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Making And Training Disciples Of Christ Using The Pursuit Of "Life... To The Full" As The Catalyst For Mission In High Springs Seventh-day Adventist Church

Mark Swaisgood
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ABSTRACT

MAKING AND TRAINING DISCIPLES OF CHRIST USING THE PURSUIT OF “LIFE . . . TO THE FULL” AS THE CATALYST FOR MISSION IN HIGH SPRINGS SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Mark Swaisgood

Adviser: Michael R. Cauley
Title: MAKING AND TRAINING DISCIPLES OF CHRIST USING THE PURSUIT OF “LIFE . . . TO THE FULL” AS THE CATALYST FOR MISSION IN HIGH SPRINGS SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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Date completed: May 2016

Task

In the Spring of 2012, the High Springs Seventh-day Adventist Church had about 29% of its membership “active in ministry,” meaning these members were involved in “ministry activities outside of Sabbath morning” or they served in “leadership responsibilities during Sabbath school and worship time” (i.e. I did not consider mere attendance as “active in ministry”). Approximately 9% of the membership was “missionally engaged,” meaning they were participating in activities through “service to others outside of our denominational affiliation” (I considered serving people within our church membership as “active in ministry” not “missionally engaged”). The goal of this
project was to increase the number of church members who were “missionally engaged” as a result of pursuing the “life . . . to the full” (John 10:10, NIV) Jesus came to give us.

Method

Using the iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment (available on the web at http://www.ifollowdiscipleship.org/index.php?id=92) I established a congregational baseline for discipleship maturity, which was used to consider the congregational impact of my intervention on missional thinking and acting after two years. To mark the beginning of the project period, a three-part preaching series was given about living “life . . . to the full” (LTTF) with Jesus through practicing three vital behaviors. These behaviors were promoted through a weekly (or biweekly) nine-month long small group commitment focused on the common pursuit of LTTF in Jesus. I was the group facilitator during each of the two project years.

The three vital behaviors of LTTF living that were promoted in my groups, and to the entire church family through my sermons and handouts, were: 1. daily, book by book Bible reading to get God’s word into people’s minds and hearts often; 2. small group participation during the week to encourage people to keep reading their Bibles, to discuss how God intends them to live “life . . . to the full,” and to keep praying for and encouraging each other toward fullness as the group practices being Christ’s body on earth between Sabbaths; and 3. asking group members to partner up in same-gender pairs to be missionally engaged in a context of their choosing outside of their denominational associations, using “Christ’s method,” as described by White (1905, pp. 143-144).
Results

At the end of the project period 3% more church members were “active in ministry” through their participation in the second year LTTF discipleship group. From the beginning of the second year two non-church-member young adults became active in my LTTF discipleship group in addition to becoming regular attenders in Sabbath school and worship services. A third non-church-member young adult joined our LTTF group as a result of our recruitment cookout. Most participants reported that belonging to our weeknight LTTF discipleship group increased their Bible reading frequency and helped them to be more active in praying for each other, they sought to represent God well in their day to day contexts (which was what LTTF with Jesus meant to them).

A comparison of the iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessments that were given at the beginning and the end of the two-year project period revealed the following outcomes. There was at least a 10% increase in the use of people’s free time to help others who have problems or needs; “Often true” (down 9%), “Almost always true” (up 3%), and “Always true” (up 16%). There was more than a 12% increase in people devoting time to Bible reading and study. When asked to respond to, “I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually,” there was a 6% increase in those indicating “Almost always true” and a 9% increase in those checking “Always true.” There was a positive shift across the spectrum in people perceiving themselves to be less critical. There was also a noticeable shift across the spectrum of people becoming more accepting of themselves, with a 14% decrease in the number of people who marked “Always true” to the statement, “I have a hard time accepting myself.” In fact, no one checked the “Always true” answer for “I have a hard time accepting myself” in the 2014 survey.
Conclusions

Believing our ability to join God on mission is predicated by our ability to love others as we love ourselves, the congregation’s increased sense of self-acceptance and decreased sense of being critical of others seem to be significant indicators of movement in a missional direction. While there were ups and downs across the spectrum, the iFollow Assessment tool indicated the church as a whole had moved in a positive direction toward missional thinking and activity between 2012 and 2014. I believe the positive iFollow Assessment results were more indicative of individual mission thinking and acting, not group or partnership actions, which it was not designed to distinguish between.

Neither of my two LTTF discipleship groups, nor any of our discipleship partners, became regularly engaged in mingling and serving activities in the community during our nine months together, but group members self-reported becoming more regular readers of their Bibles, more committed prayer partners for each other, and felt their lives were enriched by a sense of increased hope and support in their pursuits of a life of fullness in Christ at home and on the job, and in all their relationships. Pursuing LTTF together for my second-year group of men was for us to encourage and pray for each other, in the context of guided Bible reading and dialogue, toward becoming better representatives of God with their families and on their jobs. My learning was that being missional starts in our homes and on our jobs and will move to the community from that starting point.

What can be said is that the pursuit of LTTF with Jesus has been a catalyst for thinking and acting in ways that represent Christ well among those who are nearest to us throughout the day.
Future Development

In future groups I would keep encouraging the three vital behaviors as the foundations of experiencing “life . . . to the full” with Jesus while giving much more attention to mingling and friendship building with the unchurched in third places (Frost, 2006) using “Christ’s method alone” (White, 1905, p. 143-144), asking God to reveal to us what he is already doing around us and how we can join him. As a follow-up to deepening the spiritual lives of group members, I plan to move our gathering place from disciples’ homes into the community, to assign mini mission challenges for group members which will require mingling, friendship-making, and service-providing. I will challenge them to look for opportunities to “overcome evil with good,” (Rom 12:21) and make and execute plans with me to do so. I plan to seek out our “person of peace” (Absalom, 2014) to see how God might use this person to help us set our agenda for joining God on his mission. Bible reading and study will be encouraged in order to resource us for the mission of revealing Christ through what we do, and where we do it, as his body on earth, making “going” on mission together our first priority.
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A Project Document
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
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by
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May 2016
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<td>DP(s)</td>
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<td>LTTF</td>
<td>“Life . . . to the Full,” as in John 10:10 (NIV)</td>
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<td>NIV</td>
<td>New International Version of the Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>NKJV</td>
<td>New King James Version of the Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDA</td>
<td>Seventh-day Adventist</td>
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To God be the glory and praise for each of those He has placed in my life at just the right time to take their turns at being updrafts of hope and help beneath my wings.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Project

What if you and I, and a group of others, committed ourselves to the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” (John 10:10) with Jesus? Do you think our commitments would precipitate missional activity in our lives? My answer was, “Yes!” The challenge I undertook through this project was to find out whether the pursuit of this “life . . . to the full” (LTTF) Jesus came to give us might have missional ramifications for the expansion of God’s kingdom on earth, or not.

In Chapter 1 I have presented a description of the ministry context, state the problem and the task, give the limitations of the project, describe the intervention process, and define terms important to this study. In Chapter 2 I have given the biblical justification for my intervention and the three vital behaviors that will be promoted as fundamental to living “life . . . to the full” with Jesus. Chapter 3 provides a review of extra-biblical literature pertaining to discipleship and mission as they relate to the three vital behaviors of “life . . . to the full” living used in this study. In Chapter 4 I have described the intervention preparation and implementation details. In Chapter 5 I have written a chronological narrative of the intervention as it occurred. And, in Chapter 6 I

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1 All Scripture references are taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.
have summarized my project, including a description of the method used to evaluate the intervention, a description of the outcomes, and a description of my conclusions, recommendations, and professional transformation.

**Description of the Ministry Context**

In February of 2012 I began to serve the High Springs and Jennings Lake Seventh-day Day Adventist Churches, in northern Florida. I found myself in the process of getting acquainted with two new churches and their various ministries and pastoral needs while year two of my missional church cohort was meeting for our second annual intensive. We were at Andrews University that year and learned a lot from Monte Sahlin about how to do demographic research, just in time for getting to know my new city and its surrounding area.

**A City Positioned for Growth**

The city of High Springs is only about a 20-minute drive from the city of Gainesville, a significantly sized college town where the Florida Gators play and from which Gatorade came. The demographics revealed a population that was growing toward the northwest, i.e. Alachua (our neighbor to the southeast) and High Springs. The population growth projections got me excited and indicated that I needed to get prepared for growth and new opportunities for mission. However, the mentality I quickly became aware of in my new city was one of doing what they could to maintain a rural, small town atmosphere and resist the kind of growth that was soon to be pressing at their door step.

Today, High Springs is a vacationer destination for swimmers and divers in its various fresh-water springs, and for tubers, kayakers, and canoers in the area rivers, and has one of the largest Adventist camps in the United States, Camp Kulaqua. The
community is a mix of century homes and newly built modern homes in a growing number of new housing developments. Real estate consists of a mix of mobile and manufactured homes, cracker style homes, and dairy and crop farms.

The High Springs Adventist Church was averaging about 90 attendees on Sabbath mornings after my arrival. It was full of energy, love, praise music, smiling faces, and ministry involvement. My family and I felt very welcomed by both of the congregations in our new district, and I was especially pleased to discover the High Springs church had visitors coming to it almost weekly. Most of the visitors seemed to be other Adventists who were visiting town, but non-Adventist friends, family, neighbors, and workers at Grace Works and Camp Kulaqua were also to be found in the pews on occasion.

Grace Works and Camp Kulaqua

The church had a community service outreach known as Grace Works, more well-known in the community than the church itself. From the community’s perspective, Grace Works is a thrift store. Its volunteers prayed with the people as they shared their needs with them, worked to connect people with the resources they needed, and, from its sales proceeds, made financial contributions to other community-serving organizations. They were doing an excellent job of redistributing the dollars that came into the thrift store, believing and testing the principle that “no one can out give God.”

Grace Works was also one of the two major supporters of our one-teacher, 1st through 8th grade, church school (now a two-teacher, K through 8 school), Living Springs Academy (the other major supporter of the school was our local church). Grace Works was the key place where missional activity (i.e. church members serving non-Adventists
outside of Sabbath mornings) was taking place by unpaid church members and volunteers from the community as well.

Camp Kulaqua, one of the largest Adventist Summer Camps and Retreat Centers in the United States of America, provided ministry opportunities (i.e. serving Adventists during summer camps and various retreat weekends) and missional opportunities (i.e. serving non-Adventists outside of Sabbath mornings) to a number of our church members with the added benefit of getting paid doing it.

Approximately 9% of the church membership was “missionally engaged,” (i.e. serving others outside of our denominational affiliation, outside of Sabbath mornings) on an ongoing basis. While a significant number of High Springs SDA Church’s ministry volunteers also worked at Camp Kulaqua or Grace Works, it seemed nearly all of our missionally engaged church members were engaged in mission through their involvement with either Grace Works or Camp Kulaqua and not one of the other church ministries.

The Missionally Minded

In spite of having more missional activity in the High Springs congregation than in other churches I have served in the past, there were too few missionally minded people I could account for once members working at Grace Works and Camp Kulaqua were removed from the count. By missionally minded I mean a mindset that reveals itself by causing people to intentionally mingle with, build relationships with, and serve people from the community at large, outside of Sabbath morning visitors during Sabbath school and worship services.

Being new to this church family, I was unable to account for personal and privately done missional activity, so this was admittedly a limiting factor in my
assessment. However, it seemed that Sabbath school and worship service attendees who intentionally served people who did not come to our building, and were not employed to serve through Camp Kulaqua, were primarily retired seniors volunteering at Grace Works or unemployed youth from the Pathfinder Club.

In order to address the age group between the teens and retirees, those who functioned primarily within the walls of our church building, I decided to do my project with the High Springs Adventist Church, and the church board kindly agreed to allow me to do my missional church project within its membership. The attending congregation consisted of about a half dozen families with young children, a half dozen youth, and about a dozen young adults, but the congregation consisted mostly of those above the age of forty with children who were grown and away from their parents’ home. Since the church had a struggling prayer meeting, and I felt them looking to me for its revival, I decided to make use of the church members who were already attending prayer meeting to promote the idea of pursuing “life . . . to the full” together and form my first year group.

Statement of the Problem

At the heart of the problem there seemed to be a Lordship issue. A deeper level of hearing God and following Jesus and being sent wherever the Spirit leads was needed.

Lordship and Abundant Living

Hirsch and Ford (2011) assert that Jesus teaches us “the source of abundant life and the purest form of joy lies in following his lead regarding how we disperse (spend) our lives. This is fundamental to what it really means for Jesus to be our Lord” (p. 79). So, the first question I asked myself was, “How can I be the kind of under-shepherd of
Jesus who facilitates Jesus being the direct, real, and daily shepherd of each person in God’s church?”

Bible Reading, Small Groups, and Mission Partnerships

The three problem-overcoming behaviors I believed to be necessary to be able to address the core of the issue of needing Christ’s Lordship over and above being cultural Christians in the High Springs Adventist Church, were as follows: a) Daily Bible Reading – Many people told me they were not reading their Bibles on a daily basis so God could feed them and lead them directly from his word; b) Incarnational Small Groups – church members who have grouped up for more than Christian fellowship and Bible study, who have grouped up to be Christ’s body on earth outside the walls of church property by being a mission agency for God in their own societal contexts; and c) Same-gender Mission Partnerships – using groups as sending communities and partnerships as missional agencies, since the church body at large, and its Sabbath School classes and other small groups, were not functioning as sending communities or missional agencies outside the walls of the church building like Jesus demonstrated and the New Testament Church imitated.

Statement of the Task

My project task is to experiment with the idea that making and training disciples using the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” (John 10:10) with Jesus as their main reason for coming together will result in people joining God in his mission activities on earth.
Three Vital Behaviors

The three foundational lordship and “life . . . to the full” vital behaviors I hoped to instill in people’s lives through this project were: a) Daily, personal Bible reading/listening and questioning (a practice of dialoging with God); b) Small, LTTF-driven communities that meet together regularly in contexts where people live and work and play to be Christ’s body on earth as in heaven (1 Cor 12:27; Matt 6:10); and c) Two-person, same gender discipleship partnerships that meet, or call, each other weekly for mutual encouragement and prayer support, and that hold each other accountable for sharing God’s favor with others where they normally gather when they are not at home with their families or at work or school (Luke 4:19, White, 1905, pp. 143-44; Frost, 2006).

Individuals, Small Groups, and Partnerships

The implementation of these three vital behaviors was promoted to the church at large through a sermon series at the beginning of the project period, and they were promoted at the weekly gatherings of my LTTF discipleship group. If a focus on living LTTF with Jesus, through the exercise of the three vital behaviors above, was a catalyst for mission, then individuals, groups, and partnerships within our church body, along with members of my small group, would become more missional than they had been previously. Accountability questions, and the ensuing dialogues that came from them, were the primary transformation tools for my small group, and the iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment was the primary measurement tool for the church at large.
Delimitations of the Project

The data points used to design this project were limited to the biblical sources available for foundational project direction, the current non-biblical literature available on the topic under discussion which was used to inform the process that was used, and my ability to think through the resource material and use it to direct me in the implementation of the project along the way. The cultural, educational, and experiential influences carried with those who joined my groups were each limiting factors in the implementation and outcomes of my intervention, as well as the spiritual maturity levels of people when they began this journey with me.

The Individual Contexts of Group Members

In year one a limiting factor was the members’ expectation of a Bible study and prayer group and my expectation that we were going to want to be missional together, based upon our reading of, and dialoging with, God’s word, as we pursued “life . . . to the full” together. Perhaps, because Adventist prayer meetings I am familiar with have been Bible studies with prayer and not really prayer meetings (gatherings for the main purpose of prayer), or because we Adventists tend to be seekers of truth as knowledge about God and not as community action with God, I was only able to get some of the group members to do a few out of the box missional or mingling activities with me. I, too, found it difficult to extricate myself from the “Bible study/discussion” focus of our LTTF, prayer meeting night gatherings.

In year two, most of the men I invited to join me in our LTTF discipleship group were not prayer meeting goers, and I moved the gatherings from the church building to group members’ homes. As year two of the intervention unfolded, it became apparent
that life circumstances related to challenges within each group member’s family, issues related to their employment or unemployment, to financial pressures, and, for some, to involvement in various harmful habits and addictions, were going to have an unforeseen effect on what it would mean to our group to pursue “life . . . to the full” together. These factors would also be limiting factors in the realized outcome of my intervention.

The time frame needed for individual transformations from self-centered to mission-centered living, especially amidst the diversity of life challenges my second-year group faced, and the amount of time I was allotted within my project time frame also had a limiting impact on the outcomes of my intervention. The starting point of individual group members when they join the group, and the spiritual resources they bring with them, will have an effect on the outcomes of the group as a whole. A group moves at the speed of its slowest progressing member or it decides to leave him or her behind in order to not be held back in the pursuit of its own goals.

The Chosen Assessment

The choice to use the iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment was a limiting factor by allowing it to determine what I measure and do not measure as potential outcomes. Any assessment of discipleship or mission has its own biases and the iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment is no different. It attempts to measure more than I would measure if I had created my own assessment tool (it measures some things unnecessary to the accomplishment of my task), and it does not ask some questions I might wish to ask if I were creating my own survey tool. However, as a resource already created, tested, and established in the field of disciple assessment tools I
found it helpful and acceptable as a standard reference tool for measuring discipleship characteristics.

**Description of the Project Process**

A theological reflection was done on biblical texts and current literature that focus on the three specific vital behaviors that were used in my project implementation as fundamental to living “life . . . to the full” for the purposes of this intervention.

**Bible Support for Three Vital Behaviors**

The three vital behaviors of “life . . . to the full” living, for the purposes of this project, and a brief biblical support for each one are as follows: a) the importance of “hearing [or reading or speaking] the word of God” (Rom 10:17, NKJV); b) The Bible’s examples of accomplishing God’s purpose for His people and His mission on earth through the small, relational, decision-making, action-taking communities such as those Moses set up in response to his father-in-law’s counsel (Exod 18:14-26), and like the group of twelve Jesus set up (Mark 3:13-15 and Luke 6:13); and c) Jesus’ own missionary method of sending His followers out two by two (Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1) to proclaim a message of “the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19) and, as Paul says, to “overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21).

**Literature Support for Three Vital Behaviors**

Current literature was reviewed in the subject areas of discipleship and the missional church as they relate to the following three areas: a) the importance of reading and hearing God’s word; b) the use of small groups as discipleship and mission communities of God’s people, the body of Christ, on earth today; and c) the practice of
sharing God’s favor in practical ways and overcoming evil with good among those outside our church membership. Several literature sources, older than 10 years from the date of this project manuscript, were included in this section because of the value of the contribution I believed they could make in this study. I also reflected upon Ellen White’s comments about using “Christ’s method alone” (1905, pp. 143-144).

The First Discipleship Assessment

The iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment was administered to the entire, regularly attending, adult (18 years and over) church body during the first two weeks of the project implementation period to determine a baseline for discipleship attitudes, beliefs, and practices at High Springs SDA Church. The administration of the assessment was followed by a three-part sermon series.

Three-Part Sermon Series

A three-part sermon series was given to introduce the concept of pursuing “life . . . to the full” as the catalyst for mission, and to acquaint people with the three vital behaviors. At the end of the series a “life . . . to the full” (LTTF) discipleship group was started to begin a nine-month experience. For nine months they were given personal Bible reading and questioning exercises on a daily basis to help them dialogue with God, they were asked to come together for group fellowship, Bible dialogue, and prayer support on a weekly basis to facilitate dialogue and prayer support with each other, and they were urged to initiate two-by-two disciple partnerships to practice sharing God’s favor with others.
Three Accountability Questions

During my first nine-month LTTF discipleship group I asked group members to ask themselves and to discuss with God, via their Bible reading, three accountability questions related to the three vital practices: a) “What’s God’s love got to do with it?”; b) “How can our group participate more fully in God’s mission to the city we meet or live in, and to others who share this planet with us?”; and c) “How can I share God’s favor with others this week” as I go about my daily activities?

Second-Year Recruitment

During the months of July and August my wife and I invited hand-picked, potentially new group members to a recruitment lunch at our house. During this time for fellowship and meal-sharing I also shared what I had been doing with my LTTF discipleship group the previous year and the three vital behaviors we were committed to as a way to live out the pursuit of LTTF with Jesus. Based upon how our discussion progressed, I invited the interested persons to join us by making a nine-month commitment to see what a pursuit of LTTF with Jesus, in the context of group fellowship, might do in their lives in the coming year.

The Second Discipleship Assessment

The complete nine-month cycle of LTTF discipleship group life, Bible reading and questioning, and encouraging individuals to partner-up for mission and accountability was completed twice before the iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment was given a second time to those who also took it the first time (i.e. at the end of the second year of the project period). I assessed both group and none-group
members who began this journey with me and who were present for worship on the day
the second assessment was given.

Evaluation of Project Outcomes

I evaluated this project through a personal interview with my discipleship group
and by comparing and contrasting the two iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship
Assessments taken by the congregation. This was to see if, and how, the LTTF
discipleship intervention, using the pursuit of “life . . . to the full,” effected missional
change in the relationships and practices of members and friends of High Springs
Adventist Church.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this paper consider “disciple,” “Jesus-follower,” and “Christ-
follower” to be interchangeable in meaning. The basic meaning of disciple is, one who is
committed to getting to know Jesus more and more, day by day, so that he or she might
imitate Jesus better and better and teach others what he has taught him or her, so that
others might join the disciple on the journey of following in Jesus’ footsteps. In other
words, a disciple, Jesus-follower, or Christ-follower is an individual committed to
knowing God better every day and to making God known to others in ever more personal
and effective ways.

When mission and missional are used in this paper they will refer to joining God
on his mission to restore the brokenness between him and those made in his image,
though the application of Christ’s Matthew 28 commission to make followers who
practice their discipleship as responsive acts of love toward God and acts of love, in
partnership with God, toward their fellow human beings.
The term “Adventist” has been used to designate Seventh-day Adventist, sometimes written as Seventh Day Adventist in other writings. I have also used the abbreviation SDA, to refer to the entire Christian denomination or to one or more members of the denomination, as indicated by the context in which it is used.
CHAPTER 2
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Introduction

This chapter will focus on three vital practices of discipleship that seem essential to experiencing the LTTF Jesus came to give us: a) the practice of “hearing the word of God” (Rom 10:17, NKJV) so we can “know” the heart, or mind, of God (John 17:3) by reading the Bible, or listening to it being read, daily; b) the practice of participating in small, LTTF driven discipleship communities (Exod 18:14-26, Mark 3:13-15 and Luke 6:13) in order to imitate God’s way of nurturing, growing, and training his church so his kingdom may come and his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:9-10); and c) the practice of sharing “the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19) with others around us in order to overcome evil with practical demonstrations of God’s goodness (Rom 12:21) and by sending Jesus-followers out two by two (Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1) to share God’s blessing with others through weekly or monthly mission activity, because God has blessed us to be a blessing (Gen 12:1-3).

Before addressing the scriptural foundations for the three vital behaviors of “life . . . to the full” living for the purposes of this project, I will provide some biblical foundation for my concepts of “the mission of God,” “the call to discipleship,” and the “life . . . to the full” which Jesus came to give us.
The Priesthood of All Believers

Peter informs us, not that we need to be priests, but that we have already been made priests to the world around us as Christ-followers (1 Pet 2). We are the building blocks, the “living stones,” with which Christ is building his church, and through which he still lives and ministers on earth. When Jesus called his disciples to follow him, the process Jesus used, and asks us to use, is a relational model called discipleship (Matt 28:19-20).

The early church understood the life of all believers to include meeting in groups regularly to hear God’s word “the Apostles teaching,” to pray for one another, and to fellowship and eat together (Acts 2:41-47). I believe it is through this very calling to follow Christ in community with others that Jesus intends to give us the experience of “life . . . to the full” (John 10:10). The hope of this project was that one’s pursuit of LTTF, as a Jesus-follower in community with other Jesus-followers, would lead him or her naturally into a life of mission.

Missio Dei

The Bible teaches us that God himself is on a mission, the Father having sent his son (John 3:16), Jesus, the Christ, who in turn sent his followers in the power of the Holy Spirit (John 20:21-22). Arthur (2013) writes, “It was Aquinas who first used the term [Missio Dei] to describe the activity of the triune God; the father sending the Son and the Son sending the Spirit.” God invites us, through our relationship with Christ and the inner working of the Holy Spirit in the rational and emotional processes of humanity, to join him. As we accept the invitation to be disciples of Christ we begin the journey from self-centeredness to mission-centeredness.
Make Disciples

What is the mission of God? When Genesis, chapter 3 informs us that God made skins to cover man’s nakedness, instead of letting humanity suffer the full results of their sin, and when God put angels at the entrance to the garden, after putting Adam and Eve out of it, “to guard the way” back into God’s presence, we have evidence that earth had become the mission field of God and that the restoration of humanity’s broken relationship with him would be God’s mission.

So, what is the mission we humans are given as disciples of Christ? Simply stated by Christ himself, while speaking to his disciples, as translated by Peterson (2002), “Go out and train everyone you meet, far and near, in this way of life, marking them by baptism in the threefold name: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Then instruct them in the practice of all I have commanded you. I’ll be with you as you do this, day after day after day, right up to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19-20).

Love, Know, and Make Known

Jesus summarized the teaching that was to be the foundation and core of a disciple’s life when he said,

‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And a second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matt 22:37-40)

John tells us that eternal life is all about knowing God intimately (John 17:3). Since God’s will and mission is to give us eternal life (John 3:16) we can say that God’s will is to be known, really, deeply, eternally known, by us. A contemporary Christian music group, Casting Crowns (2014, January), expressed the biblical sentiment of God’s will this way, “Just to know You [God] and to make You known, We lift Your name on
high . . . We know we were made for so much more than ordinary lives. It’s time for us
to more than just survive. We were made to thrive.” God’s mission in Christ is to call us
to so much more than ordinary lives, to call us back to the thriving, abundance, and
fullness of life in him.

The Call to Discipleship

I have described mission as joining God on his mission to restore his relationship
with humankind through the making and training of disciples. I have named the core
value of discipleship, as intended by Jesus, as being a response to God’s love by
demonstrating love back to him and sharing his love with others, making him known.
But, when Jesus called twelve men to be his disciples, what was the new relationship
with him Jesus was calling them into?

A New Relationship and Purpose

From Matthew 11:1, the Greek word mathetes, translated “disciples,” means
“learners” or “pupils” (Myers, 2012). Matthew 10:2 names these twelve disciples and
calls them apostles, apostolos in the Greek. Apostolos means “a delegate,” and “an
ambassador” (Myers, 2012) of the Gospel (the good news Jesus came to give to everyone
on earth). The word apostello, which is also translated as apostle, means “to set apart,”
and by implication “to send” (Myers, 2012).

Fundamentally, a “disciple” is one who has been “set apart” by Christ to be his
“student,” for the purpose of being sent back into secular society as “an ambassador of
the Gospel of Christ, an appointed agent of the Kingdom of God” (Matt 4:23; Luke 9:6; 2
Cor 5:11-21). As we work together as his disciples he makes us into “a spiritual house, a
holy priesthood.” The disciples of Jesus are “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a
holy nation, His [God’s] own special people, that you [we] may proclaim the praises of Him who called you [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light,” for we are “the people of God, who…have obtained mercy” (1 Pet 2:5-10, NKJV).

“Life . . . to the Full” Now

What does John mean by “life . . . to the full” (John 10:10)? There are two major aspects of LTTF in the Bible. The first aspect has to do with “how we live life now.”

This is the quality question of LTTF, meaning will I just accept my lot in life, giving up on anything better until heaven, or will I take hold of the best life I can, in the midst of my circumstances right now, because I believe God has already begun to bless me in the here and now through Jesus?

When God said to Abram, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:2-3), God was not talking about his people living a better, more abundant life only once they get to heaven, but beginning on earth. God was not talking to Abram about “life . . . to the full” after death, but on earth during the life time of Abram’s earthly children or grandchildren, if not during his own earthly life.

God first intends LTTF to be reflected in temporal blessings, a fullness to be shared with others within the sphere of influence of God’s people, as a witness to all of those who knew not Abram’s God, or who know not our God today (same God, different time, place, and people to be witnessed to). In the first sense, LTTF does not mean life after death, either in heaven or on the earth made new. “Life . . . to the full” is now.
It appears from records of the early church (Acts 2) that LTTF means life to its fullest potential in the present circumstance. The fullness experienced is not only in material goods that benefited the poor among them but in the inner joy that benefited the wealthy among them. There was a leveling of the socio-economic ground that gave all a sense of inner joy for the new purpose and place that disciples enjoy as Christ-followers in community with one another.

As believers “in” Christ became followers “of” Christ, their discipleship led them to sacrifice for one another in the fellowship of believers, to become missional to those around them who were outside of their new community in Christ, and to experience life on a new and higher plane, even when persecutions came later on. When we accept Christ as our savior we may receive him seeking a fullness in our own imagination of temporal living, yet through a daily exercised relationship with Jesus Christ our humanly immature ideas of LTTF are transformed (Rom 12:1-2). The foundation and starting point for all discipleship transformation is, and must be, God’s word itself.

“Life . . . to the Full” Forever

The second aspect of LTTF has to do with “how long we will live.” This is the quantity question of LTTF, meaning will my life be a temporal life (I pay for my sins since I am my own lord/master) or an eternal life (Jesus pays for my sins since he is my lord/master)?

In John 3:16, Jesus says the reason he came is because of God’s great love for humanity, and that what he came to do was to give “eternal life” to all who believe in him. The text explicitly says that God’s son was given to us, “that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” In this context, “Life . . . to the full” is life
lived forever. Eternal life is the forever aspect of the LTTF that Jesus came to give us. Jesus offers us a package of longevity of life and quality of life, which he calls “life . . . more abundantly” (John 10:10, NKJV). Since Jesus is “the Word” (ho logos) made flesh (John 1:14), then “the Word” may also be said to be Jesus and it would make sense that reading the Bible (“the Word”) should be like listening to Jesus, entering into his forever kind of life through a forever relationship with him that is established and maintained through reading the Bible daily.

Isaacs (2008) writes, “In the most ancient meaning of the word, logos meant ‘to gather together,’ and suggested an intimate awareness of the relationships among things in the natural world. In that sense, logos may be best rendered in English as ‘relationship’” (p.19). Then, crediting “Emelios Bouratinos, a student of Heidegger’s in the early 1950s,” as his source for the line of thought leading to his next statement, Isaacs says, “The Book of John in the New Testament begins: ‘In the beginning was the Word (logos).’ We could now hear this as ‘In the beginning was the Relationship’” (p. 19).

What I understand from Isaacs’ writing is that dialogue is relationship; and what I understand from my experience is that the more my LTTF group dialogued with each other and God’s word (through reading, questioning, group discussion, and prayer) the better our relationships became with God and one another, and the more secure we became in the commitment of Jesus to give us each “life . . . to the full,” now and forever.

**LTTF Through Reading and Hearing God’s Word**

The prophet Jeremiah gives us a window into God’s heart and mind when he writes, “‘I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jer 29:11). God’s plans are to
give his created people *shalom shalom*, which is the double Hebrew word expression used in this passage and translated into English as “to prosper you” in the NIV and “of peace” in the KJV. *Shalom shalom* means “safety welfare, happiness, peace, prosperity, and health (Myers, 2012). God’s plans are to give us a *tiqvah achariyth*, which means an expected end, a destiny we are tied to by a cord so we cannot be shaken from it (Myers, 2012).

Jesus expresses his heavenly Father’s heart and purpose to us when he says, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). A significant precursor to living LTTF is the knowledge that God is present with us (Matt 1:23) and that he is with us to save us from our sin (Matt 1:21), not to condemn us for it (John 3:17). So, Jesus, who Matthew says is “God with us” (1:23, NKJV) came first “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:19).

LTTF begins with the salvation of God as we have it in Jesus Christ (John 3:16-17), and this salvation is made possible by first hearing the word of God so that God’s offer can be known by, and accepted by, the hearer. Paul said it this way: “How, then, can they call upon the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one whom they have not heard?” (Rom 10:14). Therefore, the daily beginning point for our own salvation journey, and for our methodology of disciple making and training must be the hearing of God’s word, and through it a reassurance of God’s favor toward us and his plans to bless or prosper us now and forever.

**Look For Jesus, Find Oneness**

The result of continually being filled by the word of God, of spending time with Christ (the living Word) through the Bible (God’s written word), is that we become
united with him in thought and trust and action. It is the prayer of Christ that we become one with him and his father in heaven (John 17:21), and it will be the testimony to the world of our oneness with him when we are one with each other in love (John 17:23).

It is important to consider what we should be asking ourselves as we read God’s word. In my own experience I have discovered that “what is asked” of the Bible often times makes more impact on what is benefited from the reading than what is actually read itself. This is testified to by Jesus’ own words as He challenged students of the Scriptures in His day, saying, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of me” (John 5:39, NKJV). What is the key challenge in this passage? Here Jesus gives us all the relational challenge of looking for, and finding, him in our reading and study of the Bible. And further, Jesus has claimed that he and the heavenly father are one (John 10:30). So, to find Jesus in the Bible is to find, and get to know, God the Father also.

Faith Comes by Hearing

It is written, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,” (Rom 10:17; NKJV). Simply put, since we Christians believe the Bible is the word of God, Romans 10:17 compels us to read the Bible, or to listen to it being read and taught, in order to come to faith, in order to build our faith, and in order to pass on faith in God and his word to others. Since our minds tend to forget that which is not reinforced regularly and tend to be swayed by negativity about ourselves and God, and since our biblical faith tends to get watered down daily by worldly teachings which are reinforced by living in our secular world, the Bible also informs us to be intentional about renewing our minds with God’s word on a regular basis (Rom 12:2).
In Genesis, chapter 3, we have a description of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day to speak with Adam and Eve directly, filling them with His word and reinforcing their faith in him daily. If the perfectly created Adam and Eve (Gen 1:27, 31) needed to spend time with the word of God daily (compare Gen 3:8 with John 1:1), how much more do we who come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23) need to spend time with God and hear His word daily, in order to hear his voice in our own ears?

Knowing God and Renewing our Minds

Jesus taught that eternal life is about knowing God (John 17:3). We humans are to focus on the “knowing God” part of the equation and Jesus will take care of the “saving us” part of the equation. Paul seeks to encourage us in this direction when he challenges us to be “confident in this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). There just is no substitute for daily Bible reading and/or listening.

The process of being renewed in our minds by the straight teaching of God’s word, from God’s word itself, is the first and most important practice that must be cultivated if we are to become a disciple of Christ and not a merely a disciple and copy-cat of another human being. One important check we have to safe guard us in our Christian experience is the word of God itself. A second important safe guard we have is to read and discuss the word of God in a group of other believers who can hold us accountable, and be held accountable by us, so one’s personal understanding may be tempered by corporate understanding, and so corporate understanding may be challenged by one’s personal understanding.
Speaking and Reading it in

Since “faith comes by hearing…the word of God” (Rom 10:17, NKJV), this project sought to integrate the spoken word into people’s lives by speaking and reading it to each other in group, as well as by reading it into one’s own life in private. Disciples are privileged to speak God’s word into each other’s lives, reminding each other of God’s love for them (John 3:16-17), of God’s power within them which is greater than any power in the world (1 John 4:4), of God’s ever presence with his followers (Matt 28:20), and of all the other Bible truths quoted in this paper and discovered in the reading of God’s word on a daily basis. Romans 10:17 is the biblical basis for needing a preacher (Rom 10:14), as well as a basis for anyone speaking God’s word into others’ lives for transformation to occur.

The discipleship methods of Jesus also involved his followers being accountable to another, and for another. Jesus knows this about humans because he made them (John 1:3), and “the Word” says, “It is not good that man should be alone” (Gen 2:18), so Jesus does not call his twelve disciples out of the world to be with him individually, nor does he send his disciples out into the world alone either. Instead, Jesus calls his followers to come together in group, into a community of oneness, and later sends them two by two.

**LTTF Through Discipleship Groups**

We were created by God, who is a community of oneness (Gen 1:26; Deut 6:4; 1 John 5:7, NKJV) to live and function as a community of oneness “on earth as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10). Since Adam and Eve were put out of the garden for their self-centered disobedience (Gen 3) God has been working to bring us back to him, and into oneness with each other through him, as Jesus made clear in John 17:20-21. At the
Tower of Babel man sought to be one with each other in opposition to God, and God scattered them because their kind of oneness was mutinous, leaving God out of the oneness equation, and, even worse, making him their adversary. Again God scattered his people. Again God’s plan to bring them back to himself was renewed as he continued on his mission for humanity.

Teach the Word, Share the Ministry

When Moses led the people out of Egypt they put all their focus on Moses as the only agent of God and Moses accepted this kind of government, perhaps in part due to the fact that God said Moses would be as God to Aaron and that Aaron would be his mouth piece to the people (Exod 4:16). Again, God separated his people, but this time he did not scatter them. God simply wanted Moses to organize his people into small groups to empower them to be leaders and to share in the ministry of his kingdom on earth. God used Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, to challenge him to separate the people for his, and for their own good (Exod 18:13-26).

The first incident of large community separation was an intentional scattering of people done by God to shift the focus of the Babylonians from self and back to God. The second incident of mega church community separation was actually an intentional reorganizing of God to give leadership responsibilities away, and to create community in a new way by making room for God to work through many small group leaders instead of only expecting God to work through one leader, Moses.

By creating, establishing, or birthing small groups of 10 people, five people, or two people (Gen 18:19-26) Moses learned how to best use his time and fulfill his calling. God instructed Moses to “teach them the statutes” and to share his leadership ministry so
the people could learn to become the leaders and priests God intended them to be. God still intends the disciples of Christ to be his leaders and priests on earth through small group organization today (1 Pet 2:1-10 and 2 Cor 5:17-21).

How Jesus Planted His Church

Jesus’ own example was not to collect one huge group around himself, or to plant a mega church, but Jesus called twelve to be his disciples (Matt 10:1). I do not present the 10, five, two model of Jethro and Moses as exacting, but as a principle for using smaller groups to manage the large challenges of leadership and discipleship. Jesus may have used twelve instead of 10, but the number is small and close enough to follow the principle of establishing or birthing small groups instead of going for much larger sizes when it comes to the goal of making and training disciples in a community context.

The twelve apostles/disciples of Jesus went almost everywhere with him, watching Jesus, apprenticing under him, learning how Jesus lived out God’s will and applied God’s law and grace in the real world, societal context of their day. Jesus’ deportment modeled ministry to them. Jesus taught God’s law through practical stories set in daily life. Before Jesus left this earth he commissioned his small apostleship/discipleship group to “Go and make disciples” (Matt 28:19).

Jesus also said, “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16). He had other sheep that were not a part of his special group of twelve. Perhaps the seventy-two followers (Luke 10:1, 17; NIV and five other translations) that were sent out were actually six other groups of 12, or five other flocks of 12 besides his apostleship/discipleship group. Perhaps one of the six flocks only had
10 sheep, or two of the flocks only had 11 sheep, and the rest of the flocks had 12 sheep, equaling the seventy followers that are recorded in the majority of the English translations. In any case, there were presumably followers who were in other groups that also followed Jesus.

How Jesus Shepherds His Church

How did Jesus shepherd his seventy-two followers, beyond the twelve closest to him, and how does he want his 2.2 billion, plus self-proclaimed followers today to be shepherded, so the day will come when “there will be one flock and one shepherd?” One answer comes from applying Jesus’ instruction in Matthew 28:19, to “Go and make disciples of all nations.” If his disciples made disciples the way Jesus did it would be through the use of small groups of 10-12. If his disciples made disciples of all nations it would require that their method be something like that of Jethro and Moses, giving away leadership and empowering the Gospel to go forth led of God, not controlled by man. While, ultimately, we all have only one shepherd, who is Jesus, the Christ, in order to grow the kingdom of God the way Jesus did we must be continually preparing disciples to be sent. In the meantime, others are being sent, as under-shepherds, rulers (NKJV), officials, or ministry leaders (a term more commonly used in churches today) to care for groups of 10 to 12.

Paul tells us that the followers of Christ are actually the body of Christ on earth today (Col 1:24; 1 Cor 12:27), or at least that is God’s design and intention for us (Rom 12 and 1 Cor 12). We are to be his hands and feet and heart and mind and voice in this world, in his place, in his name. He says we are one body, but we have many functions. We may have been baptized by different people but we have been baptized into only one
person, Christ. Disciples of Christ may meet in different homes (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phil 1:2), or other places of worship and prayer (Acts 2:46; Acts 16:13), and God’s church does have many groups with many leaders (1 Cor 1:12), yet we are united under one Lord, Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3).

The Bible informs us that the church is a group no bigger than can fit in a first century person’s home (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phil 1:2). The church is also the entire number of believers in a given town (1 Cor 1:2), or around the world, or from the time of the first child of God by faith to the second coming of Christ. The church, functionally, is the small group of 10-12 people that are focusing on knowing God better in community with each other, seeking God’s heart through daily personal Bible reading and regular time spent with discipleship partners (DPs) for accountability, nurture, prayer, and service to others in Jesus’ name. Because Jesus used a two-by-two formula to send out his disciples into the mission field of the cities around them we will deal with that next.

**LTTF Through Discipleship Partnerships**

In Genesis 2:18 God says, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.” Afterward, God created Eve as a helper to be with Adam. While authors have seen this as the establishment of the first marriage, and of the institution of marriage, it is also an example of God’s plan that humans were created for community, starting with the number two, the smallest measurement for community. Just like caring for the garden was not given to Adam alone, nor to Eve alone, but to the pair, so Jesus gave ministry assignments to a group of 72 of his followers in pairs (Luke 10:1).
Two-by-Two by Example

Whether one counts his seventy-two followers or his twelve apostles, Jesus’ total head count of his larger and small groups are each divisible by two. When it came to being sent out on missional exercises to put what they had been learning into practice, Jesus would “send them out two-by-two” (Mark 6:7). When his followers returned they would tell what God had done through them and what difficulties they had, and Jesus would affirm the successes and use the failures as opportunities for further teaching. Ministry was not given to Jesus’ disciples as a loner activity. Missional ministry, outreach, and evangelism are community activities also, and a community of two working together in harmony is the most basic unit for church mission.

In Acts 13:1-3, Saul, “who was also called Paul” (Acts 13: 9), and Barnabas were set apart, or appointed, by the Holy Spirit to do missionary work together. One day Paul had a disagreement over Barnabas’ desire to take John Mark, an apprentice picked up on an earlier trip (Acts 12:25), with them on another missionary trip. Paul said, “No way.” John Mark was not going with Paul this time. So, Barnabas takes John Mark with him, and Paul, instead of striking out alone, takes Silas with him to different missional destinations than Barnabas and John Mark went to (Acts 15:36-41). Two seems to be the biblically-sized group for doing mission work, and neither Paul nor Barnabas acted as if it was alright to continue on alone. Ecclesiastes 4:12 reads, “Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him” (NKJV).

While Jethro counsels Moses, in Exodus 18, to divide God’s people up into groups that are mostly ten people in size, once the math is done to equal Jethro’s thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, the result includes groups of two. Two groups of
fifty equals a group of 100, so that a leader of 100 is actually a leader of two leaders, who each oversee five leaders, who each oversee ten people. So, two was a number used by Jesus in the sending out of his disciples to minister and two was a number also used by Moses to make ministry more effective and easier to bear for himself as he divided and shared leadership responsibilities.

Triads of Oneness

God the Father, the Spirit of God, and the Word of God, Jesus, did not make us to live alone any more than God exists alone (Gen 1:1-2, 26-27 and John 1:1-3). God is a three in one being, a triad of divinity, the godhead supreme. When God decided to create humankind, he said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness” (Gen 1:26). The use of the word “our” implies the nature of God as a plurality or community, yet Deuteronomy 6:4 expresses the prophet’s belief and commitment to the oneness of God, not to a plurality of gods. The Holy Scriptures teach us of the collective oneness of God, a unity of three co-eternal persons (Gen 1:26-27; Mal 2:10 and Matt 28:19). God is truly one, yet not as in the singular sense that humans often think of when they use the term “one.” God is a community of oneness: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt 28:19).

When God made “man,” he did not make mankind as a singular being, but “male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). Jesus tells us that God’s plan is that humans are to be one with him as he is one with the Father (John 5:19, 30; 8:28; 17:20-21). In the beginning God created humans as two, but he designed us to function as one with himself, God and Adam and Eve. God calls us to oneness of purpose through two of the most common relational triads today: a) God, husband, and wife, and b) God, another, and self (compare Gen 1 and John 17). The emphasis being made here is concerning our
oneness as a functioning unit of three. DPs are actually triads of you, me, and Jesus. Jesus said he did nothing alone but only as the Father led him or showed him (John 5:30), so discipleship pairs seeking and following the leading of God in their lives create a very stable triad for nurture, growth, and mission.

The oneness that humans were created for begins with God and us becoming one through daily Bible reading, question posing, and prayer. Oneness with God is then extended to oneness with God and another. A buddy system of accountability for being missional is established through weekly one-on-one meetings between DPs.

Asking and Discussing Questions

An important aspect of these weekly DP meetings is to ask of each other discipleship accountability questions, and to listen to, discuss, and clarify the answers (i.e. to help each other hear the Lord’s leading, the Holy Spirit’s guiding voice), and to plan and carry out mission exercises together, as they are led to do so from their application of that week’s biblical reading. In addition to story-telling and teaching Jesus used questioning, set aside time for group reflection, and sent out his disciples to meet the needs of others as ways to develop them and train them for mission. Three of the four Gospels record a very important question for Jesus to ask in the development of his first disciples, “Who do you say I am” (Matt 16:15, Mark 8:29, Luke 9:20)? In other words, “Who am I to you?” The answer to this personal question will make all the difference in each disciple’s life as a Jesus follower and missionary for God’s kingdom. The questioning of Jesus in this way helps his disciples to own their faith by verbalizing it, and by verbalizing an answer Jesus can affirm what God is speaking into their lives.
Applying Jesus’ use of asking questions, making time for reflection with each other, and servicing others in practical ways, as important aspects to their training, has resulted in the following questions I suggested for DPs to ask each other and to act on in their lives: a) From this week’s Bible reading, in what specific and practical ways did God demonstrate his favor to his people, and how did He show favor to others who were not his people? b) What has God been teaching you, or speaking to you about, through your Bible reading this week? b) What is the personal application challenge for you this week; what do you think God wants you to do this coming week with what He taught you this past week? This question is important because it will empower disciples to demonstrate their trust in God in some practical way and help them experience one aspect of what it means to pursue LTTF in Jesus before they meet with their group again the following week. d) How did last week’s favor-sharing activities help you to live LTTF and demonstrate God’s love and the Gospel to others in practical ways? e) What are some practical ways we can, individually and/or together, share God’s favor with others around us this coming week, in order to join God in overcoming evil with good (Rom 12:21)?

Favor Sharing and Overcoming Evil With Good

For Jesus, his practical ways of favor sharing often involved healing individuals of some disease. We may not be able to heal or raise the dead or multiply a few fish and loaves of bread to feed a multitude like Jesus did, but we can do what the Lord has gifted us to do to be a blessing and share God’s favor with others in some practical way. Jesus sought to overcome evil with good every time he chose to forgive a person instead of condemning him or her. He was overcoming evil with good when he creatively chased
away the accusers of the woman caught in the act of adultery by shining the law back on
the accusers. He was overcoming evil with good when he spoke to and asked to be
served by the woman at the well in Samaria.

White (1905) writes, “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the
people. The Saviour [sic] mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed
His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then he
bade them, ‘Follow me’” (p.143).

Steve Sjogren (2008 and 2014) wrote two very significant books containing
modern day examples of sharing God’s favor by serving others in practical ways. In
Conspiracy of Kindness he gives his theological framework for servant evangelism, along
with some service examples, and in 101 Ways to Reach Your Community he gives the
reader 101 ways to demonstrate God’s love in practical ways, with details like the
number of people and material resources needed and the approximate costs of time and
money.

What Jesus demonstrated through all his practical good works on earth for the
benefit of others he put into a personal mission statement taken from the Scriptures of his
day in Luke 4:18-19, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord…has sent me…to proclaim the year
of the Lord’s favor.” After reading this quotation from Isaiah 61:2, Jesus claimed that he,
and his ministry, was the enfleshment of this prophecy. Jesus took ownership of these
words and lived by them during his earthly ministry, and he bid those who were willing
to follow him.
Conclusion

In this chapter we have looked to the Bible for a theological foundation for this project intervention. It has been seen that God himself is on a mission, and that his mission is to restore his broken relationships with his human creation. God has chosen to disciple a core group of followers through the work of Christ on earth and commission them to make the method of discipleship a core part of God’s mission plan. Jesus said he came to give humanity “life . . . to the full,” that is, more abundant temporal life and eternal life. The core value of this LTTF is love, God’s love, as seen in Jesus leaving heaven and coming to earth to die a substitutionary death on the cross for each one of us.

Together we looked at scriptural support for the three vital behaviors which will be core to implementing a structured approach to the pursuit of LTTF with Jesus. The Bible teaches us that reading, hearing, and speaking God’s word is vital to faith development. The use of small groups has been used to shrink down mega sized communities of faith by Moses and have been used to establish the New Testament Church by Jesus. Whether the first disciples or today’s disciples, the Bible puts forth a small group context as a vital community for development and sending of ambassadors and missionaries of reconciliation to help God accomplish his mission on earth. Finally, the Bible tells us that Jesus sent them out two-by-two and Paul and Barnabas followed in Jesus’ footsteps when the used the two-by-two model on their missionary travels. From my reading and study of the Bible it seemed reasonable to hypothesize that one’s pursuit of “life . . . to the full” with Jesus, in the context of daily Bible reading, weekly small group fellowship, and one-on-one accountability and missional mingling with a
partner would be the cause of missional activity and impact in the lives of disciples of Christ.
CHAPTER 3
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In the previous chapter I sought to provide a theological basis for my idea that the pursuit of Jesus’ “life . . . to the full” offered in John 10:10 is a catalyst for mission. I proposed that how Jesus intends us to live “life . . . to the full” on earth today flows out of three vital behaviors.

In this chapter I review what current literature has to say about these vital behaviors, and they are addressed in the following order. First, the practice of reading and hearing God’s word daily (Cole, 1999) to allow what God means by “life . . . to the full” to take root in each other’s lives is examined. Second, participating weekly in a missional, relational, incarnational (Sweet, 2009) small group family in order to be the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27) and evidence of his kingdom on earth as in heaven (Matt 6:10) is explored. Third, I finish this chapter by discussing the specific task of being missional together, with emphasis on meeting regularly in same-gender pairs (i.e. “life transformation groups,” Cole, 2010, 1999), using conversation, questioning and coaching skills (Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan, & Switzler, 2008, Kimsey-House, 2011; Stoltzfus, 2008) to facilitate one another’s character building progress, and going to “third places” (Frost, 2006) using “Christ’s method” (White, 1905, pp. 143-144) to
mingle, build caring relationships, and share God’s favor in practical ways, seeking to overcome evil with good (Rom 12:21).

I will primarily use literature written between 2001 and 2011, but I also use a few select references from authors such as Ellen G. White (1905), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1954), Marvin Weisbord (1987), Andrew Murray (1828-1917) and Neil Cole (1999) to allow their work to contribute to this study as well.

**LTTF Through Reading and Hearing God’s Word**

“Thinking like Jesus will lead to acting like Jesus,” writes Hull (2004, p. 185). Further, Hull states, “The individual Christian must develop his own walk with God. This is why personal devotions are so vital to effective Christian living. Jesus spent time with his Father to receive sustenance for his mission” (p. 131). White (2010) adds, “A ‘Thus saith the Lord’ is not to be set aside for a ‘Thus saith the church’ or a ‘Thus saith the state’” (Chapter 6, para. 35), so, to be able to know the difference, one must be a reader of God’s word for oneself.

To highlight the importance of the church reading the Bible, Platt (2011) proclaims, “The Word of God accomplishes the work of God” (p. 45). Giving us insights into the Jewish mind in the time of Christ’s earthly life, Spangler and Tverberg (2009) ask, “Would it surprise you to learn that the rabbis thought that study, and not prayer, was the highest form of worship? They pointed out that when we pray, we speak to God, but that when we study the Scriptures, God speaks to us” (p. 26).

From the beginning of my project period I developed my own Bible reading plan and began to promote it to all church members to encourage the membership to be reading what I was reading. It also challenged me and my fellow speakers to preach on
some Bible passage from the previous week’s reading so we could experience the hearing of God’s word together.

Pursue a Panoramic View

While in-depth study of the Scriptures is profitable, Viola and Barna (2008) challenge us to read to “become familiar with the whole sweeping drama from beginning to end. We need to learn to view the New Testament panoramically, not microscopically” (p. 239). Cole (1999) promotes “reading about thirty chapters of the Bible each week” (p. 57), book by book, followed by one-on-one time with an accountability partner to ask life-probing questions about each other’s successes and struggles in being faithful to God’s word since last meeting together.

Wright (2010) is in agreement with Cole, Viola, Barna, Spangler, and Tverberg about the vital importance of putting forth the effort necessary to know God’s word better, when he writes, “The antidote to the power of the present age…is to have the mind renewed [by the word of God] so that one can think clearly about the way of life which is pleasing to God” (p. 152). Willard (2009) adds, “We need to understand that what simply occupies our mind very largely governs what we do. It sets the emotional tone out of which our actions flow, and it projects the possible courses of action available to us” (p. 324).

In the Bible reading plan I used the first year we read 16 to 28 chapters per week. During the second year I lessened the reading to between five and 16 chapters per week, and usually more than 10 per week. I selected sermon texts and topics from the reading plans and I asked the other speakers to do the same. Our LTTF discipleship group also
focused its Bible dialoging on the reading plan passages for the week. The assignment was to do reading throughout the week so we could discuss it when we got together.

Read Scripture Together

Instead of focusing on reading Bible quantity, Armstrong (2010) challenges us to “lovingly read Scripture together if we want to preserve a proper balance between unity and diversity” (p.140). The idea is that the more we read the Bible “together” in community, the more engaged and united we will be as community. So, Cole challenges us individually to read Bible chapters in quantity, while Armstrong encourages us to read the Bible together, in community.

Issacs (2008) says,

Dialogue is a conversation in which people think together in relationship. Thinking together implies that you no longer take your own position as final. You relax your grip on certainty and listen to the possibilities that result simply from being in a relationship with others—possibilities that might not otherwise have occurred. (pp. 19-20)

Boren (2010) challenges every Christian to take advantage of small group time “to listen to and for one another” (Chapter 6, Practice: Listening Together, para. 5). To be in God’s word and in community with each other during God’s Sabbath day is a weekly opportunity for everyone. Boren challenges us to take weekly breaks from our personal efforts and, every Sabbath day, to practice trusting in God’s provision, taking time to see what God is up to in our lives and in the world around us so we can be better prepared to join him in the week ahead (Chapter 6, Practice: Keeping the Sabbath).

For my LTTF Discipleship Group, reading the Bible out-loud together in our group meetings, everyone having the opportunity to read, yet no one being compelled to read, followed by engaging the text and each other in dialogue, was more helpful to the
development of our relationships with God and each other than was reading 16 to 28 chapters a week on our own. Reading our Bibles for ourselves, outside of our meetings, was not as meaningful for my group members as reading them together. They reported getting more understanding out of what they read, and enjoying a greater ability to relate the text to their lives, when we dialogued about the text right after having read it together.

On the other hand, when I asked our group members to read their Bibles separately and then to discuss it when we were together the discussion was not as rich. The dialogue did not engage as many within the group when no reading was done together (especially those who had not done the assigned reading and those who did not remember the reading they did). By reading a chapter of the Bible together everyone could participate in the dialogue with God and each other, and this had a positive relationship-building effect on us all.

Our dialoging with each other was about what the text was saying to each of us, what God was saying to each of us, and it was ok not to be in agreement all of the time. We were seeking to know God better through a dialogue with God’s written word.

The Bible is Our Discipleship Manual

One of the purposes of reading, listening to, and speaking God’s word is to make disciples of Jesus, and Cole (2005) proclaims, “Each new convert is a worker—immediately” (p. 149). Cole goes on to challenge us not to focus on training programs that might help people work for Jesus, but to focus people on working for Jesus as their discipleship training program. Speaking to pastors, Hatmaker (2011) challenges leaders to move beyond a focus on “attenders” and “volunteers,” and encourages them to facilitate a “self-sustaining” and “heart-transforming” church by shifting the driving force
of planning, scheduling, promoting, and recruiting for service projects from the pastors to the people of God (p. 62).

According to Blackaby and Blackaby (2011), “The most important thing spiritual leaders do is cultivate their relationship with God (John 15:5; Jer 7:13)” (p. 42). One way Hellerman (2009) says disciples of Christ can know what to do when they encounter new situations that do not have exact biblical parallels is to learn to “carefully observe the various ways in which Jesus responded to the individuals and cultural institutions of His day . . . in order to learn how to act in our world like Jesus acted in His” (Chapter 3, Reuniting Belief and Behavior, para. 7).

For Murray (2014) the issue of God gaining our trust so we can give our permission for him to possess our whole being is at the core of why we need to study and know God through our Bibles (Chapter 2, para. 5). Whether reading the Bible for ourselves, or with others, Hull (2004) reminds us that “following and listening to Jesus are essential elements to effective ministry” (p. 11).

Scazzero and Bird (2010) point to the emotional health of Jesus as exemplary for us as his disciples. They call us to pursue the kind of emotional health that will allow us to be real, expressing real joy and sadness, with laughter or with tears. They challenge us to have the kind of intimacy with our heavenly father that Jesus had. “His relationship with his Father” say Scazzero and Bird, “freed him from the pressures of those around him. He was not afraid to live out his own unique life and mission, regardless of other people’s agenda for his life” (p. 33).

Harvey (2010) says, “God’s glorious agenda for our ambition, like his glorious gospel, begins not with what we achieve but with who we are” (p. 67). Since who we
are, and who we believe we are, effects what we do and achieve, what we think about ourselves has a great impact on our future.

The kind of unfearful determination to be self-differentiated, as highlighted by Scazzero and Bird, seems to be related to Jesus’ sense of, and confidence in, who he was in his heavenly father’s eyes. He also had a strong sense of the mission he had on earth (as seen in texts like Luke 4:18-19). Some of my LTTF group members lacked evidence of either knowing, or having confidence in, who they were in their heavenly father’s eyes. Like putting water into buckets filled with holes, the task of reminding one another who we are in Christ Jesus right now (especially since we often cannot see it and must accept our identity in Christ by faith), is a demanding one. This challenge is highlighted in the next section as I look at what current literature has to say about our thoughts and words.

Think, Speak, and Act Like the Ambassador You Are

Slaughter (2002) writes, “You experience your future by your thoughts, words, and actions. Every thought you think, every word you speak, and every action you commit has a long-term consequence. You can be purposeful about creating your future, or you can create your future by default” (p. 191). By reading God’s word to mine the depths of his love for us (John 3:16), to better grasp his thoughts and plans for us (Jer 29:11), and to better know the original image we were made in (i.e. God’s own image, Gen 1:26-27), we can inform our thinking and better reflect God in our speaking as we cooperate with Christ in creating a more abundant future for ourselves and others around us.
**Chose to Accentuate the Positive**

DeSteno and Valdesolo (2011) cite work done by psychologist Paul Rozen that has shown, “humans possess a fundamental tendency to accentuate the negative” (p. 7), which is all the more reason for Christians to be counteracting the negative messages in life with a Christ-centered message that gives us the ability to accentuate the positive, using a scriptural basis, to retrain our minds in an upward direction toward God and hope. What we read, hear, and think back to ourselves, and what we say to others can have great impact for good or bad in our lives, so we need to get the word of God into us daily to allow “the mind of Christ” to dwell in us richly (Phil 2:5) and become empowered to share God’s word with others richly.

**Inviting Heaven Down**

Slaughter (2010) challenges Christians to be a different people in this world, reflecting God’s other worldly kingdom, and this is no less true for Seventh-day Adventists as it is true for other Christians these days. Slaughter writes, “We have overemphasized getting people into heaven to the neglect of getting heaven into earth” (Introduction, Biblical Measures, para. 1). Getting heaven into earth requires getting God’s word into the people who live here. Clem (2011) reminds us that the apostle Paul has called us ambassadors, and “a good ambassador embodies the country he represents. As ambassadors of Christ we are to embody Jesus and his kingdom” (p. 164) among the citizens of the kingdoms of this earth where we now dwell.

**Bringing Heaven Down**

I set the stage in the beginning for being a positive force in each other’s lives. I asked my group, “If we don’t have each other’s back who will, or should, on this planet?
Shouldn’t God’s church, God’s people, be such an environment?” Our group, I told them, needed to be a safe place, an affirming place. We provide such an environment with our words. We create or destroy such an environment by our self-talk as well. We have sought to encourage heaven into our lives, not to focus on chasing hell out of them. Our group is a safe place to share real life issues and find real encouraging support.

Dialogism and Cultural Sensitivity

Reading the Bible can help us become culturally sensitive and empower us to be able to communicate God’s word more clearly across our own cultural barriers. As we befriend people from different cultures, or sub-cultures of our own, people with varying religious beliefs, experiences, and traditions, Theissen (2007) reminds us that “the God of the Bible is the God of all people (Rom. 1:18ff.; 3:29). Dialog among religions begins in the Bible” (p. 76). Theissen offers us a non-exclusivistic, non-inclusivistic, non-pluralistic way to position ourselves when we speak of the Bible with others. He calls this position “dialogism,” because it encourages interfaith dialog in a way that facilitates “respect and appreciation for other religions and authentic advocacy of one’s own cause” (p. 100) at the same time.

Promoting, Not Judging

“Dialogism” allows one to fully promote one’s own religious beliefs, using the Bible as one’s truth source, without judging another’s religious beliefs, or one’s choice of truth source, in any particular way. God gets a better chance to enlighten all those in dialog when we trust God over self as the one who is best suited to the task of transformation, in thought or in practice. Scriven (2009) made a similar point when he wrote, “Unless witness is conversation, it’s just another name for arrogance” (p. 142).
While we were mostly a group of High Springs Adventists, we had non-Adventists (both never before Adventists and no longer Adventists) in our meetings from time to time. No one’s views were ever ridiculed, even though we had some far out new age thoughts a few times. We centered our discussions around the Bible itself, not any other book. We had our Bibles open, not just in our laps or on the coffee table. And when people shared their felt needs we prayed for them to receive God’s best. We were not there to teach each other but to share and learn together as the Holy Spirit helped us to understand God’s word together. We did not ask each other to give the right answers as much as we asked the Bible to answer our questions in ways that made sense to all of us. If it did not have a clear answer for us, we might share our answers as opinions and leave it at that.

Pursuing Better Questions

In order to read and discuss the Bible with others in a dialog fashion will require us to pursue the best questions, instead of the best answers, and to do more listening than we do talking. Reflecting on his own religious experience Selmanovic (2009), an Adventist missionary who is working in an inter-faith context in a major US city, adds, “We have all seen it over and over again: whenever a creature claims to have an exclusive grasp of God, someone gets hurt” (p. 141), and “I was disturbed by my own religion. I realized that it is our superiority complex that makes us an inferior force in making the world a better place” (p. 161).

Gibbons (2009) proclaims, “One of the axioms I’ve come to believe about life and ministry is that questions should lead us” (p. 70). What would happen if we asked the Bible different questions? What if we asked, “How did Jesus relate to people who were
not the religious leaders of his day, average people like you and me, who did not see eye to eye with him, and whom God loved anyway?”

**Giving God Room and Time to Work**

I appreciated both authors’ focus on better learning methods not on better telling methods. They inspire me to change the question, in order to change the answer, in order to change the learning, and not to worry because truth will never change, just our perspective in relation to it. A change in our perspective just may be the next big thing some Christians need to become missional, again or for the first time.

Each of our goals should be to engage in a process of understanding God better together, not in just finding ways to be better understood, and certainly not in finding ways to better sell our beliefs to others. Bible dialogue and discussion in small groups is not about marketing or sales. This is one area I believe my LTTF group excelled in. We did not argue, but had differing ideas. We allowed one another to hold onto their different ideas if the dialogue left them unchanged. We did not try to fix each other when problems were shared, nor did we need to answer every question. And, we continued to ask, “What does the Bible say?,” what is it revealing to us, and what biblical texts were supportive of our views. This was a very appreciated process and helped me get total involvement of the group in our discussions every time we had them.

I am thankful to the men I had the privilege to be with in the group. They maintained a respect for each other and a level self-humility and desire for engagement that allowed us to have many wonderful discussions and to enjoy special moments of divine discovery and regular prayer support.
Unsettle to Build up

It is “the role of leadership,” write Frost and Hirsch (2011), “to continually unsettle the community, holding its feet to the fire of mission and marshalling the God-given potential that emerges in times of dissonance and uncertainty” (p. 132). Whenever a person sets out to unsettle the settled, Viola (2009) challenges us to know this, “The source of spiritual authority is Christ. The means of spiritual authority is the Word of God. The exercise of spiritual authority is brokenness and servanthood. And the goal of spiritual authority is edification” (p. 104). The goal of unsettling is to build another up, not to bring his or her walls down. Further, Viola states, “If you focus on the church, you will get division. But if you focus on Christ and embrace His cross, you will get the church” (p. 264).

Combining these authors’ comments makes me think of unsettling to build up as an art form. I have usually tried to avoid unsettling because I have seen so little building up come out of the work of unsettlers. I have not done much (any?) unsettling in this project, but I would like to learn how to use it effectively to build up God’s people.

God Gets us

In his book, Just Listen, Goulston (2009) paraphrases Warren Bennis as saying, “When you really get where people are coming from— and they get that you get them— they’re more likely to let you take them where you want them to go” (p. 86). While this is shared as a leadership principle to motivate us to “really get where people are coming from,” it also challenges me to want to help people to get it that God gets them, because then we will all be more likely to let God take us where he wants us to go together.
Indeed, I believe the Bible is God’s way of letting us know he gets us, but we must be readers of it to get that he gets us, so we will let God take us where he wants us to go. I have already stated that getting people to read the Bible on a regular basis has been a major emphasis of my intervention. I have also been trying to bring to light perspectives from the Bible that shed light on God’s character of love and plan to restore us to his image and presence. I think the heart of what Goulston is writing about has to do with gaining another’s trust. The more I read the Bible the more I gain trust in God. I hope that is true for others as well.

LTTF Through Discipleship Groups

In this postmodern era we are living in, Kimball (2003) tells us, “community is valued over individualism” (p. 49), so it is essential that small discipleship groups become fundamental to what it means to be a Christian. I agree with Kimball. While I traveled to Europe alone in my mid-twenties for the individual experience of the places I would go and things I would see and do, my teenage son goes places with his friends for the community experience of being with his friends and enjoying their company. It matters less where he goes or what he sees or does than who he goes with, and the fact that they spent time together. Therefore, in our social context today, I agree with Hull (2007) when he writes, “The small group provides the best environment for disciple making” (p. 283).

Belong First, Believe Second

Writing about GenMe, “people born from the 1970s to the 1990s” (p. 109), Twenge (2006) describes three basic human requirements that *GenMe* often lacks, and that God’s church should be particularly able to assist them with: “stable close
relationships, a sense of community, [and] a feeling of safety” (p. 136). Kinnaman and Lyons (2007) also write about an overlapping age group, Mosaics and Busters, ages 16 to 41 in 2007, also claiming that “relationships are the driving force. Being loyal to friends is one of their highest values” (p. 22). This makes the time we live in ripe for a small group model for church life similar to that of New Testament times.

Breen and Cockram’s council is to “invite only a few people into a discipling relationship.” In other words, we should not think in terms of discipling the entire congregation. Instead, they counsel, select a “group of four to ten people you feel God has called you to specifically invest in.” They call this a huddle. Then, they say, “You will meet with them [your huddle of disciples] regularly (at least every other week) to intentionally disciple them in a group setting” (Part 1, Chapter 4, para. 13). Concerning his own experience with churches that have moved away from the attractional model of the past to a more incarnational paradigm for doing church, Armstrong (2010) writes, “People are being invited to belong to a people before they are invited to believe a message” (p. 177).

A Place for Open Expression and Respectful Disagreement

Spangler and Tverberg (2009), writing of discipleship in the time of Jesus say, “Haverim [disciples] need to learn to trust one another, openly expressing their thoughts and feelings” in a confidential community and “they must also learn the art of respectful disagreement,” since “debate was…normal…, an essential way to learn” in the life of a disciple (p. 75).

We may not have had the vigorous kinds of debates that go on in a Yeshiva, but in my LTTF discipleship group we had good participation and open dialogue about the
biblical text together. We did not limit our group to members of our church, though almost all were members. I sought to engage everyone in our Bible dialogues. One of the results of the community we built together was that we learned from one another as well as from the word of God directly. Viola and Barna (2008) attest to similar results in their small group experience, when they write, “We learn Christ from one another and with one another in a close-knit, shared-life community.” From their perspective, “The Christian life was never meant to be lived outside of Christian community” (pp. 256-257). Community is as core to our Christian identity says Clem (2011) as is the identity of God as triune in nature. “We profoundly belong to one another as the family of God,” writes Clem. “This truth must disrupt us at the core of individualism, resetting us to what it means to love another as Jesus loved (John 13:34)” (p. 134).

One way I seek to disrupt individualism in my setting is by sending weekly text reminders of our gatherings. Every week I have sent my group text message reminders I got better attendance than when I have not. Their belonging is modelled by me sending text invites weekly and it is experienced as we practice listening, sharing, and disagreeing respectfully in our gatherings. I have found that discovering truth is not just about church doctrines but also about gracious church community that draws me out of self and into dialogue and learning together.

**Becoming A People and Belonging to God**

Chester and Timmis (2008) emphasize the apostle Paul’s teaching in 1 Peter 2, that one of Christ’s purposes on earth is to make individuals who once “were not a people” (v. 10) into “a people belonging to God” (v. 9). The authors write, “We are not saved individually and then choose to join the church as if it were some club or support
group. Christ died for his people, and we are saved when by faith we become part of the people for whom Christ died” (p. 39). Concerning this idea of becoming “a people belonging to God” in the world, Dybdahl (2006) writes, “The Sabbath is God’s gracious gift of identity that, if celebrated, demonstrates who we are and to whom we belong” (pp. 64-65). One way God gives us to help us become “a people” in a practical way, and to impact the world with his presence, is to remember to keep the Sabbath day together, not just separately, and to invite others to enter God’s weekly Sabbath time and to enjoy it with us. Roxburgh (2010) says,

Jesus formed a community of disciples as a parallel society, a light on a hill, whose commitment to one another and their world would transform their culture… . Our task is to form local churches as environments in which that journey might begin all over again. (p. 147)

**Church Planting and Small Group Birthing**

I believe Stetzer and Putnam (2006) would agree when they write about the need for church planting disruptions, saying, “If we are to fulfill the Great Commission, church planting will have to be part of every established church’s vision and strategy” (p. 169). In my project selection I find Stetzer’s comment relevant since I define church planting in my setting as small LTTF mission group start-ups. When trying to implement missional, relational, incarnational, intergenerational small groups in any pastor’s church district, Sahlin (2007) counsels pastors that “everyone should not be expected to participate” in a group and that we need to allow “individuals to voluntarily group themselves around goals and natural clusters” (p. 171).

I took Sahlin’s counsel. I allowed involvement in small groups to remain optional and did not make an all church program a part of my small group intervention. I was
intentional about implementing “natural clusters” during my second year LLTF discipleship group. I invited only men who had a number of similar life experiences and who agreed to join me in making the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” with a group of other men our common goal together.

Intercede for One Another

Bonhoeffer (1954) writes, “A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses” (p. 86). Whether it is the practice of prayer or fasting, or any other spiritual discipline, Roxburgh (2010) counsels, “Leaders will need to begin slowly by inviting small numbers of people into simple experiments in Christian practices. Small experiments rather than wholesale change is the way we form people in practices of Christian life” (p. 148).

Blackaby, Blackaby, and King (2008) write, “Reflect on what is happening around you. Try to identify things God is presently initiating in your life. Pray over each one, and allow the Holy Spirit to give you further clarification regarding what He intends to do in and through your life” (p. 118).

Perhaps, the richest and most appreciated thing we did in our LTTF groups was to share with each other what God was doing in our lives, and then praying for each other. In the beginning I took prayer requests and prayed for the group, but as time went on I asked others to volunteer to pray for the group. Finally, I asked each group member to tell the person to their left what they wanted him to pray for and then we immediately gave time for the person to the left of the requesting person to pray specifically for that individual before we moved on around the circle, one person at a time. Something was
truly missing from our time together if we missed lifting each other up, one person at a
time, in prayer, and we each looked forward to this part of our group time most of all.

Share Resources and Serve Others Together

To be a group that is about more than mere study and the gaining of head
knowledge, Blake and Blake (2001) challenge us to make the sharing of financial
resources and the use of group member time to serve others in practical ways core
elements of the group’s purpose for being. The progression of growth from facts, to
belief, to behavior that has been a part of the modern mindset is quite different in the
emerging mindset of today. Kimball (2003) says we would be more effective by
facilitating an experience that influences a desired behavior that is later supported by a
belief explanation of what was just experienced and done (p. 187). In other words, we
need to “do” first, then “explain why” in support of what we have done.

Barrett (2004) writes, “The church does not exist for itself, but for participation in
God’s mission of reconciliation. ‘Mission’ is not just an activity carried out by special
people in faraway places. Mission is the character of the church in whatever context it
exists” (Preface, Section 1, para. 4). If “the church” is even average sized it would be too
big for the entire church to be involved in almost any service project personally, unless
we are talking about all members serving through small groups in various places.

My initial understanding of local “mission” prompted me to see this intervention
of pursuing “life . . . to the full” with a group of men as leading us into service projects
and living among activities. However, it became evident that the personal needs within
the group were such that we became missionaries to each other. That gave me a new
perspective on what it means for mission work to start at home, in the context it existed
amongst ourselves. The sharing of spiritual resources and serving one another together, through prayer and mutual encouragement, was our mission field as we pursued “life . . . to the full” together.

Pink (2011) challenges us to consider how people are wired in order to get them from doing at some level to doing something masterfully. Pink tells us, “An essential ingredient in achieving mastery is getting feedback on how you are doing” (Part Three, Type I for Organizations: Thirteen Ways…, para. 16). “By creating conditions for people to make progress, shining a light on that progress, recognizing and celebrating progress, organizations [and discipleship groups] can help their own cause and enrich people’s lives” (Part Two, Chapter 5, The Oxygen of the Soul, para. 7).

While my second year LTTF group and I did not step out into the community around us to mingle or serve together much (during the nine months we were meeting together), nor did we adopt a missional target to be able to live among, mission-mindedness was fed through our pursuit of “life . . . to the full” together. What I believe we did live out was to create conditions for people in our group, Adventist members and non-members, “to make progress, shining a light on that progress, recognizing and celebrating progress,” in order to enrich group members’ lives in ways that would empower them to be better husbands and fathers, and prepare them to become engaged in the community in the future, beyond their family and work challenges that were their first priorities in their pursuits of “life . . . to the full” at that time.

Living Among Others, All Time is Sacred Time

Hirsch (2006) who describes the erosion of God’s work on the earth as being facilitated by the way we have divided time into the sacred and the secular, proclaims,
“our task is to make all aspects and dimensions of life sacred—family, work, play, conflict, etc.—and not to limit the presence of God to spooky religious zones” (p. 95).

Halter and Smay (2008) echo the same conviction when they write of the church’s call to be God’s incarnational people, saying, “The habit of living among, means participating in the natural activities of the culture around you, with whimsical holiness” (p. 136). One thing these authors seem to have in common is a desire to challenge the church (the people of God) to make mission a genuine life-style of caring small groups that love people in practical ways and demonstrate a willingness to enter the trenches and get messy in the process.

“Simply put,” say Breen and Absalom (2010), “mission is God’s activity of love toward the world. He is a sending God, a going God, a God who incarnates himself in a specific time and context, so that every person may come to know and love him. ‘To be a follower of Jesus means that you, too, are called to be a missionary’” (Part 2, Chapter 1, para. 3).

I went into this project with the idea of leading a group of church members, and in the second year a group of church men, into mission engagement in our community through a pursuit of “life . . . to the full” with Jesus. What I discovered along the way was that God led me to use Christ’s method as a ministry tool for my group, as well as to model what it might look like for them to follow in Christ’s footsteps with others in their lives in the future. I discovered incarnational ministry needs in my group that required my attention before investing much time with my group members in the street, trying to minister to others incarnationally.
McNeal (2009) says it this way: “We must change our ideas of what it means to develop a disciple, shifting the emphasis from studying Jesus and all things spiritual in an environment protected from the world, to following Jesus into the world to join him in his redemptive mission” (Chapter 1, Mission Shift Two: From Program…, para. 3). Breen and Absalom (2010) write of discipleship and mission as acts of living among a particular group of people and letting the Holy Spirit guide us, through the relationships we build, to acts of service and need-meeting for each other.

Admittedly, McNeal, Breen, and Absalom challenged me to consider at what point mission among my group members should become mission with my group members among others in our community on a weekly basis. Jesus did not have perfect disciples, nor will we ever be perfectly ready as his disciples today, yet in the time I had with my group members during this project’s time frame I was compelled to place the bulk of my ministry focus on them, reading God’s word together and in praying together. I hope I was able to establish a stronger sense of identity in Christ for being the missional agents that God has made us all in Christ Jesus.

Heuertz and Pohl (2010) write, “If we want people to experience the kingdom of God and to dwell with God for eternity, then how they experience their relationship with us should be a foretaste of that goodness and beauty” (p. 31). They go on to say, “A willingness to put down roots in a particular place and with a particular group of people provides a setting where over time we are forced to depend on God’s grace as we work through interpersonal issues and go deeper into the Christian life” (p. 79).

As much as I look forward to the day Heurtz and Pohl’s comments will affirm me for putting down roots in a secular context in the community around my church family, I
get a present affirmation through their words for having put down roots in the context of my current mission field for disciple-making, my LTTF discipleship group.

Breen and Absalom (2010) would call those who commit to such a venture of friendship “a missional community.” They write, “A Missional Community is an extended family of people on mission together, seeing the Gospel come to life and incarnated in whatever crack or crevice of society they find themselves in (i.e., mission context)” (Part 2, Chapter 2, Maps + Cracks, para. 13). McNeal (2011) agrees with Breen and Absalom, adding, “A post-congregational culture requires a strategy of engaging people right where they already live, work, play, go to school, and pursue their hobbies and passions. It's incarnational” (Chapter 1, Taking a Page from Our Past…, para. 10).

To be a missional community is to embrace the arts of diversity and invitation and “create multiple entry points through which an enquirer can begin the journey of faith,” says Minatrea (2004). Continuing, he says missional communities “invite people to begin walking with them toward Christ, well before those people may grasp what it means to become His disciple” (Chapter 2, The Eight Passion Actions, para. 19).

I have been walking toward Jesus with my second year LTTF group, rooting for them, praying with them, and engaging them in the context of their lives. I hope this will serve as a model for them to imitate with others as our group grows, divides, or multiplies in the future. I acknowledge I have lived out a different reality than I ventured into this project anticipating, yet pursuing “life . . . to the full” with my discipleship group has been a mission experience in each of our lives.
Mealtime is Mission Time

“People often complain that they lack time for mission. But we all have to eat. Three meals a day, seven days a week. That’s twenty-one opportunities for mission and community without adding anything to your schedule,” says Chester (2011, p. 92). During those missional and community building dinners Robinson (2010) would challenge us to think of ourselves as gardeners. He says, “We must become spiritual horticulturalists who fully understand the makeup of good soil so our crops will more consistently grow to maturity, authenticity, and sustainability” (Chapter 1, para. 27). To fully understand the makeup of good soil, and what God does to make it good, one must be ever-reading, sharing, and discussing the Bible, our source for life, truth, and missional impulses.

Chester (2011) challenges us to focus on the relationships we make and the incarnational presence with others we share, as we break bread together. “Meals are more than food,” writes Chester. “They’re social occasions. They represent friendship, community, and welcome.” Chester plainly states that eating meals is not his idea of church or mission, “but,” he says, “I do want to argue that meals should be an integral and significant part of our shared life” (p. 14). When Chester speaks of sharing a meal together, he means sitting down with hungry people “to share in a meal and a conversation,” not just cooking and cleaning for strangers (p. 82). Chester writes,

If you tell someone he’s a sinner who needs God while you’re handing him a cup of soup, then he’ll hear you saying he’s a loser who should become like you. But when you eat together as friends and you tell him what a messed up person you are, then you can tell him about sin and grace. (p. 83)
For many years my wife and I have used our Sabbath mealtimes and our children’s birthday parties as opportunities for inviting our Adventist friends and our non-Adventist friends to come together over a common interest (eating and socializing with friends) to create opportunities for two kingdoms to rub together. During this intervention my wife and I invited potentially new LTTF group members to eat with us in our home and I shared my vision for the group and gave the invitation. Our LTTF group also gained two new members after we hosted a BBQ for male invitees at one of our group members’ homes.

Motivating People to Serve Others

Pink centers his book around the power of intrinsic motivation. He helps us appreciate the drive potential of service projects that are challenging to the volunteers and meet the needs of others. Sjogren (2008) built his entire congregation from the ground up using the simple missional challenge of seeing how many ways people can demonstrate God’s love through practical service to others, and do it for God’s glory, free, no donations accepted. In a more recent book, Sjogren (2014) shares 101 service opportunities that his church has done, complete with how many people are required and what items or money will be needed to execute them well. I have found this book to be a help for those who want to get started in demonstrating God’s love in practical ways, as well as for those groups that are looking for new ways to serve others in Christ’s name.

During the first year of my intervention I encouraged group members to do prayer walking downtown on Main Street and to mingle in third places and make new acquaintances. In High Springs third places are often people’s churches. Apart from church activities, people gather at the sports fields with their kids, or at the various fresh-
water springs in the area, or in one of the area restaurants. The three best places I have found to meet people when they are not at home or at work is at the grocery store in High Springs where I shop, at the Taco Bell in Alachua where I often eat lunch, and at the playground at the Alachua recreation park where I have taken my girls to play (Alachua is the neighboring town southeast of us).

During the second year I selected a small number of Sjogren’s 101 mission projects from his book, that I thought might be easiest to pull off well, in order for my group members (and church members-at-large) to demonstrate God’s favor. I printed them up on my own half sheets of paper so they would carry nicely in our Bibles. I put two project ideas on each half sheet, including everything needed (even the number of people) to execute them well. I asked each person to take a sheet and each DP to choose one from the choices they had to do together. For several weeks I assigned a mission to be done one week, on our meeting night, and I included time for sharing our experiences with each other the following meeting night. But, what my discipleship group members were really interested in and committed to was to our regular group time for fellowship, Bible discussions, and prayer. It seemed to me, for them, our regular group meetings were helping them in their pursuit of “life . . . to the full,” and the serving opportunities were not. This is a group that would do anything for someone with a specific need, but the serving/mission assignments never caught on. The mission assignment nights, even though group members did give them a try for a while, soon were just treated as nights off. Eventually, we went back to meeting every week, using our regular LTTF discipleship group format. My own sense of mission changed and became one of staying
with my group, where they were on their journey, while keeping a missional end in my sights as I downshifted.

Bonhoeffer (1954) wrote, “Every member serves the whole body, either to its health or to its destruction. This is no mere theory; it is a spiritual reality” (p. 89). In addition, said Bonhoeffer, “A community which allows unemployed members to exist within it will perish because of them. It will be well, therefore, if every member receives a definite task to perform for the community” (p. 94). Breen and Cockram (2011) counsel, “We should expect and appropriately plan for some degree of failure, aim for ‘low control, high accountability’ and invest all we have in creating empowered leaders who can function as producers rather than consumers” (Part 1, Chapter 2, para. 29).

The next challenge for me and my LTTF discipleship group members is to help each one find a meaningful way to employ the skills God has given them, in our group, or through service to our church family, or through service to the High Springs community, so that our current focus on personal issues of great family importance for pursuing “life . . . to the full” does not result in eventual group death. I have experienced the end of a group’s life-cycle before. Groups that do not become missional disband after a few years or they become self-serving clubs. This is what I believe Bonhoeffer is referring to.

Redefining “the Church”

Instead of continuing the illusion that a church is a building, and when there is a building then there will be a church, Halter and Smay (2010) put forth the notion that “church happens when a group of people decide to go on mission with God together” (p. 46). “If you try to start a church or grow a church,” they write, “you often attract people
who just want to do ‘church things’; but if you start with a mission, God will draw people together and church will happen naturally” (p. 174).

The mission for my group has been interpreted as primarily working toward ourselves becoming better fathers and husbands and workers and witnesses on our jobs. Now that my project is over, I want to find and focus on a specific mission field, perhaps a street, a neighborhood, or a school near us, and see if seeking to overcome evil with good (Rom 12:21) amongst that very specific group of people will do any better at helping us to experience “life . . . to the full” than pursuing “life . . . to the full” has helped us to become missional within a nine-month period.

Concerning our church buildings, Cole (2005) says, “Jesus seemed not to have plans for buildings,” (p. 36) and “the early church did not have any buildings for the first three hundred-plus years” (p. 37) either. Cole goes on to say, “in our organic church movement we have come to understand church as this: the presence of Jesus among His people called out as a spiritual family to pursue His mission on this planet” (p. 53). Platt (2011) writes, “When the church is fundamentally a gathering of committed people, the place where the church gathers hardly matters” (p. 61).

Pearcey (2005) adds, “God’s strategy for reaching a lost world is for the church to function as a visible demonstration of His existence” (p. 361), revealing itself in every aspect of our day to day lives, living out God’s word in our modern context. Hatmaker (2011) agrees when he writes, “Missional community may serve as one of the best ways we can embody the incarnation of Christ — putting on flesh and being Jesus to our world. When we live this out, the focus of the church shifts to hearing and responding to the Spirit” (p. 59).
My LTTF discipleship group was a wonderful way to experience being the body of Christ together. The further challenge is to carry Christ’s body presence out of the homes which became our church buildings and into the streets to become our church parishes. We have begun to be missional in each other’s lives. The mission field beyond our own Jerusalem awaits us. Jesus’ own example, as we have seen in the previous chapter, was to establish a small community, and the New Testament Church was established house to house, so, Jesus and the New Testament Church used small groups as methods of discipleship and mission. We have moved God’s church (defined as a small group of Christ-followers) from the big box to our houses. That is where Jesus began and it took him three and a half years of hand-holding before the New Testament mission explosion began. My project may have ended, but my commitment to lead my LTTF discipleship group into God’s mission field outside our homes has not.

Concerning God’s mission through his church, Hunter (2010) gives us a John 10:10 perspective of moving toward life fullness when he writes, “Where and to the extent we are able, faithful presence commits us to do what we can to create conditions in the structures of social life we inhabit that are conducive to the flourishing of all” (p. 247). I agree with Hunter’s assessment of “life . . . to the full” as being the creation of conditions and structures conducive to the flourishing of all, and I believe that is exactly what I did accomplish with my group of men. Some benefitted more than others, as is always the case in life. Some stopped joining us. Others started joining us. The pursuit of “life . . . to the full” with Jesus goes on.
Change Requires God’s Work and Our Action

Conner (2011) affirms our experience when he writes, “God changes his people as they participate in Christian practices” (p. 85) such as friendship (p. 112) or hospitality (p. 113). Christian community, he says, is the birthplace for such practices to begin and develop and then to spill over into the world around them. Brown (2006) says, “Changing people’s behavior requires the active involvement of those whose behavior you are trying to change” (p. 7), so, “organizers spend…much time building relationships at the beginning and fostering bonds and community throughout the development of the organization” (p. 13). Brown just described my LTTF men’s discipleship group. The lack of apparent productivity may well be offset by the bonds of community I fostered with them in those ensuing months.

Quoting from the organizational consultant, Marvin Weisbord (1987), Brown writes, “From 100 years of experience repeating the same patterns over and over again, we can predict social consequences of any improvement project: the less involvement of those affected, the less likely will be the implementable solution” (p. 7). Weisbord described my project’s challenge well. I tried to find the balance between not pushing toward the desired change (of being missional) enough to properly facilitate it happening, and pushing so much that the appearance of change was only a yielding to my push.

Roxburgh, Boren, and Priddy (2009) write, “The belief that internal renewal or health leads to missional life is false,” and “Enough time has passed to show that this is patently not the case; we just get more focused on ourselves in a different way” (Part 2, Chapter 5, para. 23). One of my learnings from this project confirms Roxburgh, Boren, and Priddy’s testimony. I could not get my LTTF discipleship group, God’s church in
miniature, to study its way into being missional, or other-centered, at least not in the time allotted me in this project.

Rethinking the Future of God’s Church

As I think of future directions I may go with my LTTF discipleship group I think of Pagitt (2010), who informs us, “There is a shift away from large churches that bring in people from a large metropolitan area and toward a kind of parish model in which a church sees itself as investing in a particular neighborhood” (p. 74). In light of this Hirsch (2006) challenges us, “One of the most missional things that church community could do is simply to get out of their buildings and go to where the people are—and be God’s redeemed people in that place in a way that invites people into the equation” (p. 240)! Slaughter (2002) highlights the fact that change is a process when he says, “As churches take seriously Jesus’ call to discipleship, their memberships change from consumer mindsets to mission-outreach movements of God whose members demonstrate both personal and social holiness” (p. 75).

But, for those individuals and groups of God’s people who are ready and willing now, with a “send me” or “send us” attitude, Gibbons (2009) plainly states, “If we really want…to see Christ revealed in our communities and through our lives and in this global world of ours, then we must focus our strategic initiatives of love on people who make us feel uncomfortable, who don’t fit into our thinking and our conventions, who are marginalized and even considered misfits and outsiders” (pp. 78-79).

Missionally-Differentiated Together

Knight (2008) proclaims, “A healthy Christianity must of necessity stand over against the values of the larger culture and hold truths that the surrounding culture finds
distasteful” (p. 19). Further, he writes, “We are truly keeping God’s commandments only when our actions flow out of a heartfelt love for Him and other people” (p. 48).

Ultimately, all followers of Christ are called to be the rest of the world’s “royal priesthood” (1 Pet 2:9), and Wright (2010) proclaims, “At the heart of the calling to be a royal priesthood lies the task of evangelism: proclaiming Jesus, persuading people to consider him, inviting people to give him their allegiance and discover through him, and through the company of his followers, a whole new way of being human” (p. 230). DeYoung and Gilbert (2011) believe we should speak to people about “living as citizens of the kingdom” (p. 21) of God on earth, not about building the kingdom.

“If there are missiological implications from Genesis” (see Gen 12), they write, “their emphasis is not ‘go and bless everyone’ but rather ‘go and call the nations to put their faith in Christ’” (p. 34). Concerning our Christian mission, they further state, “The emphasis is on God dwelling again with man, the enmity between them ended, and the sin that separated man from God forgiven” (p. 89). The key idea DeYoung and Gilbert want us to grasp is that God is interested in ruling or reigning in the lives of his creation again, and the mission of those who are letting that happen in their own lives is to facilitate a decision of the will in the minds of others to let God’s reign happen in their lives too (p. 119).

For my discipleship group, modeling God dwelling with us and leading us into a life lived to the full was something we did weekly or bi-weekly together, and it could only be witnessed by those who joined us during our meeting time. Our ability to carry that modeling into the streets through service on a regular basis has not yet been realized.
What is God Already Doing?

Before running into the midst of something God is already up to in our neighborhoods and messing it up, we should return to the question of, “What is God up to?” and “How can we know?,” so we can join him and avoid working against him. To begin to discern what God is up to around us, Roxburgh (2011) says we must get out of our church buildings and “enter the neighborhoods and communities where you live. Sit at the table of the other, and there you may begin to hear what God is doing” (p. 134).

In fact, says Slaughter (2010), “The mission model depends on networking. The missional church is actively creating partnerships with social agencies, public schools, government and nongovernment organizations, as well as other faith groups” (Chapter 1, Ministry with the Poor, para. 13). Further, he states, “The missional church is actively and practically demonstrating God's mercy through ministries that provide daily life necessities in the communities where they are located” (Chapter 1, Three Biblical Mandates, para. 8). And, when it comes to the proclamation of the message, Bounds, Garlow, Lipscomb, and Lyon. (2009) write, “It is a dance between confrontation and grace—having the courage to bring up uncomfortable subjects, but doing it with the tenderness of the Savior, speaking words that restore dignity and hope” (p. 64).

The success of this project has not been in being able to answer the question of what God is up to in the secular community around us. The success of my LTTF discipleship group has been in our experiencing together what God has been up to amongst us as he has worked through our group members to fit them to be sent.
LTTF Through Discipleship Partnerships

Ghandi (as cited in Slaughter, 2010) once spoke to Americans concerning his knowledge of Christ and concerning his experience with Christians in the following way, “I like your Christ,” said Ghandi, “I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ” (Chapter 2, para. 1). Ghandi’s words challenge us to find better ways to teach and train Christians, ways that will produce more Christ-like results. This section looks to the literature of our day seeking that better way of disciple-making.

The Basic Unit of the Kingdom

Cole (2005) tells us, “The basic unit of Kingdom life is a follower of Christ in relationship with another follower of Christ,” with “two or three believers” being ideal (p. 99). Prime (2009) agrees, saying, “Two-by-two is the biblical model. Moreover, it is the best method for deploying the maximum number of harvesters in order to reap the maximum harvest” (p. 149). It is a way to employ the entire church in the mission of God, says Prime. Murray (2014) encourages us to believe with everything we are that God has given us Christ “to dwell and work within” us, and to make us what the Father would have us be (Chapter 2, para. 10).

I have appreciated what has been said about the missional unit of two being foundational to kingdom grow. While I was convinced and prepared to apply this principle of two-by-two mission work, based upon both Biblical study and current literature, a new discovery to me was that God may have plans for me to use this two-by-two approach to become missional to each other, instead of just to reach our community, as we built foundational discipleship relationships before we would become regularly “going” (Matt 28:19) agencies. I saw the two-by-two approach played out as we
developed prayer buddies, as we picked up members who needed a ride to meetings, as we engaged in committing ourselves to a discipleship buddy for the purpose of mutual support outside of meeting times, and as we did serving activities like those suggested by Sjogren (2014). The new learning for me was to see two-by-two ministry as something we do not only for others outside the pair (the mission) but also for the sake of the health and growth of the pair in being called upon to serve each other (the missionaries).

Accountability and Confrontation

“The purpose of accountability is to supply energy for change,” writes Stoltzfus (2005, Chapter 16, Healthy Accountability, para. 1). Where there is humility and grace accountability can be just that, the energy needed by each of us for living “life . . . to the full” with Christ. Isaacs (2008) writes, “Dialogue addresses problems farther ‘upstream’ than conventional approaches. It attempts to brings [sic] about change at the source of our thoughts and feelings, rather than at the level of results our ways of thinking produce” (p. 20).

When it comes to confronting others about their weaknesses McCallum and Lowery (2006) say, “you have to be willing to let them do the same for you. You should be as transparent as possible about your own struggles. You should be willing to receive insight from your friends with gratitude, even if they are less mature than you are” (Section 3, Chapter 4, Subheading 4, Points of resistance, para. 4).

According to DeSteno and Valdesolo (2011) “a little humility can be useful” in helping us to act morally. Research has demonstrated that participants who described themselves using a set of words implying high moral character acted less charitably than those participants who used words implying low moral character to describe themselves.
“Describing oneself as moral didn’t make these people act morally. To the contrary, trumpeting their moral qualities apparently gave their short-term systems greater room to urge them to keep more money for themselves” (pp. 56-58).

It seems we all need a healthy balance between feeling good about ourselves because of our relationships of acceptance by others, ultimately by God, in Christ, and our sense of short coming morally that urges something better out of us as we reach for higher ground. This seems to be the balance Jesus struck with his disciples and calls us to establish with the disciples we make, as we invite others to imitate us as we imitate Christ. McCallum and Lowery (2006) call this “personalized education where two men formed a close, trusting relationship in which the rabbi could sense and minister to inner spiritual needs in his disciple” (Chapter 1, Discipleship in the New Testament, para. 3).

The area of accountability and confrontation is where much of our “life . . . to the full” pursuing energies where placed in the first nine months of my second year LTTF group’s time together. In our group time, I sought to be vulnerable with my own spiritual needs and my real needs for prayer about my own human challenges in life. I did not ask for general prayer but for specific issues I was being challenged by, and the men in my group did the same.

We agreed from the beginning of our group time to not try to fix each other when problems were shared. I asked that we only help each other in ways that the sharing person invites us to. Otherwise, we just pray for them, for God’s will (but not specifying God’s will unless the prayer-requesting person mentions it). Through the practicing of grace and humility, we were able to begin opening up to each other and find the prayer
and accountability partners who could help us succeed in our pursuits of lives lived more abundantly.

As levels of trust continue to increase in my LTTF group, I am looking forward to going deeper with them in the pursuit of a better understanding of the sources of unwanted actions in their lives and the barriers to more effective mission engagement in society around them. Using the dialoging skills of Isaacs and Theissen (2007), the coaching skills I have learned from Florida Conference’s discipleship training program for pastors, in harmony with praying out-loud for one another and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, I believe the possibilities for my group of men overcoming the personal limitations they have and making them into missional agents of God’s grace to others around them are many. My biggest challenge to being able to report on such activities in this writing has been the reality of the short time constraint of this project and the length of time it will take me to make this journey with the group of men I am serving.

Fullness and Human Flourishing

Addressing what the changed life of God looks like, Scriven (2009) writes, “Most fundamentally, the question of life mission is about whether you stay true to God’s covenant of peace and actually contribute to human flourishing, actually honor the sanctity of every human face” (p. 153). For Hunter (2010) the Great Commission and the “vision of formation” that hopes to transform society and change the world for Christ are both actually one and the same task, the task of ‘‘making disciples,’ of being conformed to the image of Christ. …This is the starting point” (p. 226). “Today,” says Gibbons (2009), “we cannot separate the what from the how, the message from the method. The
issue is not just sharing our message but *becoming* the message” (p. 20). So, he continues, “What matters most is how each person lives outside the church building” (p. 180).

Spangler and Tverberg (2009) challenge us to aim higher as disciples of Christ and lovers of God, saying “If you want to be part of God’s redemptive kingdom on earth, don’t ask how little you can do, but ask how much you can do to please your Father in heaven” (p. 173). Hirsch (2006) describes the process of becoming more like Christ as a weekly coaching meeting. Each week the coach meets with disciples he “will debrief them, identify problems, suggest actions, and refer them to resources, including books and conferences” (p. 124). Pohyl (2001) generally agrees with Hirsch, but he calls this coaching role “supervision.” Pohly says that supervision is a dialogue, and it facilitates learning, growth, and excellence “by listening, making observations, and raising questions as a way of enabling the supervisee” (p. 117).

Kinnaman (2011) contributes to this conversation when he poses this question for our consideration, “What if we said that the hallmark of mature Christianity is a willingness to invest in a young person for a period of two to four years, teaching him or her the fine art of following Christ?” Hirsch (2006) weighs in concerning the teaching/mentoring process, saying, “Academy demands passivity in the student, whereas discipleship requires activity. …I simply do not believe that we can continue to try and *think* our way into a new way of acting, but rather, we need to *act* our way into [a] new way of thinking” (p. 122). To address the issue of beliefs versus actions, Halter and Smay (2008) simply state, “What makes the gospel good news isn’t the concept, but the real-life person who has been changed by it” (p. 42). Chester and Timmis (2008) concur,
“The theology that matters is not the theology we profess but the theology we practice” (p. 18).

One of the things this intervention experience has taught me is that pursuing “life . . . to the full” together is about making a commitment to human flourishing, inside as well as outside my discipleship group. The pursuit of “life . . . to the full” is a work and journey of transforming “the theology we practice” into a reality that casts a shadow that looks like “the theology we profess.” In order to be disciples who can say with Paul, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1), we need to be examples to be followed, equipped with more than a belief in Jesus or the knowledge of certain truths about Jesus.

I discovered that my discipleship group needed to grow in the practice of hearing God together, supporting one another in our separate spiritual journeys, and learning how to unite with each other in our battles for personal victory, in order to be prepared for effective mission to others. Our own brokenness needed some repairing. I think our own sense of living short of God’s ideal for us hindered us from doing more for others and led to us spending so much time on addressing our own needs. Certainly, helping each other to get victory over the things that we did need to get victory over was a good and necessary thing to do in preparation for mission to others, but we seemed to lack a sense of already being complete in Christ and ready and able to be one of his missionaries because he has appointed us, making him the center instead of ourselves.

Our Discomfort Zone is Our Mission Field

Patnaik (2009) says that our Christian witness and discipleship must begin with empathy, and that “empathy is more than a warm and fuzzy notion best-suited for annual
reports and greeting cards. It’s the ability to step outside of yourself and see the world as
other people do” (Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 2, para. 6). Further, Patnaik states, “If you
want people to be interested in you, you should be genuinely interested in other people”
(Part 1, Chapter 1, Section 4, para. 4). According to Rusaw and Swanson (2004),
“Externally focused church moves toward two specific groups. The first group comprises
those on the margins” (Chapter 1, Section 3, para. 2). “The second recipient of the
externally focused church's energy is the city. Externally focused churches have moved
past being angry with the city to wanting to be a blessing to the city” (Chapter 1, Section
3, para. 7).

Bonhoeffer (1954) takes genuine interest in others to the level of allowing another
to be a burden to us as an act of true brotherhood. He wrote, “The Christian . . . must
bear the burden of a brother. He must suffer and endure the brother. It is only when he is
a burden that another person is really a brother and not merely an object to be
manipulated” (p. 100).

I have experienced that many people do not want to be a burden to others, and
that other people do not want to be burdened by others. Bonhoeffer’s words indicate to
me that both attitudes are resisting brotherhood towards others. His words also
encourage me because my LTTF group demonstrated a willingness to be burdened for
one another, willing to really be brothers, not manipulators or objects to be manipulated.

To effectively pass behaviors on to other disciples, Putnam (2010) writes,

Great disciple-makers will always take their followers through a process. It
starts with "You watch; I do" and moves to "Let's do it together” and then to
"You do; I watch." Finally, the disciple starts this same process with some-
one else-someone who watches while the disciple does. (p. 59)
After everyone knew the meeting format and had experienced reading and discussing the text and taking prayer requests and praying together, I changed my attendance to every other week and gave group members the responsibility of running the group in my absence. By not being there twice a month they could not defer to me and I could not yield to the temptation to lead. By being there every other week I could maintain group cohesion and momentum, while affirming them as we debriefed their previous week’s experience. I need to use a similar process with DPs, doing serving and mingling activities together at first and building toward releasing them as independent partnerships who report to the group when it meets. Putnam’s process is a useful one.

Engaging Others

According to Stetzer and Putnam (2006), “God is at work in the lives of those outside the church and invites us to join him” (p. 125), but self so often gets between Jesus and us that, “before anything that is truly of God can be born your own preferences have to die” and “be laid on the altar and sacrificed in order to receive Christ’s call and mission” (Stetzer & Putnam, p. 215). Piper (2003) writes, “Now I see that millions of people waste their lives because they think these paths [of pursuing God’s glory and pursuing our joy] are two and not one” (p. 9). My experience during this project informs me that many in my churches do not see pursuing joy and pursuing God’s glory as the same things either, so mission is perceived as hard work, not as personal joy.

friend with no other motives” (pp. 194-195). In order to gain the privilege of being heard by others Goulston (2009) gives the following counsel: “Make the other person feel ‘felt,’” (p. 45) “Be more interested than interesting,” (p. 55) and “Make people feel valuable” (p. 64). One way to engage with strangers, suggested by Roxburgh (2010), is for church members to practice hospitality regularly “by setting aside one evening a month to welcome the stranger into their homes. The stranger is someone other than a friend or a church member, such as a neighbor, work associate, or acquaintance from a coffee shop or sports team the children play on” (p. 156). The first step, according to Hull (2004), is that “each of us should covenant together with one, two, or three others to engage in weekly sessions for a fixed period of time” (p. 36).

Writing about today’s teens and young adults, Kinnaman (2011) tells us, “This is a generation hungry for substantive answers to life’s biggest questions, particularly in a time when there are untold ways to access information about what to do. What’s missing—and where the Christian community must come in—is addressing how and why” (Chapter 6, Shallow Turns to Apprenticeship, para. 8). Rainer and Geiger (2011) say it this way. “People need spiritual tour guides. They have had plenty of spiritual travel agents. Be a tour guide through the process of spiritual transformation in your church. Take people on a journey with you” (p. 133).

The discovery I made during my search for a connection between the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” and becoming missional was that mission needs to begin at home. Our missional endeavors would be mere marketing techniques for church growth, not real invitations to join us in following Jesus, unless we were living out evidence of his saving, delivering, transforming work in our own lives in the present (not just “X” number of
years ago when we used to...). As we engage God in all of our life choices, not merely in the doctrinal concerns of our denomination but in every action of life, I am learning from my group that this real living with God will result in the mission connection with Jesus we need to engage others. As we learn how to walk with Jesus in victory and in defeat, knowing we are his without being perfect (except through faith in Christ) and in spite of our compromises, we will discover the God David knew, the Jesus Paul knew, the kind of grace the world needs, and we will make the gospel a real power in our lives so we enter this mission field around us with gentle boldness.

Third Places and Jesus’ Method

Frost (2006) tells us one of the most fundamental mission practices a pair of disciples can be involved in is visiting “a third place” regularly together. He says, “third places are those environments in which people meet to develop friendships, discuss issues, and interact with others” (p. 56). Moreover, “Your third place is the place where you just like to relax and be you” (p. 57). “It’s here that people are more willing to discuss the core issues of life, death, faith, meaning, and purpose” (p. 58).

White (1905) wrote of the third place work of Christ in the following way.

Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour [sic] mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.” There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit. (pp. 143-144)

In order to put White’s counsel into action in or own lives we need to live in our context in a new way. Halter and Smay (2010) write, “We do it by becoming friends
with people” (p. 55). Further they tell us, “We…qualitatively measured being a friend by how many of them invited us to be with their friends” (p. 56). According to Halter and Smay, and those they have asked over the years, it is likely to take two years before we will be legitimized on the inner circle as a friend (p. 57), so we need to plan to invest our time in others’ lives and to make it real. This is not some evangelism technique, we are being challenged to make lasting friends for Jesus who are outside our faith communities, whether they come into them in the future or not.

When I arrived in my church district it was during the second year of my doctoral cohort and it was time to execute my ministry intervention at the same time I was getting to know my two new congregations. Halter and Smay’s work caused me to wonder if it would take me the entire length of my two-year project to be “legitimized on the inner circle as a friend” within my discipleship group. While I was a fellow Adventist and their pastor, which should shorten my legitimizing process with them considerably, I am also a northerner, a foreigner of sorts to many. I was also their “new” pastor and they may have wanted to present themselves as unbroken and faithful to God, instead of being willing to be real with me and trusting me with access to their families and friends, except in the best of terms or appearances.

During the first year I was in Florida one of my church members opened up to me and told me that southern friendliness and the use of expressions like “hey honey” and “Hi sweetie” are ways to keep people at a distance, not to draw them close. In other words, southern friendliness is a clever façade to protect the real self behind the friendly face from being really seen, it’s a form of hiding, not inviting in.
To begin to break down those barriers and live incarnationally, Halter and Smay (2008) say we need to develop “the habit of living among,” which means, “participating in the natural activities of the culture around you, with whimsical holiness” (p.136). Boren (2010) gives us a way to get started, saying, “Build relationships with some people who are underresourced and listen to their stories and their needs…. Simply listen to them, share life, and see what God is already doing in their lives” (Part 1, Chapter 4, How Improvement Groups and Adjustment Groups Prepare, para. 8).

My project goal was to seek missional (outside the church building and membership) outcomes with my group members as a result of pursuing “life . . . to the full” together. What I learned was that God wanted to use me to help a group of men to become more regular Bible readers, to become prayer partners for each other, and to become more spiritually engaged with Jesus and one another as we sought to be godly husbands to our wives, godly fathers to our children, and godly men on the job. To facilitate these changes in their lives I used Christ’s method, as stated above. I learned that the method Jesus used to make disciples is also a good method for training disciples, helping them to pursue “life . . . to the full” with Jesus.

**Overcoming Evil With Good**

Dybdahl (2006) reminds us, “Grace is reaching out and initiating contact. …Grace is remaining faithful when others are unfaithful” (p. 25). That is what God has done for us all throughout our history with him, and we are invited to join him in serving up grace for others, in Christ’s name. We may lack the will or the courage to join God on his mission, but for Murray (2014) we just need to exercise humility. He says, “Our one need is to study and know and trust the life that has been revealed in Christ as the life that
is now ours, and waits for our consent to gain possession and mastery of our whole being” (Chapter 2, para. 5).

Robinson (2010), who, after 15 years of work in his church’s mission field, has seen a community-wide transformation take place, tells us how they accomplished this. “We never protested the immorality or came against the corruptness of our new community; rather, we simply served” (Chapter 7, Corporate Protection against Adversity, para. 7). This church saw the extreme poverty and they ministered to those needs physically, first. Robinson believes, “The Lord's desire and our responsibility is not to go around pulling out weeds of unrighteousness, but rather to crowd out the evil with healthy, thriving communities of grace, mercy, and compassion” (Chapter 7, Corporate Protection against Adversity, para. 5). This sounds a lot like Romans 12:21 being lived out in the 21st century to me. The biblical prophet Jeremiah once said, “Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jer 29:7).

Ultimately, our missional purpose might be described as trusting God, following in the footsteps of Jesus, and inviting others to join us in trusting God and following Jesus. As we pray for God to bring about something new or faithful in each other’s lives, instead of praying for God to take something away, we intentionally focus on overcoming evil with good. As we try to catch people in obedience, acknowledge and celebrate each other’s victories and successes, I am encouraging a focus on overcoming evil with good. As we turn our attention to problems in our families, church membership, and city, I am hoping the habit we are developing will result in us finding new ways to deal with old problems by seeking to overcome evil with good.
Conclusion

As I have examined the literature pertaining to the three vital practices used in this project for testing the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” as a catalyst for mission, I have found much written about each one of them. We have considered the practice of reading and hearing God’s word daily to allow what God means by “life . . . to the full” to take root in each other’s lives. Second, we have considered the importance of participating weekly, or bi-weekly, in a discipleship small group in order to be the body of Christ and to be evidence of his kingdom on earth as in heaven. Then, I finished this chapter by examining what the literature has to tell us about being missional together, in pairs or in small groups, using mingling, dialogue, service, abiding among, grace-giving, and prayer to facilitate one another’s character-building progress, while being challenged to go mingle in “third places” using “Christ’s method” to share God’s favor in practical ways and seek to overcome evil with good, inviting others to join us.
CHAPTER 4
DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVENTION

Introduction

Concerning Jesus, Hirsch and Ford (2011) have said, “The source of abundant life and the purest form of joy lies in following his lead regarding how we disperse (spend) our lives. This is fundamental to what it really means for Jesus to be our Lord” (p. 79). If Lordship is connected to experiencing “abundant life and the purest form of joy,” and Jesus, speaking to his followers as Lord, tells them to “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19), there must be a missional connection within the kind of life Jesus came to give us (John 10:10).

The Original Thought

Having heard comments made by, and about, wealthy individuals who found no fullness in the abundance of the world’s money and goods until they began to give them away, spending themselves and their resources to be a blessing to others, it occurred to me that pursuing “life . . . to the full” with Jesus might actually be a catalyst for the mission impulse. That thought was the initiator of my project thesis statement.

Since Jesus said he came so that we may have “life . . . to the full” (John 10:10), I wondered if simply reading God’s word, meeting together with like-minded pursuers of “life . . . to the full” living, and asking people to buddy up with Jesus and one same-gender other would result in Jesus making us all missional like he was (Luke 4:14-21).
My reasoning went like this. If I can answer the question, “What does following Jesus look like?”; then, I can design a plan to make people look that way too. But, what if the way I discover is not a one size fits all way? What if God personalizes how he develops each of his disciples based upon their individual uniqueness? God needs more control of the outcome than one person developing a discipleship plan would likely allow, unintentionally of course. To try to be used by God, while not getting in the way of God in making disciples to be replicas of me, “questioning” became more important in this project than answering.

Questions and Dialogue

Isaacs (2008) writes, “Instead of good answers, we need good questions. The power of dialogue emerges in the cultivation, in ourselves, as well as in others, of questions for which we do not have answers. Identifying one good question can be vastly more significant than offering many partial answers. In cultivating a dialogic stance, I encourage people to develop a capacity to ‘mine for the questions’” (p. 148). Since my goal was to make disciples of Christ, my first two tasks were to help people cultivate habits of reading and questioning their Bibles on a daily basis and then to get people dialoging with Jesus and each other in a LTTF discipleship group on a weekly basis.

Vital Biblical Behaviors

Since “faith comes by hearing…the word of God” (Rom 10:17, NKJV), our first and most important discipleship practice was the reading of God’s word daily to try to understand the kind of life God has in His heart for His children? Second, since Jesus chose a small group of twelve to gather as his disciples and to train up as missionaries for his kingdom (Mark 3:13-14), we met regularly as a small group of Christians to talk
about what the Bible says about living “life . . . to the full” with Jesus and to pray for and with each other to act on our understandings. Third, since Jesus sent his disciples out two by two as part of their missional training (Mark 6:7), I encouraged group members to partner up with another same-gender Christ-follower to mingle with, desire the good of, and minister to others in accordance with the method White (1905, pp. 143-144) says Jesus used.

What Does the Literature Say?

The literature agreed with the three behaviors chosen: a) the working-in of God’s word through reading large, continuous portions of the Bible on a daily basis (Cole, 1999), b) the mutual learning and practicing of God’s word by being Christ’s body on earth, between Sabbaths, with a small group (Cole, 2008; Sjogren, 2008), and c) asking group members to partner up to be missionally engaged (Mark 6:7) in an environment of their choosing outside of their denominational context (Frost 2006), using “Christ’s method,” as described by White (1905, pp. 143-144) or using specific suggestions for service which I provided them, taken from Sjogren (2014).

My Starting Point

If people focus on getting more out of their relationship with Jesus, on living more abundantly, on living “life . . . to the full,” and if they pursue it through the use of the three vital practices just described, my hope was that they would be led on a journey with Christ that would be missional.

In this chapter I share some demographics and observations pertaining to my context, I describe what was done to establish a baseline for measuring the presence of any missional changes that may occur during the intervention, the three-part LTTF
sermon series are unpackaged, and I explain how this intervention was developed and how I planned to execute it.

**Demographics and Observations**

When I began serving High Springs Seventh-day Adventist Church on February 1, 2012 it was a congregation of 129 members, with an attendance averaging 95 for worship each Sabbath. Its building is situated in a rural, small town population in Northern Central Florida of about 5500 citizens, based upon the 2010 census data and 2014 Population Estimates (American FactFinder, 2014). The racial statistics of the population of High Springs is approximately 83% White, 15.5% Black, 0.6% various Native American tribes, 0.1% various Pacific Islanders, and 0.9% mixed ethnicities (including 0.4% Asian-Whites). Of all races 4% is Hispanic or Latino. The median age living in High Springs is 36.9 years old. Of the total population, 50.2% are males and 49.8% are females, 69.3% are 18 years or older, and 53.4% of the population is between 18 and 62 years old.

My observations, made during the later three years of my course of study, indicate that our nearby college town of Gainesville is growing to the west, pushing into Alachua and High Springs which are located to the north-west. The three High Springs exits off of I-75 give the city of High Springs easy access to Gainesville, and housing and shopping development have been on the rise in recent months.

**High Springs is Growing up, Like it or Not**

In various meetings I attended and the discussions I have had with people around town it became apparent that many of the long-time residents of High Springs established homes and businesses here to get away from city living (whether Miami, Orlando, or
even Gainesville) and that there is significant push-back against attempts to grow up and lose their small-town feel and appeal. In spite of the desire to resist growth it seems only a matter of time before a new big-town High Springs is birthed amidst the old Mayberry-like town of present day.

Alachua, her neighboring city is herself the neighbor of Gainesville. Alachua is already the home of a research park and growing housing and business communities. New shopping and home developments are being put in right up to the threshold of High Springs. High Springs has three-highway (I-75) access points and is on a trucking route, plus being a tourist destination for those seeking the enjoyment of its numerous area springs and the Santa Fe River which runs through it.

A Busy Church

One of the first things I noticed about the new church family is that they were very busy. To their credit they were a loving, serving, and active church, though the church’s leaders seemed to be focused more on their own members and friends than on the High Springs community at large. Those that did serve the community did so through one of two entities, Grace Works or Camp Kulaqua, that were each well-known and respected in their own right, not because of the existence of the church. Grace Works is the church’s community services center that serves the largely non-SDA community, and Camp Kulaqua is the Florida Conference’s camp for its members that also serves other denominations and various other organizations in both southern Georgia and the entire state of Florida, providing summer camp and year-round wilderness retreat and recreation opportunities.
The Greatest Present Need

Two observations that presented missional challenges were as follows: a) The bulk of the activity was facilitated by a minority of the church members who were primarily focused on ministering to other church members and to visitors who came to us on any given Sabbath; b) The number of members exercising a personal commitment to daily Bible reading and small group involvement, from which missional activities might be driven, seemed to be very low, as testified to in discussions with church members; and c) Out-of-the-building mission work that was being done in the community around us was seen by many as being done by two Adventist-run non-profits, Camp Kulaqua and Grace Works, and not by the local Adventist church itself (i.e. the congregation lacked a mission presence in the community). The Head Elder agreed with me that perhaps the most important need of our church’s members was to be helped to become committed readers of God’s word on a daily basis. We believed any and every change should come from a biblical foundation and experience with God.

Administering the Assessment

Before this project formally began the “iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment” (see Appendix A) was given to the church members who were in attendance on Sabbath morning, August 11, 2012. This self-assessment instrument was given and collected on the same Sabbath morning. Individuals were asked not to put their names on the instruments. Attendees at the worship service that Sabbath were asked to fill out and turn in an assessment only if they were a regular attender of High Springs Adventist Church and if they thought they may continue to be attending the church two years from then, unless the Lord or an unforeseen change of circumstances should decide differently.
A volunteer was used to collect the assessments from people before they left the premises that day.

Establishing a Baseline for Measuring Change

The reason the assessment was given was to establish a discipleship practices baseline which was compared with assessment results at the end of the two-year project period, to see what effect, if any, pursuing LTTF, or at least the promoting of pursuing LTTF, through the three vital behaviors prescribed, may have had on individuals being more missionally minded and active outside of church walls. The anonymously collected participant data from the assessments was entered via the iFollow website for scoring and for future review and comparison after the final assessment was given at the end of the two-year project period.

The LTTF Sermon Series

The iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment was followed up with a three-part sermon series on living “life . . . to the full” in Jesus. The first Sabbath of the LTTF sermon series was preached on August 25, 2012. The three-part series was preached every other week, due to having a two church district pulpit schedule, and was completed on Sabbath, September 22. The central text for the series was John 10:10, where Jesus says to his disciples, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” The goal of the series was to describe, for the purpose of this project, the three key practices that are related to living “life . . . to the full,” or “life . . . more abundantly” (NKJV), as it is in Jesus.
Pursue God’s Heart

In “Living Life to the Full, Part 1,” the daily practice that was promoted in order to receive Jesus’ gift of LTTF was also the name of the message, “Pursue God’s Heart.” The key Bible text that was given for this daily practice was John 17:3, where Jesus makes a direct correlation between eternal life and knowing God. The congregation was taught the following key concepts. “Life . . . to the full,” according to John 10:10, includes the forever quantity of life and a temporal quality of life through intimacy with God here and now, both of which are found in John 17:3.

**Know Jesus, Enjoy and Share Abundant Life**

Since one’s possession of the kind of life Jesus came to give is tied to knowing God intimately (John 17:3), the offer of LTTF made by Jesus (John 10:10) is also an invitation by Christ into a personal relationship with him in the pursuit of a knowledge of God to the full. Humans are called into a relationship with God that is deeper than the knowing of His written word and law. As indicated in the title, I believe God is calling us to know him, mind and heart, to be one with him so that we might say with Jesus, “the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner (John 5:19; compare with “By myself I can do nothing,” John 5:30).

As McNeal (2006) writes,

Great spiritual leaders argue for life. They argue for it by their example and by their actions on behalf of others. They wage war on the forces that keep them and others from enjoying the life God intends. Abundant life for them is not elusive; it is the prize they intend to enjoy and to share with others. (Conclusion, para. 7)
Now and Forever

God’s people will come to know His heart, His character, the kind of God he really is, so that one might ascertain what God Himself would do in a situation where there is no specific law or word on a subject, as well as to know how the laws that have been given in the scriptures are an expression of God’s love for us. To be in pursuit of the LTTF that Jesus came to give us, eternally “or” temporally, is to be in pursuit of an intimate knowledge of God himself, which will result in LTTF eternally “and” temporally (on earth as in heaven). In other words, the congregation was told, Jesus came to give us LTTF now and forever.

People take hold of this life by taking hold of Jesus, and people take hold of Jesus by reading God’s word on a daily basis, and by asking God to open their understanding to a deeper knowledge of his heart and will for their lives. This knowing of God that ushers in LTTF takes a commitment of time, and it goes beyond information gathering to develop a relationship of action with God in response to his word.

At the close of the first message in the series the congregation was given six practical actions that can be taken as God’s heart is pursued. They were given in a handout to all who were present and made available to others on a table in the foyer. These six action steps were as follows:  
a) Read the Bible into your-self daily.  
b) Ask, “What’s God’s love got to do with it?”  
c) Find a Discipleship Partner to meet with.  
d) Speak God’s hope and future into others.  
e) Meditate on God’s words of hope and pray.  
f) Choose God’s “plan A” for you, then act.
Read A Lot

A Bible reading plan was also passed out to help the entire church walk through the scriptures together during a 40-week period, requiring about 15 to 30 minutes per day (depending on one’s reading speed). The goal presented to the congregation was to read an abundance of the word of God, not to get bogged down in word studies or side tracked by text to text and book to book jumping around. Ideally, reading each of the New Testament letters from beginning to end without any break of time between verses or chapters would allow one to have the best opportunity to hear the author’s message in its context.

Since Cole (1999) challenges his readers that measuring our reading by chapters instead of by verses is a healthy, contextualizing exercise that gives God a chance to speak into our lives in new ways, I tried it. The possible promotion of Bible lesson books, word studies, and commentary usage, accompanied by a seminar promising to teach attendees how to be disciples of Christ, was replaced with the promotion of three to four chapters of Bible reading per day, in continuous flowing order from book to book.

Ask A Lot

Some of the suggestions that were given to the congregation in a handout to help them pursue God’s heart were as follows. a) Before you begin reading each day, briefly read through the following questions. What does today’s Bible reading teach me about God’s heart for me (and all of humanity)? In other words, What was God’s “plan A” for living “life . . . to the full?” and, What’s God’s love got to do with it? How does God demonstrate His favor, or grace, for humanity, and for me, in today’s reading? b) As soon as you finish reading each day, read these questions again and answer them. c)
Finish with this prayer: “Dear God, my Father, may what I read today help me to trust you to be fully involved in every aspect of my life. Thank you for your favor, forgiveness and presence with me today. Open my eyes to the opportunities you give me to demonstrate your love and favor to others in practical ways. Reveal your heart to me and help me to choose your ‘plan A’ for me today. Amen.” (For the complete four-page handout of the “Bible Reading Plan” see Appendix B. Copy the two Appendix B pages on both sides of one page to make the bi-fold pamphlet as it was passed out Sabbath morning.)

Share God’s Favor

In “Living Life to the Full, Part 2,” the practice of intentionally “sharing God’s favor,” of passing on the blessings God gives to us so as to be a blessing to others in his name, was taught as another key aspect of living LTTF. This was actually used as the third vital behavior in the intervention, but it was presented as the second message of the sermon series. The key Bible passage for this daily practice of living LTTF was Luke 4:18-19, where Jesus proclaims, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Demonstrate the Compassion of God

Listeners were encouraged to follow the example of God in being an example to others from the counsel of Luke 6:36, which says, “Be merciful, just as your Father [in heaven] is merciful.” Because Christ’s followers are called to be living sacrifices (Rom 12:1) and are challenged to fast in a way that helps us to become sensitized to human
needs around us and the compassion of God for those on the fringes of society (Isa 58:6-7), a handout with seven ways to live LTTF by sharing God’s favor was passed out to all who were present (See “Sharing God’s Favor Handout” in Appendix C. This document is made to be copied on full sized paper and then cut in half to make half-page handouts).

**Five Ways to Share Favor**

Only five of the seven ways to share God’s favor were given in the message, and the congregation was challenged to try them and see how God might use them. They were as follows: a) Smile and say “Hi” to everyone your eyes are able to meet. b) Speak to all people with words that build up, encourage, and bless. c) Ask people how they relate to God in their daily lives & listen. d) Find specific reasons to like and pray “for” every person you meet. e) Worship God by serving others “in practical ways” and being kind.

**According to its Kind**

The final message was titled, “Living Life to the Full, Part 3: According to Its Kind.” Based on Genesis 1:1, 2, 11, 12, 24, 26-28 and Matthew 28:16-20, the congregation was taught that God made humanity to reproduce after its kind.

**Make Me a Sanctuary**

The challenge was that they would see changes in their offspring as they experienced changes in themselves through a relationship with God in Jesus Christ. The listeners were encouraged to ask God to make them each personally a sanctuary for God to dwell in them, and, through them, to allow God to dwell in the world (Exod 25:1-9).
The outcome of each of our lives is to reproduce certain behaviors in others by modeling those same behaviors ourselves. Helping people become Christians and, perhaps, members of the church, or helping other Christians birth a new small group, is the natural outcome of those who themselves are shaped and molded by their own personal relationships with Jesus Christ.

“If we want people to experience the kingdom of God and to dwell with God for eternity, then how they experience their relationship with us should be a foretaste of that goodness and beauty” (Heuertz & Pohl, 2010, p. 31). I believe we can give a taste of the kingdom of God by being a personal sanctuary, but we give others an experience of being part of God’s kingdom when we group up to become a sanctuary together, and then invite others into our midst. That is what small discipleship groups are, sanctuaries in miniature. And, we reproduce what we are, after our kind, so we must continually keep on inviting God to keep on making us after his kind, together in group.

Series Summary

The series was summarized at the end of this third message with the following three points. It should be noted that the order in which I preached the three vital behaviors was different than the way I usually present them throughout this paper. a) Reading God’s word to know God’s heart and to know Jesus, our Pattern, our Savior, and our Lord, is an essential relational component to living LTTF (This is usually presented as the first vital behavior for this project.). b) Walking with Jesus and sharing God’s favor with those He would share God’s favor with is living LTTF (This sermon was preached to teach the third vital behavior of this project.). c) Disciples birthing other disciples, and groups of disciples birthing other groups of disciples, will be the natural
outcome of following Jesus, because we were created to reproduce according to our kind
(This sermon was to teach the naturalness of disciple and small group reproduction, and
the importance of being a part of healthy discipleship communities for God to grow his
church and accomplish his work on the earth, which is the second vital behavior of this
project.).

Final Appeal

The final appeal to the congregation, as the sermon series was brought to a close,
was to give an open invitation to “Join us on Tuesday nights, at 7 pm, as we seek “life . . .
to the full” in Jesus, by pursuing God’s heart, sharing God’s favor, and praying for Him
to use us to birth mission groups for God’s kingdom, in preparation for Christ’s return”
(Again, in my appeal as in my series, I referred to the three vital behaviors in the order of
first, third, and second vital behaviors, and, since this was a preaching format and not a
seminar format, I did not present the vital behaviors in the same way or with the
completeness as I did with my LTTF discipleship group.).

Development of the Intervention

As I began to think about how I would design the intervention I would use to
experiment with the idea of making and developing disciples using the pursuit of “life . . .
to the full” as a catalyst for mission, a theological reflection was done on biblical texts
related to discipleship and mission in the Bible, particularly in the New Testament.

Three Vital Behaviors in the Bible

Out of my study of God’s word I chose three specific, biblical, discipleship
behaviors (I refer to them as vital behaviors, or the new DNA of LTTF living) through
which, living “life . . . to the full” (John 10:10) with Christ will be pursued. The first vital behavior is the “hearing [or reading or speaking] the word of God” (Rom 10:17, NKJV) on a regular, if not daily, basis. The second vital behavior comes from the Bible’s examples of God accomplishing his purpose for His people and His mission on earth through small, discipleship communities (Jethro’s counsel to Moses in Exod 18:14-26 and Jesus’ small group approach to change the world through twelve disciples in Mark 3:13-15 and Luke 6:13). The third vital behavior is Jesus’ own missionary method of sending His followers out two by two (Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1) to proclaim His message of “the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19) and, as Paul says, to “overcome evil with good” (Rom 12:21).

Using Christ’s Method Amongst His Disciples

I also reflected on the counsel of White (1905) as it pertained to “Christ’s method alone” (pp. 143-144). I noted what appeared to be a six step process: Christ mingled with people, desired their good, demonstrated his sympathy, ministered to their felt needs, won their confidence, and then invited them to follow him. At the beginning of my intervention I intended to apply Ellen White’s counsel largely to the unchurched people my discipleship group would meet in the community around us. I did not realize then that God would have me apply Christ’s method to my LTTF group of men. Our pursuit of “life . . . to the full” together was actually a weekly call to keep on following Christ together. I sought to live out White’s counsel with them so they could live more abundantly themselves, see how Christ might have administered grace in their context, and be better equipped to use Christ’s method with their wives and children, at work and in the community, as the Holy Spirit empowered them to do so.
Three Vital Behaviors in Current Literature

Current literature was also reviewed in the subject areas of discipleship and the missional church, particularly as they relate to the three vital behaviors that were promoted for living “life . . . to the full” during this intervention, namely: a) the importance of reading, hearing, or speaking God’s word into people’s lives; b) the use of small groups of disciples as incarnational mission communities of God’s people on earth (Christ’s body on earth today); and c) the practice of sharing God’s favor in practical ways and overcoming evil with good in pairs and in small groups.

I administered the “iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment” (see Appendix A) for this project to establish a baseline for discipleship practices already taking place in the High Springs Seventh-day Adventist Church, as a whole. During the three-part sermon series, a Bible reading plan for the entire church to follow was promoted and handouts were prepared and distributed to the congregation on numerous occasions. I told the congregation they could count on me preaching from some portion of the Bible which was a part of our reading for the week prior to the sermon. I tried to get our other speakers to cooperate with this plan as well. In this way I tried to take the entire church on a journey through the Bible together and kept encouraging everyone to keep asking any question that would help them to grasp God’s plan A, God’s idea of “life . . . to the full.” A copy of the reading plan presented to the church, and that the group and I used is available in Appendix B. During one of my sermons I also promoted partnering up with another same-gender believer using the “Sharing God’s Favor Handout” in Appendix C. After completing the three-part sermon series, I gave the entire church the “Three Vital Behaviors” handout, Appendix G, so the same principles we
were seeking to implement as a LTTF discipleship group could also be implemented by everyone as the Holy Spirit led members to do so.

**Description of the Intervention**

I began my actual intervention with the start-up of my first discipleship group at the end of the three-part preaching series. I gave an invitation to all who were at the series and to those who were already coming to the mid-week prayer meeting. During my first nine month LTTF discipleship group term I was facilitating our weekly meetings and promoting the three previously mentioned vital behaviors: a) individually pursuing God’s heart through the reading and hearing of God’s word (Rom 10:17, NKJV), and answering three basic discipleship questions (see below); b) living in a healthy LTTF mission community that seeks to be Christ’s body on earth, in pursuit of “life . . . to the full” with Jesus (John 10:10), with the mutual support of the group; and c) intentionally sharing God’s favor in practical ways (Luke 4:19) and serving others (Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45) to overcoming evil with good (Rom 12:21), both personally and with same-gender partners, to demonstrate God’s love in our own context.

Three Basic Questions

The three basic discipleship questions to be asked of each other, pertaining to what we read in the Bible the previous week (using the Bible reading plan I assigned to the entire church), were: a) “What’s God’s love got to do with it?”; b) “How can I share God’s favor with others this week?”; and c) “How can our group participate more fully in God’s mission?” These questions were intended to move a person’s thinking from the individual relationships God wants with us (the first vital behavior) to the missional partnerships with him and others that God calls us into (the third vital behavior) to our
new identities as members of Christ’s body on earth, to be experienced through corporate and small group gatherings (the second vital behavior). These questions were to be asked of ourselves before and after each day’s Bible reading time to help us make applications of God’s word in our contexts.

All three basic discipleship questions, above, were designed to help people begin thinking about ways they could live out what the Bible says with others in their own lives. The questions were intended to prepare them for third-place encounters and for successful implementation of Christ’s method by getting them thinking about the possibilities they might have in their own present-day contexts for reflecting God’s love and sharing God’s favor, as they mingled with people as ones desiring others’ good. In this intervention, the starting point for discovering and serving others’ felt needs, instead of just carrying out our own agenda, is the pursuit of knowing God’s heart from reading the Bible. I believe, as we seek God’s heart, and start thinking about how to share God’s favor and overcome evil with good (our third vital behavior), God will use our mingling with others, desiring their good, to reveal their felt needs how he wants us to serve them for his glory.

Two Nine-Month Cycles

The first LTTF discipleship group met once a week, every week, during the normal prayer meeting time. I designed a single-fold, bulletin-like “Life . . . to the Full” Discipleship & Mission Log that could be kept in our Bibles, and that was used as a meeting outline and as a study and group assignment aid. Some of the group discussion and application questions in the guide were to be chosen each night, to be discussed
together, as time allowed. The “LTTF Discipleship & Mission Log” we used can be found in Appendix D.

During our summer break months my wife and I were in a recruitment and sign-up period for the following nine-month discipleship group. My wife and I hand-picked potential new members for the group and had a recruitment dinner in our home to share the idea of forming another group to pursue “life . . . to the full” with Jesus.

A second nine-month cycle began in the Fall of 2013 with a second LTTF discipleship group. I gave another Bible reading plan handout to the church-at-large during the second year of the project to keep the church and my discipleship group in sync with our journey through the Bible. Again, the reading plan was used by me as a guide to what I preached on each Sabbath during the second year. The “Bible Reading Plan for 2013/14” can be found in Appendix E. During the second year, my LTTF discipleship group used an updated meeting guide I designed. It was called the Life to the Full Living Log, and included a study aid for the week, a Life to the Full Group Gathering Outline, and a Life to the Full DP Meeting Outline. This handout can be found in Appendix F. We used the group gathering outline in our group meetings and I asked each of the DPs to use the outline I provided for their weekly meetings, whether in person, by phone, or via computer.

I gave the “iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment” a second time in the fall of 2014, after the second year of discipleship training using the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” as a catalyst for mission. I evaluated my intervention and its effectiveness by comparing the results of the two assessments to see if the congregation’s missional impulses and actions had changed and by having a discussion with my second year group
to evaluate the impact upon the group members, both from their perspective and from mine.

**Conclusion**

The premise of this paper, and its ensuing intervention in my context, has been that one’s pursuit of “life . . . to the full,” as a Jesus-follower in community with other Jesus-followers, will lead him or her into a life of mission. In this chapter I stated that High Springs Adventist Church has the potential for growth and would benefit from an effective discipleship and church growth plan. The church is very active in ministry but is not particularly involved in organized missionary activities in the community where they own property, apart from Grace Works and Camp Kulaqua. A detailed overview of the three-part sermon series was given to prepare the soil, recruit participants for my intervention through an LTTF small group, and to seed the soil for the Holy Spirit’s work among those who did not chose to join or stay with my small group approach.

Both from the pulpit and through my small group three specific practices of pursuing “life . . . to the full” in Jesus were shared and promoted as vital behaviors for those wanting to take hold of “life . . . to the full” with Jesus. The first vital behavior got the greatest amount of promotion time during the project because it was the core practice needed so everything else could flow out from God, instead of out from me as leader. That first behavior for experiencing the LTTF Jesus came to give us was, and is, the practice of “hearing the word of God” (Rom 10:17, NKJV) so people can “know” the heart of God (John 17:3), by reading, or listening to, several chapters of the Bible each day was promoted to the church.
A sermon series was used to cast the vision for this practice, and a 12-month Bible reading plan was passed out to all in attendance at worship services. Second, the practice of being Christ’ body on earth, to enflesh his kingdom inside and outside the LTTF discipleship group itself (Exod 18:14-26, Mark 3:13-15 and Luke 6:13), in order to imitate God’s way of nurturing, growing, and training his church, so his kingdom may come and his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:9-10). Third, members were encouraged to practice individually sharing “the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19) with others around them, in order to overcome evil with practical demonstrations of God’s goodness (Rom 12:21), and to be a blessing to others (Gen 12:1-3) as God has blessed them.

Those who were part of my LTTF discipleship group were asked to do favor-sharing activities and to use “Christ’s method,” as described by White (1905, pp. 143-144), by partnering up in same-gender discipleship pairs. Jesus set us an example of this with his disciples (Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1) as he intentionally involved them in two-by-two mission activity. It is hoped that birthing other groups will be the natural outcome of being committed to the three “core disciplines” (I took the idea of core disciplines, but not the same disciplines as in his book, from Senge, 2010) I have taken from the Bible to facilitate change in the group’s DNA and make it fertile, because God made us to reproduce after our kind (Gen 1).

These practices are a part of our preparation for Christ’s return and they are missional in that they will produce fruit beyond ourselves for the Kingdom of God as well. Through the process of discipleship described previously, the intent of this project was to transform each Christ-follower into an agent of Heaven on mission with God. The
goal was that everything a disciple does would grow out of his or her growing knowledge of the Bible, shaped by small group discussions around LTTF-focused Bible application questions and real-world, Jesus-following missional activities done with a DP, in anticipation of Christ’s return.
CHAPTER 5
NARRATIVE OF INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

The following narrative primarily revolves around my experience with two nine-month long discipleship groups, each focused on meeting together regularly to encourage each other in the mutual pursuit of “life . . . to the full” with Jesus. These individual, yet mutually supported pursuits of more abundant living with Jesus was exercised by practicing three vital behaviors and through group sharing, intercessory prayer, mutual encouragement, and accountability partnerships. The three vital behaviors used as foundational to living “life . . . to the full” together in a discipleship community were daily personal Bible reading, weekly or bi-weekly participation in a LTTF-focused small group, and same-gender partnerships for accountability and mission.

The progression of this chapter is to give an account of the implementation as it unfolded. First I offer a brief description of the preparatory work that was done, followed by what happened during the first year of the LTTF discipleship group, and a section on discovering and overcoming obstacles, followed by the second year LTTF discipleship group, a section of group participant testimonies, a section on discipleship partnerships, and wrapping up with a discipleship partnership debrief.

Intervention Narrative

I began the intervention process after the pre-work of giving the regularly attending adults in the congregation the iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment
and finishing my three-part sermon series to introduce the idea of pursuing “life . . . to the full” in the context of the three vital behaviors of Bible reading, small group participation, and discipleship/mission partnerships. These three practices were presented to the church as the DNA of “life . . . to the full” living. A church-wide Bible reading plan was established during the series and implemented through a small pamphlet-sized plan that was designed to fit between the pages of one’s Bible. Additional Bible reading plans were handed out as each previous one expired to help keep our church reading the Bible together (See Appendixes B and E for copies of the first two Bible reading plans).

As part of the call at the end of the last message in the series, church members were invited to become part of a small group that meets weekly, on Tuesday nights, during the church’s prayer meeting time, to discuss the Bible reading for the previous week and to pursue “life . . . to the full” together. The LTTF discipleship group met weekly the first year, and it took the place of the regular prayer meeting group on Tuesday nights.

Mixed-Gender Start-up and Transition

A few women joined us initially, until my wife began a woman’s ministry group on Tuesday nights at the same time. Tuesday night was the best night for most of us, so my wife and I decided to run both groups the same night. Due to the gender nature of my wife’s group we lost our women to her women’s group, and as time went on my group became a type of men’s ministry group. During the second year in particular, LTTF discipleship group members were males, between the ages of 25 and 55, most of whom were, or had been, married and were raising, or had raised, one or more children. The
affinity we shared as seekers of “life . . . to the full” became even stronger as we became a group of men ministering to men to help each other pursue “life . . . to the full” with Christ as sons of God, as husbands, as fathers, as employees, and as Adventist church men anticipating the Lord’s soon return.

LTTF Discipleship Group, Year One

The initial group members for the first year were made up of some of the key elected leaders of the church, such as a couple of the Elders, the Head Deacon and Head Deaconess, and church members who responded to my sermon appeal to join us as we sought the “life . . . to the full” that Jesus came to give us. One of the things I wanted to help the church accomplish, while I was working on my LTTF project, was to facilitate leadership training that was voiced to me as a real and present need in my new church pastorate. So, I tried to meet the church’s needs for leadership training, prayer meeting facilitation, and my project of making and training disciples of Christ pursuing “life . . . to the full” as a catalyst for mission all at the same time (in retrospect, a mistake, but, as a new pastor in the district at the time, it seemed like a way for all of our needs to be met).

From 30 to 12 in One Night

On the first Tuesday after the sermon appeal there were about 30 people who came out to check out this new group adventure in faith, including those mentioned above, but the numbers quickly dwindled and stabilized at around 12 people for the next several months. On the first night, when 30 were present, I tried to give an accurate description of where I saw us going together. I described the reading requirements of 15 to 30 chapters in their Bibles per week. I spoke of making a commitment to be with us weekly, to prioritize our group time together. I reiterated that we were going to be
discussing how God wants us to live “life . . . to the full,” based upon our out-of-group reading, and that we would be meeting on other days to serve others in our community as the Lord led us to do so.

The heavy commitment of time right up front seemed to be the main thing that turned the initial numbers away from continuing with us. During the later three to four months of the first year the group shrunk to about six people each week. Work schedules had a significant bearing on who the regulars were. I facilitated the group each week, which met from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm on Tuesday nights, and I made use of the “’Life . . . to the Full’ Discipleship & Mission Log” that I created for use by this group in this project (See “LTTF Discipleship Mission Log” in Appendix D. Copy the two Appendix D pages on both sides of one page to make the bi-fold pamphlet, as I did and then passed out to everyone on Sabbath morning.).

**What Says the Bible?**

To extend our group learning to the church family at large, I taught everyone in the church a poem that I learned years earlier, at a “Bible Prophecy Crusade” in Searcy, Arkansas, from an evangelist by the name of Sisk. It goes like this. “What says the Bible, the blessed Bible? This, my only question be. The teachings of men so often mislead us. What says the Bible to me?” All of the attenders at High Springs Seventh-day Adventist Church were given a Bible reading plan so we could journey through the scriptures together at about the same pace and wind up in the same place every Sabbath. I, and the other speakers I asked to preach on the Sabbaths I was not in the pulpit, had a goal to preach a sermon using some portion of the text in that week’s Bible reading plan, so once again we could journey through the scriptures together, from home to pulpit.
Corporate Bible Reading and Questioning Plan

During the first year of this project the entire church was encouraged to use our daily Bible reading plan and a variety of questions that were designed to help people discover LTTF from God’s perspective. Ministry leaders were asked to use this process, or to join us in person on Tuesday nights, to address the Bible from this LTTF frame of reference.

Some of the questions that ministry leaders and my LTTF discipleship group members were asked to consider as they did the daily Bible readings were as follows:

What does today’s Bible reading teach me about God’s heart for me, and for all of humanity? What was God’s “plan A” for living “life . . . to the full,” as revealed in this text? What’s God’s love got to do with it? And, how does God demonstrate His favor, or grace, for humanity, and for me, in today’s reading?

The goal of this process for my discipleship group, and for the entire church family was to turn Sabbath school class attendees and worship service participants into active disciples and missionaries of Christ, working in partnership with God in their contexts, using the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” as the catalyst for their service to others to advance God’s kingdom. However, the potentially missional results were to be achieved by a pursuit of “life . . . to the full” as exercised through the three vital behaviors not to the specific questions themselves, so the questions were changed as we went along, looking for those that would give us the best traction for missional momentum.

To help me in the formulating of questions throughout this project I referred to the works of Cole (1999) and Stoltzfus (2008), and I was always on the lookout for any
powerful questions throughout my reading that would help us to plumb the depths of understanding “life . . . to the full,” as Jesus intends us to understand and take hold of it today.

**First-Year Meeting Format**

The key elements of each Tuesday evening group meeting, and the way a typical meeting took place were as follows.

1) Sharing our Prayer Concerns and Praying Together: These were the first things we did every time we got together. It usually started out casually as we greeted each other upon arrival and asked how our week’s had been. Then I would guide the conversation to focus us on sharing our prayer requests and praying for one another.

2) Reading Check-in, to see what each person had read and to share something they had learned with the rest of the group: This was an opportunity to learn from each other, especially about what each other valued as most important to them from the common Bible reading we all did. This also provided a motivation to read so that everyone would actually have something to share from it.

3) LTTF Testimonies, to share what each group member has been up to with God since our last get-together: This focused sharing time provided each of us with opportunities to talk about missional activities we might have been doing within the context of our relationship with God as we lived it out between group meetings. This segment was also to create the expectation in each group member that between our group meetings we each were to be up to something with God, that He was to be more intimately involved in each of our day to day lives than perhaps we had been used to previously. LTTF testimony time was a time to talk about how we had applied or tested
previous LTTF gleanings from our personal Bible reading or from our group’s discussion time. This was also a time to give a prayer request report or update from some previous week, sharing how God had answered or was answering one’s prayer request.

4) Group Bible Reading, so that one chapter of the Bible gets read aloud together each week: This was used to promote us having a community experience with the Bible. My Head Elder, who was part of my LTTF discipleship group, feels strongly about the importance of corporate Bible reading and has been a good promoter of this method in our group and elsewhere in the church.

5) Discussion of LTTF Questions, to facilitate targeted thinking and discussion around our pursuit of “life . . . to the full” as we might be informed about it from God’s word. My goal was to see the group take action related to our growing understanding of how God desires us to live “life . . . to the full.”

6) The Ministry of Healing Quotation Reading and LTTF Prayer Time, to keep fresh in our minds “Christ’s method” and make it more likely that the Holy Spirit would do a work within us that will bear missional fruit. A copy of our meeting guide and discipleship exercises can be seen in Appendix D (LTTF Discipleship & Mission Log).

Core Questions, Bible Referenced Answers

While specific group questions changed several times over the course of my two years of group work, two questions everyone was asked to inquire of themselves, before and after reading each day, to better prepare them for the group discussion later were as follows.

First, “What says the Bible to me concerning God’s plans to prosper me (Jer 29:11) and Jesus’ desire for me to have ‘life . . . to the full’ (John 10:10), now and
forever?” The group members were asked to come to the LTTF discipleship group able to give Bible reference(s) with their answer, and to write a response to each day’s reading in their take-home “LTTF Discipleship & Mission Log” (see Appendix D).

Second, “What says the Bible to me concerning how I am called to follow Christ and be a servant-leader in my responsibilities at home, at school, at work, in my church, and in my community?” Once again, group members were asked to point out the Bible reference(s) their answers were based upon so that when they shared their insights with the group everyone could make a connection between what each one perceived as answers to the questions and what the Bible actually said that resulted in the answers given.

Discipleship Partners (DPs)

Several months after the group had been meeting, group members were asked to choose DPs with whom they would spend approximately one hour per week doing the following activities (but, not necessarily every activity every time they were together).

The first thing DPs were to do was to discuss two questions during their time together: “What is God like, according to this week’s Bible reading?” and “What have you seen God doing around you, or in the world, this past week?” (Blackaby, Blackaby, and King, 2008, p. 270). They were free to have these discussions in person over lunch, at one or the other’s home, or on a phone or internet connection.

The second thing all DPs were to do with each other weekly was to share with each other the things that each of them did to share God’s favor with others (at home, at school or work, in their community) the previous week and what the reactions or results were. Then, affirm each other’s achievements, and make sure each one prayed for the
other, out loud, a prayer of encouragement and blessing to help them each pursue LTTF in Jesus.

The third thing DPs were to do together was to plan, carry-out, and review “Christ’s method” activities (White, 1905, pp. 143-144) they did together; then they were to make a journal entry in their LTTF Discipleship Mission Logs to share during testimony time with each person’s LTTF discipleship group the next time their group met.

**Five Mission Questions**

To help our LTTF discipleship group stay focused on God’s mission, the following weekly group questions were also among those asked. My desire was not to ask all of the questions which I provided each time people met, but to have a number of LTTF guiding questions which could be referred to, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead us as DPs and when we were together in our LTTF discipleship group to select the questions to ask that day, and seek to change the questions occasionally to keep us growing and stretching ourselves.

The five additional mission questions that were to be considered were: a) What’s been happening in your life with Jesus/God since we last met? b) How has your experience this past week been similar to, or dissimilar to, what you’ve been reading from your Bible? c) Name, or describe, as many people groups as you can from this week’s reading, and discuss the similarities and differences between how God relates to them, and how He wants His people to relate to other people groups. d) Name some of the people groups that you or your friends have belonged to, or currently belong to, and tell us which people groups you have been praying for this past week and which one you
will be working with, or are preparing to work with, in the coming week? e) How might God want to use this group, as one of his people groups, to accomplish his mission to another people group near us, and what will it require from us for God to do so?

Discovering and Overcoming Obstacles

The largest challenge of the first year was for group members to consistently prioritize personal time so the reading plan could be kept up with. Most group members were not used to doing this much reading on a daily basis. Work schedules were blamed for not having read the material, and for irregular attendances in general. Hearing my group’s discouragement about not having the time necessary to get all the reading done, I allowed our group to discuss the text and its meaning without all the meeting attendees having read the material, rather than to repeat the reading assignment as many weeks as necessary until everyone had actually read it, like Cole (1999) has done with his groups.

Encouraged Reading vs. Required Reading

My decision to encourage, but not require, the reading to be completed each week did keep people from dropping out of the group due to the reading requirement, but it seemed also to hurt us. By changing the daily reading of the Bible from a necessity to a strongly encouraged, but optional, task, the desired source of missional action (the Bible) lost its opportunity to shape and motivate group members, making Bible-directed action less likely. The less reading that was done by group members the more I needed to direct the action, instead of having it flow from the word. Indeed, we sadly could not get past information gathering and move on to mission sending (so we continued to imitate a common Sabbath School and Wednesday night teaching vs. mission tendency).
One of the challenges I faced was how to move the group from asking, a) what must I know to be saved questions to what more can I learn about my God because he is the one who saves me, and b) what must I do (or not do) to be saved questions to what actions are my savior calling me to undertake with him since he has saved me and brought me onto his life-saving, kingdom-building team?

The second challenge was to get us all to read God’s word in enough quantity and with enough regularity and continuity to be able to hear his will for us in our context and be able to discuss how best to implement it together.

**Asking Difficult Questions**

During the first year all group members found some of the questions asked to be difficult to answer. One of the difficult-to-answer questions was, “From this week’s Bible reading, what does God want me to know about His image in me, and what does God want me to do this week to partner with Him in the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” (John 10:10; Jer 29:11; John 17:3), now and forever?” Fact questions, such as are used in Bible trivia games and fill-in-the-blank Bible studies, were much easier for people to answer about the text. Questions related to how to apply the message of the text in one’s own life were not hard to answer, but application questions about how we should respond to God’s word as a small group, or as a whole church, were difficult for group members to produce answers for.

The most difficult questions to answer were the missional questions. The question concerning what the Bible says about how to follow Christ in our local community, for instance, resulted in more silence than it did a variety of answers. It
seemed they had no experience being asked, or answering, questions related to community action that the Bible might be suggesting for God’s people.

**Doctrinal Study vs. Community Action**

In spite of having missional intentions in starting the LTTF-focused group we used all of our group time in discussing the meaning of the text, sharing what was going on in our lives and praying for each other, and considering what missional acts we could actually do together, but not actually planning and carrying out any missional acts as a result of pursuing a study of “life . . . to the full” from God’s word. We discussed how we might join God in the neighborhood, but we never got beyond trying little off-church-property experiments, such as prayer-walking the down-town business district, prayer-driving some residential streets, or having our LTTF discipleship group meeting in a member’s home, around a bonfire in a member’s yard, or in an area restaurant.

At one point I did make up some half-page mission assignments, using Sjogren’s (2014) book ideas, and passed them out to each of my group members, two assignments to a page, and asked each discipleship pair to choose one of the three missions to do together and report back on the following week. However, it seemed near impossible for me to move the group beyond Bible dialoging and into application and mission action together as a normative behavior in the community.

**Sunset and Mealtime Blues**

The time of day that our group was meeting meant that it was dark many of the meeting nights. Since our meetings were at the end of the day and during the part of the year when the sun sets earlier, it made getting us back out onto the streets to do something together, after opening our meeting with sharing and prayer, impractical.
Finding another time, in addition to the time we gathered for Bible discussion, sharing, and prayer, was also fraught with difficulty because of people’s busy schedules.

As the meetings progressed, the time for eating together was discontinued as people preferred to eat at differing times, or with their spouses or families at home, instead of together as a group. Snacks were later added in place of a meal to take the place of breaking bread together. It seemed to serve the same function as the full meal did. It still created an environment for group sharing and relationship building, but the downside was that it only facilitated our own bonding and did not facilitate us getting out into the community in some meaningful way. Previously, we had eaten together in fast food restaurants that allowed us access to the workers and to other patrons.

Third-Place Blues

One of my biggest challenges was in trying to find a “third place” to meet and mingle at on a regular basis. In High Springs, third place hangouts are people’s churches, the area’s fresh-water springs, one small bar north of town, our local sports fields where families gathered for their children’s team sports, or one of our local restaurants. One of my greatest regrets is that I did not press this point harder. We never made a third place commitment for the purposes of mingling and experimenting with Christ’s method.

Less Demanding Bible Reading Plan

I decided that the second year Bible reading plan for the church and my LTTF discipleship group would be less demanding in the number of chapters required per week (See “Bible Reading Plan for 2013/14” in Appendix E. This one-page document was copied on both sides of each sheet of paper to make two half-page handouts for members to keep in their Bibles.). The intention here was to get more people to give the reading
plan a try, and to help those who did try it to be less discouraged by not being able to keep up with the pace (as a number of people reported to me they had gotten because they could not keep up). These concerns were especially true for my LTTF discipleship group also.

Second-Year Recruitment

During the first year I learned that the use of elected church leaders and prayer meeting regulars did not turn out to be an effective criterion for choosing group members for the purposes of fulfilling my project goals. By year two’s recruitment time I prayerfully asked God to bring to mind those he might have me work with who are hungry for “more” in their own lives, and who would be willing to make a nine-month commitment to God, me, and a group of others in pursuit of the LTTF that Jesus desires for us. The second year group plan was to be more rigid in my recruitment criterion and to make “life . . . to the full” our main and only pursuit when we were together.

Food, Fellowship, and Personal Recruitment

The summer recruitment of group members in the second year for my LTTF discipleship group included relationship-building Sabbath afternoon dinners (Chester, 2011) that my wife and I hosted, and other family or church gathering opportunities. At the fellowship and friendship-building conversations I had during food gatherings of our church (potlucks and socials), and at our personal Sabbath lunch gatherings, I engaged members in one-on-one conversations about my vision. I shared my desired to experiment with the idea of pursuing “life . . . to the full” together as a catalyst for mission. I tested their interest with questions and made select invitations.
Personal Recruitment Questions

The two key questions that were addressed with potential group members were as follows: a) Are you satisfied with the way things are in your life right now, and would you be interested in joining a group of others who are pursuing “life . . . to the full” with Jesus, to see how God might bless us personally, with our families, in our careers, and other areas of our lives? and b) Will you make a nine-month commitment to spend two or three times a month with me and a group of others in pursuit of “life . . . to the full” with God and each other in this world?

A Nine-Month Commitment

Interested persons were also told that the nine-month commitment includes the following: a) To attend two Thursday nights of LTTF discipleship group time per month, from 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm on the first Thursday of each month and from 6:00 pm to 8:30 pm on the third Thursday of each month, starting with dinner. b) To share one missional experience together each month, and the day, time, and activity was determined by the group. c) To have a DP for prayer support and mutual encouragement weekly, to be done over lunch, by phone or texting, or through email. d) To commit ourselves to daily time in God’s word as individuals, using the Bible reading plan that I supplied to the entire church.

Group Recruitment BBQ

As soon as I began meeting with the second year LTTF discipleship group, we began talking about and planning a back yard barbeque, as a second recruitment dinner for those that my invited core group members wanted to invite, or felt led to invite as a result of our prayer for God’s leading in this matter. We had four visitors that night and
gained two new LTTF discipleship group members through the barbeque at one of the
group member’s home. In hind sight, if we had held a barbecue once a month we would
have probably grown that gathering two or three times as big in a few months, but my
goal at that time was not numbers. Since commitments to journey together were what I
was looking for, once I had my committed core I stopped recruitment and focused on
helping them live “life . . . to the full” with Jesus.

LTTF Discipleship Group, Year Two

In the early months of the group, supper was eaten together in a restaurant or at
the church building or in a home (the location was determined at each meeting for the
following meeting) in an attempt to imitate the meal time gatherings of Jesus (Chester,
2011). During the meal group members would share how their week was going and after
eating members would pray for each other. The most fundamental requirement of group
members was to keep up with my Bible reading plan for the church (See Appendix B).

Second-Year Meeting Format

The outline for the meeting is found in the “LTTF Discipleship & Mission Log”
(See Appendix D). The Discipleship Log was not followed rigidly, to allow for the Holy
Spirit’s leading, but the key elements of the discipleship log that were most used were the
questions each group member was asked of themselves and the questions they asked each
other when together. The group also very much enjoyed sharing events of the previous
week with each other, praying for each other, and being prayed for.
**New Group Questions**

When the group members gathered for group time each Tuesday night the questions the group asked each other weekly were as follows:  
a) “What insights did you gain as you answered question #1 from your reading each day?”  
b) “What insights did you gain as you answered question #2 from your reading each day?”  
c) “What was your overall take-away for this week’s Bible reading and time with God in prayer?”

**New Mission Log**

The goal of asking God to implant a new DNA in all group members was the same the second year, but a different LTTF Mission Log was used by group members at meeting times and throughout the week (See “LTTF Living Log” in Appendix F. This two-page document was copied front and back on a single sheet of paper to make half-page pamphlet handouts for members to keep in their Bibles.).

The new DNA, referred to above, is that we learn to respond to God’s love for us by:  
a) individually pursuing God’s heart through the reading and hearing of His word, the Bible, and answering three basic discipleship questions (see below);  
b) intentionally sharing God’s favor in practical ways, seeking to overcome evil with good, and demonstrating God’s love in our own context (individually and with one’s same-gender DP);  
c) living in a biblically grounded mission community that seeks to be Christ’s body on earth, with each other and in the world around them, resulting in group reproduction.

**Personal Reflection Questions**

The three LTTF self-reflection questions that group members were expected to use as they read their Bibles, to be asked of each other during mission group time, and to be asked with one’s DP, were:  
a) How is my Bible reading time helping me to know God
better, and how are my eyes being opened to what God is doing around me locally, and around us globally? b) What says the Bible to me, concerning God’s plans to prosper me (Jer 29:11) and Jesus’ desire for me to have “life . . . to the full” (John 10:10) now and forever? c) What opportunity to share God’s favor and fullness, to be a blessing as I, or we, have been blessed (Gen 12:1-3), and to be Christ’s body in our context (1 Cor 12:27) has God brought to mind through my Bible reading, so I, or we, can impact the lives of others in His name (think about how I might be a greater blessing in my family, at school or at work, in my community, or in the world outside these circles)?

**Group Accountability for DP Time**

The LTTF discipleship group was designed to help DPs to help each other facilitate the changes God wants to make in their lives by weekly reading out loud together “Christ’s method” of loving people (White, 1905, pp. 143-144). Group members were to hold fellow members accountable for having productive DP time, to having lunch or meeting together in person or on the phone, and to asking each other, “How have you and your DP practiced “Christ’s method” and helped others move toward “life . . . to the full” in Christ since we last met?” In addition to the LTTF group and DP accountability, a half-page handout, called “Three Vital Behaviors,” was provided to each group member to keep in their Bibles for reference (see Appendix G).

The discipleship partnerships (or mission partnerships, as they were sometimes referred to by me) never functioned as envisioned. I had a partner that I met with every week for an hour or two. We would do visitation together and read the Bible together or share and discuss an extra-biblical book or missional concept together. A couple of the others had random support encounters with another person, inside or outside our group.
membership, but regular two-by-two support never took hold, even though it was modeled by me and encouraged often.

**Christ’s Method Among us**

I discovered my second-year LTTF discipleship group had a greater need for the grace of God in their own lives than I had anticipated. My use of White’s (1905, pp. 143-144) six step process, described as “Christ’s method,” was used with my discipleship group instead of in the community around us. I found myself mingling with my disciples outside of the church box, desiring their good and deliverance and life fullness in their own terms. I demonstrated my sympathy through creating an environment where we would look forward to praying for each other to be overcomers in the areas we each acknowledged we needed most, knowing none of us were without the need of each other’s prayer support. I won their confidences by keeping their confidentialities and being committed to not trying to fix them, nor allowing other group members to try to fix them.

I encouraged my group to trust that God would honor a group of men coming together to pray for each other and that the Holy Spirit would do the fixing and transformational change we needed most so we could be missionaries to our families and in our communities. I also experienced that the growth of a couple of individuals was not linear but would advance for a time and then the person would experience a set back and then repeat the cycle again, and that sometimes the set-back would be greater than the previous run of advancement. The work of pursuing “life . . . to the full” was messier than I had thought it would be for my group, but it was also a great learning for us all in the grace of God, through Christ, that stretches to reach us where we are, and the work of
the Holy Spirit who draws us toward God through the hearts, mouths, and praying hands of fellow followers of Christ, who are committed to each other’s pursuit of fullness.

Meeting Format Changes

During the second year there were two significant changes in meeting format. The three new LTTF, self-reflection questions that were to be asked as one reads the Bible, to be asked of each other during mission group time, and to be asked with one’s DP, were as follows: a) How is my Bible reading time helping me to know God better, and how are my eyes being opened to what God is doing around me locally, and around us globally? b) What says the Bible to me, concerning how God’s plans to prosper me (Jer 29:11) and what Jesus wants for me to be able to experience “life . . . to the full” (John 10:10) now and forever? c) What opportunity to share God’s favor and fullness, to be a blessing as I/we have been blessed (Gen 12:1-3), and to be Christ’s body in our context (1 Cor 12:27) has God brought to mind through my Bible reading, so I/we can impact the lives of others in His name (think about how I might be a greater blessing in my family, at school or at work, in my community, or in the world outsides these circles)?

It was expected that the above questions would be asked of each person by their DP as well as in the LTTF discipleship group and that a mission log would be filled out every week. DPs were also asked to read Ellen White’s “Christ’s method alone” quotation weekly and implement a mingling or serving activity monthly.

As the year progressed we adopted a more natural style for us that was less regimented. We would begin the meetings with a check-in of what we had been reading lately and what God was teaching us through it. Then, we would read a chapter or so of
the Bible together and discuss it for insights into God’s love for us and how he may want to bless us, or use us to bless others, more abundantly. We would ask what each of us had been up to with our DP, and if our time together included any missional activity that we would be willing to share.

The mission log was dropped as an accountability tool because it was deemed too mechanical for this group to use. There was push-back on the requirement to fill out the log, not to discussing it, so a conversational format was used by me without any logging being done. While I believe maintaining the log requirement might have produced greater implementation by some, I also believe it would have been an implementation stopper for others who would feel their missional activity was not validated without having it written down.

At the end of every meeting we would each pray for the person to our side (sometimes the person to the right of us, and other weeks to the left of us), asking them what we could pray for that would help them live life more abundantly, or to the full, this coming week. Our meeting would end with a confirmation of the next meeting date, time, and location.

At the end of the second year LTTF discipleship group I gave the iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment for the second time, to the attendees who happened to be present on that Sabbath and who also took it the first time, two years earlier.

**LTTF Group Testimonies and Observations**

The group I formed for the second year of my project intervention did not become missional the way I had hoped it would as a result of pursuing “life . . . to the full” with
Jesus together. However, their testimonies encouraged me that this group was meeting a mutually felt need for nurturing relationships with other men who are dealing with close-to-home issues of being a disciple in their families first. The reported benefits of our group time the second year were due in large part to the sense of affinity they had with each other (due to my being intentional about who was invited into the group) and to them being willing to trust me and each other to open up about their real life challenges so we could pray for and encourage each other.

Better Husbands, Fathers, and Work Witnesses

The LTTF men reported feeling they were becoming better husbands, fathers, and representatives for Christ on their jobs and in the community. Here was some definite evidence of missional success from the lips of those who had been part of my LTTF discipleship group. Several of the guys from my LTTF discipleship group specifically said the group had helped them to become more regular in their Bible reading, or helped them to start reading their Bibles again on a regular basis. Bible reading on a consistent basis is not only the first practice of the DNA change I wish to see in the High Springs SDA Church but it is also the most necessary ingredient to facilitate the work of the Holy Spirit in leading people into the other two practices and making them fruit-bearing agents of the kingdom of God.

God’s Mission Amongst His Missionaries

Even though they did not become missionaries in nine months, I thought the spiritual health gained through accountability to God’s word in the context of a group of other mostly young men who had wives to be loved and young children still needing to be raised, and who agreed to pursue “life . . . to the full” with Jesus and each other, did
better equip them to be the kind of missional people that this project is seeking to achieve in the long run. This experience has modified my thinking about what it may mean for these men to be missional.

Mission Partnerships

The guys in my group have buddied up to encourage each other to read their Bibles, to pray with each other, to talk with each other and encourage each other, and to provide transportation to meetings for each other, so they are forming good discipleship relations with each other. I am aware of times when group pairs have sought each other out to talk and pray, to help or teach one another, to go visiting and generally to be helpful to each other and to the church body. The third place mingling and ministering, adopting a mission field for DPs to call their own may be a year or two off in the future.

Significant Modifications Made During the Project

During the first year the group was run in the same time slot and place as the mid-week service and it never became more than a Bible study together. It never developed the environment of a committed family or tribe, but in the second year the venue was moved out of the church building and a group was hand-picked with God (through prayer) that had some affinity with one another and a band of brothers was born. Almost all of them were men who were or had been married, who were parents (whether their children were still at home or not), and who each expressed an interest in a group pursuing “life . . . to the full” together.

The invitation method seemed to help with commitments to come to meetings regularly and to do the reading, at least in the beginning. The group developed a sense of
community and empowerment that has allowed it to keep functioning without me, when scheduling conflicts arose near the end of our year together, and in this first year following my project year with them I am hoping to commission the group to function regularly on its own, with me supporting it only once or twice a month in person.

The decision to change from open meetings to a group set up by invitation only impacted the recruitment plans also. Recruitment was done by holding a couple of dinners in our home. We hand-picked the guests, made our pitch for involvement with the group during the meal, and gave them time to think about it and respond. This method did not open up recruitment to the community at large, but it did help us to solidify a greater sense of belonging and commitment.

We often felt like the weekly meetings came around a little too fast. Each of us had very busy lives. When I introduced missional activities to the group as assignments to be done with a buddy it became apparent that we would need to use a meeting night, or at least the time allotted for a meeting on some other night, to be able to have time to do the mission partner work.

We started meeting every other week for our Bible study time and planned to use the weeks between for missional activity for a while. In order to help with the lack of time being reported for DPs to meet and enter the mission field together I decided, during the off weeks, we would meet every other week for prayer at the meeting time and then disperse in pairs to find some place to mingle or to do a service for others.

I printed out some ideas from Sjogren’s book (2014) on half-page sheets to assist the DPs in their mission excursions. I tried meeting for prayer and then breaking up for the night to have DP time, and I tried asking DPs to meet and mingle and/or serve and
then meet together near the end of our usual group meeting end time for testimony sharing and prayer. Neither one fixed the problem of getting everyone out and into the community to mingle and serve, nor did the accountability questions and commitment to each other as DPs ever really get used effectively.

In the final analysis, we were all more easily engaged in, and needful of, applying the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” to our home lives, our work lives, and our personal lives and relationships in general, than we felt needful to applying “life . . . to the full” to others outside our already established relationships. To reach out and connect with others could have been addressed if a need was stated and the groups help was asked for, but to go out looking for needs, go add to the friendship circles already established, was not a result of pursuing “life . . . to the full,” at least not in the two group experiences I had, in the time I had with them (a nine-month period with each of my two groups). We went back to weekly meetings to re-energize the group when it was noticed that the skipped meeting week was not being used for mission, but for other things.

During the first year everyone in the church was assigned to read 16 to 28 chapters of the Bible each week and I used the LTTF discipleship group time to hold us accountable to do our reading. We have always read a chapter, or a complete, in-context section of Scripture together and discussed it in our group meetings, but in year two I cut the Bible reading amount down (see Appendix E).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I shared my experiences of seeking to make and train disciples using the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” (John 10:10) as a catalyst for mission in the High Springs SDA Church. The progression of this chapter was to describe how the
implementation unfolded over the course of its two-year term. After giving the initial assessment to establish a baseline for discipleship practices in High Springs, and preaching the three-part sermon series I used to teach the three vital behaviors of “life . . . to the full” living, I launched my first LTTF discipleship group.

I described how the first-year group functioned from week to week, and the way I sought to test the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” with Jesus that first year. Then I discussed some obstacles I ran up against and what I did to address them and move into the second year LTTF discipleship group.

The second year group was chosen differently, more intentionally, yet it did not produce missionaries into the community-at-large any more than the first group did. I did learn that Christ’s method is not just for missional outreach but also for discipleship and missionary development. I found that the group God gave to me needed to experience a greater measure of healing and redeeming grace amongst ourselves before we could become missional to the community around us together. The missional impact was that the men in my group experienced Christ’s method being used with them and later reported becoming more committed readers of their Bibles, better fathers and husbands and more Christ-centered men as a result of our time together pursuing “life . . . to the full” with Jesus.

I also shared that while my experimentation with trying to establish and activate missional discipleship partnerships fell short of my desired outcome it did result in providing a taste of what two-by-two missional practice looks and feels like through the mission assignments they were given to do and report on. I finished this chapter off with a description of the significant modifications made during this project and how the
greatest benefit discovered thus far was in helping everyone to become more regular readers of God’s.
CHAPTER 6
EVALUATION AND LEARNINGS

Introduction

During this project I found that focusing a group of people on living “life . . . to the full” with Jesus as a catalyst for mission would require much more time than a nine-month discipleship training period, or it would take a group (a youth group perhaps) more generally ready to be missionally engaged in the community around us than the groups I worked with. I also found that my own commitment to journeying toward fullness with Jesus in this life, within a fellowship of others who are likewise committed, using the three vital behaviors previously mentioned as anchor points for the journey, has drawn me closer to God and to the other men in my second-year LTTF discipleship group. My wife tells me, from comments made in her women’s ministry group, that my intervention has been a blessing to the wives of the men I have worked with. The experience with my second-year group helped us to pray for and root for each other as we pursued “life . . . to the full” together and sought to act out our faith in healthier and more missional ways in our personal relationships at home and on the job, in preparation for doing community mission work in the future.

In this final chapter I first discuss my evaluation and knowledge acquired from the iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment. Then, I present my project intervention implementation summary, followed by my project conclusions, and ending
with my recommendations for follow-up work to help us better understand the mission connections to the “life . . . to the full” that Jesus said he came to give us.

**iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship**

Before this project formally began the “iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment” (see Appendix A) was given to the adult church members who were in attendance on a Sabbath morning in August, 2012, when I was there to preach. The first assessment provided data from 59 respondents.

The second assessment was two years later, on a Sabbath morning in July, 2014. The people present that day were asked to fill out an assessment only if they had taken the first assessment two years prior. This assessment collected data from 29 respondents.

**Dealing With Missing or Unclear Responses**

During both assessment days there were a few people who did not fill in several answers, or in one case filled in two answers at each of the extreme ends of the spectrum. I recorded these responses as “Sometimes,” the middle box on the survey, instead of throwing out about a half dozen assessments for two or three unanswered questions a piece (I needed to give one answer, and only one answer, to each and every question) in order to be able to enter the data online. Since I was going to be looking for most of my meaningful data at the two ends of the spectrum of survey data, I considered these few middle-ground entries to be negligible to the overall findings. Answer shifts to the left or right of center were of primary interest to me.
Subjective and Reflective Evaluation of Project

The iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment has a total of 38 response-invoking statements. I have reflected on only those statements which I have deemed of greatest interest to this project. Here is my subjective and reflective evaluation of the results of the 2012 and 2014 assessments when compared and contrasted with each other.

Observation 1: When asked to respond to, “My faith shapes how I think and act each and every day,” there was a 24% increase in responses of “Almost always true,” or “Always true.” Actually, 45% of the 29 people who filled out the second assessment checked either “Almost always true” or “Always true.” Another 10% checked “Often true.” No one checked any of the other choices. In the prior assessment, 3% checked “True once in a while” and 14% checked “Sometimes true.” While the sampling is small, the change is significant enough to warrant mentioning that 90% of the people indicated their thinking and acting was being shaped more by their faith in 2014 than two years prior. Whether this was due to preaching, increased Bible reading, the effects of the “life . . . to the full” small group on the congregation (through their interactions with family and friends in the congregation), or some other variable is not known at this time.

Observation 2: When asked to respond to, “In my free time, I help people who have problems or needs,” there was a 10% overall shift, in the upper three categories, toward using one’s free time more often to help people who have problems or needs. While “Often true” went down by 9%, “Almost always true” went up 3% and “Always true” went up 16%. Because the sample was small it is not clear whether our loving church was responding more favorably because there were greater needs two years later, a greater knowledge or awareness of needs, whether people had more time or money
resources to help others, or whether people had actually become more actively caring, but the shift is a positive one that may have been an effect of the project implementation.

Observation 3: One issue of particular interest to this study was when people were asked to respond to, “I devote time each day to reading and studying the Bible.” Respondents for “Never true,” “Rarely true,” and “True once in a while” went down 2%, 3%, and 11%, respectively. Respondents for “Often true,” “Almost always true,” and “Always true” went up 4%, 6%, and 2% respectively. That is more than a 12% increase in people devoting their free time to Bible reading and study in the upper three commitment categories, not counting improvements made in the bottom four answers to the question (In 2014 no one checked the “Never true” box). It is likely this improvement is largely due to the every-week reminder to read God’s word that was given from the pulpit by reciting the following poem (author unknown) prior to the sermon time: “What says the Bible, the blessed Bible? This, my only question be. The teachings of men so often mislead us. What says the Bible to me?”

Observation 4: When asked to respond to, “I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually,” there was a 15% increase in respondents indicating this was either “Almost always true” or “Always true.” While there were ups and downs across the spectrum, there was a definite shift in the positive direction in this category of activity between 2012 and 2014. Any time people begin taking responsibility for their spiritual growth by seeking growth opportunities intentionally it is a good thing and it is reasonable to assume this will lead, sooner or later, to people taking whatever action step is required of them to go beyond mere learning.
Observation 5: When asked to respond to, “I accept people whose beliefs are different from mine,” no one answered “Never true” (on the far left) in either assessment, but in 2014 there was a significant 20% increase of those who answered “Always true,” (on the far right). While this assessment does not help with cause and effect, what can be said from my own experience during this two-year period is that there was a significant amount of preaching of grace and acceptance of people by God, and many encouragements given from the pulpit for us to do likewise, so I am cautiously interpreting this and the Bible reading being done by church members to be the likely cause of the 2014 assessment effect.

Observation 6: We will look at the next three statements people were asked to respond to as a cluster. Of those responding in 2014 there was a significant increase in the number of people who said it was either “Almost always true” or “Always true” to the following: “I feel God’s presence in my relationships with other people” (up 15%), “My life is filled with meaning and purpose” (up 16%), and “I am confident that I can overcome any problem or crisis not [sic] matter how serious” (up 21%). The other responses that revealed negative answers in 2012 each had decreases in 2014. Taken together, these responses indicate positive changes in the health of the congregation from the start to the finish of my project intervention period.

Observation 7: When asked to respond to, “I tend to be critical of other people,” there was an increase of 7% in “Never true” answers, and a 2% increase in “Rarely true.” There was also a decrease of 8% in “Almost always true” responses in 2014. Again, overall it seems to indicate there is a subtle, but measurably positive, change going on in the lives of the 29 respondents who filled out both assessments. To put this into
perspective for all of these results, an average attendance on any given week is about 80 people, the range being from about 65 to 95. This means that approximately three fourths of the congregation took the first assessment and slightly more than a third of the congregation took the second assessment.

The final two indicators of discipleship maturity speak to our sense of self and to our sense of God’s character in relation to his law. Our acceptance of self weighs heavily upon one’s ability to love others as we love ourselves (Matt 22:39). Surely, both of these issues will have missional consequences, so I report them as possible indicators of mission being catalyzed in people’s lives.

Observation 8: When asked to consider the statement, “I have a hard time accepting myself,” there was an increase of 19% of the 2014 respondents who indicated that was “Never true” and a 14% decrease in the number of those who had said that it was “Always true” in 2012. Again, it appears positive change has been taking place.

Observation 9: Finally, to the statement, “I believe that I must obey God’s rules and commandments in order to be saved,” there was a rise of 15% in the number of respondents who answered that this was “Never true,” and 8% of those who had answered “Always true” in 2012 did not answer that way in 2014. Perhaps, the 8% only down-graded from “Always true” to “Almost always true” (a 7% increase in 2014), but this is still a positive change for the sake of the Gospel; that is, it is change in the right direction.

What remains to be seen is how long it will take the average group to acquire the three vital behaviors for LTTF living initiated with this intervention in such a way as to be self-sustaining, and how many generations these behaviors will be able to withstand
before morphing into something else. Continuing to give the church body an iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment every two years would provide a consistent, long-term way to track discipleship maturity related to missional thinking and acting.

**Implementation Summary**

This project was selected to see if the pursuit of the “life . . . to the full” that Jesus came to give would be a catalyst for mission. The measure for mission-mindedness and activity that was selected was the iFollow Roadmap for Discipleship Assessment, and it was given to the congregation at the beginning of the project period to establish a baseline of mission already being done at High Springs Seventh-day Adventist Church.

**Teaching, Reading, and Reinforcing**

A three-part congregational sermon series was given to the entire church membership during weekly worship service to introduce Jesus’ stated purpose for coming in John 10:10, namely so that his followers may have “life . . . to the full.” A Bible reading plan was given out and promoted week after week to the entire congregation.

Handouts for the entire church family were used to promote the following three “life . . . to the full” practices: a) the practice of “hearing the word of God” (Rom 10:17, NKJV) so we can “know” God (John 17:3) as He desires to be known, by reading, or listening to, several chapters of the Bible each day; b) the practice of being Christ’s body on earth, to incarnate the kingdom of God inside and outside the LTTF discipleship group itself (Exod 18:14-26, Mark 3:13-15 and Luke 6:13), in order to be God’s ambassadors and to imitate God’s way of nurturing, growing, and training his church, so his kingdom may come and his will may be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:9-10); c) the practice of partnering up in same-gender mission pairs (Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1) to share
“the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19) with others around us, in order to overcome evil with practical demonstrations of God’s goodness (Rom 12:21) and to be a blessing to others (Gen12:1-3) as God has blessed us, using “Christ’s method” (White, p. 143-144) as our model.

I made ongoing references to our Bible reading plan when the entire church met for worship from Sabbath to Sabbath. I asked our elders and others who I invited to speak to preach their sermon from something they took from the Bible reading for the week they preached. I made references to God calling us to live “life . . . to the full” often in the sermons I preached and in the conversations I had with people through visitation and other social contact outside of sermon and group time. The pastor’s reading plan, as we called it, was made available to every Sabbath morning worshipper, and encouragement was given to every church member to engage in the three practices of “life . . . to the full” living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in a context of mutual support and intercessory prayer.

LTTF Discipleship Group, Year One

At the end of the sermon series my first LTTF discipleship group was started. I used the church-wide Bible reading plan, suggested Bible reflection questions, and the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” with Jesus as a method for making and training disciples of Christ that I hoped would be a catalyst for joining God on his earthly mission. We used three vital practices, described above, as our common DNA for the pursuit together. The group was formed by those who responded to the invitation I gave at the end of my last sermon of the LTTF series, combined with those who were already participants in our mid-week prayer meeting.
My first-year LTTF discipleship group turned out to be a Bible study group that sought to understand what the Bible teaches about how to live “life . . . to the full” with Jesus, and that, on occasion, experimented with out-of-the-church-building exercises into potentially mingling and missional environments. It did not become a missional group by my original definition (mingling and ministering among non-Adventists in our community, outside of Sabbath worship, in order to help them become Jesus followers). But, my experience with my first-year group helped me to make some changes that I thought would give the second-year group a better chance at becoming missional through a pursuit of “life . . . to the full” with Jesus.

LTTF Discipleship Group, Year Two

For my second-year LTTF discipleship group, our missional activity seemed more needed in our homes than on the streets of our community. My original aspirations of making and training disciples of Christ using “life . . . to the full” as a catalyst for mission in the community (my original definition) became the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” with Jesus as a catalyst for mission to our wives and children. Our pursuit of LTTF also motivated my group members to want to be the best ambassadors for Christ they could be on their jobs.

Earlier in this document (Statement of the Problem, p. 5), I stated “at the heart of the problem there seemed to be a Lordship issue.” Since Lordship is about letting Jesus direct us in how to live our daily lives, my second-year experience helped me to address the Lordship issue in the context of my project goals and the felt-needs of the men in my group. This intervention taught me that Lordship is not just about submitting our wills, but also about being able to better tune in our ears and successfully execute action. Our
involvement with one another in our LTTF group helped each of us learn how to hear and follow Jesus’ voice more successfully, in the context of our pursuits of “life . . . to the full” with Jesus through the use of the three vital practices. These LTTF pursuits included our desires to be godly husbands and fathers and to represent Christ well on the job, and develop into missional agents at home in preparation for being effective missional agents in the community.

We experimented with the use of some of Sjogren’s (2014) missional service recommendations, but I chose to put more energy into the development of my group as men of God where the need was most felt by each one individually. Having determined to give myself to helping these men become missional with their families and through their jobs as a result of pursuing “life . . . to the full” with Jesus together, and hearing the testimonies from their own lips and second-hand reports from some of their wives, I believe my intervention has been a success, even if it is a different kind of success than the one I was looking for in the beginning. While I still believe missional activities are those that join God in his redeeming work primarily off of church property, and beyond simply performing many of the ministry positions a church might ask people to fulfill, this project has taught me to value whatever I can do to help men become more effective Christ-followers in their homes and on their jobs as being a missional outcome that is needed in our church, and in the world today.

Conclusions

I believe that both groups’ focuses on living “life . . . to the full” with Jesus, and my references to God’s desire for each of us to live LTTF in my sermons during the two-year project period, did have an overall positive effect on the entire congregation by
making everyone more open to the Holy Spirit’s leadings with regard to what living “life . . . to the full” might mean in their lives and in their dealing with family, friends, and neighbors, as we anticipate the Lord’s return.

Congregational Benefits

Two years after a baseline for missional thinking and activity was established using the iFollow Assessment, the assessment was given a second time and the results were tallied, considered, and reported in the preceding chapter. Observable improvements in mission mindedness and activity were recognized when comparing the survey differences, even though precise cause and effect correlations could not be made to specific aspects of my intervention as opposed to other influences in the respondents’ lives during the same period. The main two ways my intervention touched the lives of the congregation was in the promotion of daily Bible reading for all worship attendees and in the positive influence my LTTF discipleship group members may have had in the lives of other members of their families, and the church-at-large, as we sought to live out the three vital behaviors together.

Based upon a comparison of the two iFollow Assessments I recognize the following positive impacts upon the High Springs Adventist Church as a whole: a) 90% of the people indicated their thinking and acting was being shaped more by their faith in 2014 than two years prior; b) there was an increase in the use of respondents’ free time to help people who had problems or needs; c) there was an increase in the amount of free time people were devoting to Bible reading and study; d) there was an increase in the frequency in which people said they sought out opportunities to help them grow spiritually; and e) There was a 20% increase in respondents answering “Always true” to,
“I accept people whose beliefs are different from mine,” and no one at the end of the project period answered “Never true” to that statement.

Discipleship Group Benefits

I believe my first-year group process helped us each to think more deeply about what Jesus might actually have meant by “life . . . to the full,” and our group time together challenged us to act upon those implications in our own personal lives, as well as encouraging us to do whatever we could to facilitate living LTTF with Jesus in others’ lives. I learned that some sort of hand-picking and being invited in person produced greater cohesion in the group from the very beginning, than using a general sermon invitation or just including prayer meeting attendees. From both groups, I learned I need to help people engage society like Jesus did, to invite people to join me in entering the mission field of God in positive ways that are supported by the Bible, and not to expect that knowledge will lead to action.

I had never before seen Paul’s various counsels to husbands as being missional counsels for the kingdom of God, but my experience with my second-year LTTF discipleship group broadened my perspective. When Paul, a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, tells Christ-following husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for it (Eph 5:29) I now hear him commissioning those husbands for a redemptive, missional work. That is the type of missional work I became engaged with as I invested myself with a group of men, learning to hear and execute Christ’s leading in our lives, a leading toward life fullness and toward mission, at home and beyond.

As I read God’s word with, dialogued with, and prayed individually with both of my LTTF discipleship groups, I came to realize the time spent with them on my endeavor
was too short to bring the initial results I was looking for. I also have now concluded that the time spent, in the way I spent it, during my second-year LTTF discipleship group, to grow the group of men God gave me through a pursuit of “life . . . to the full” with Jesus, “was” of missional significance, just as Christ’s investment in his disciples was missionally significant. I learned I need to use my time to invest in people, whatever we pursue with Jesus together; the missional outcome will come in God’s time.

**Recommendations**

First, if more time would be given to a group to work on becoming consistent in executing the three vital behaviors, in the context of pursuing “life . . . to the full” with Jesus, I think greater results would be realized. I am thinking of establishing a kingdom of intentionally organized, missionally purposed tribes out of what we today call the local church. I think they need to covenant with each other to invest themselves in a specifically describable mission and become a relational tribe of *hermanos* (Spanish).

Second, one of my observations has been that LTTF discipleship groups did not learn their way into acting missionally and that discipleship groups may need to act their way into learning some spiritual truths. Perhaps missional activity will be a catalyst for living “life . . . to the full” instead of the other way around. One methodological change that might facilitate beyond-the-family community action within the LTTF model is found in the words of Paul, in Romans 12:21, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (NIV and NKJV). While Paul’s counsel was a part of this model, it was not present in our thinking, conversations, and study to a great extent. There seems to be something directly and unalterably missional that happens as one is challenged to overcome evil with good wherever it exists. If overcoming evil with good
was intentionally made a greater focus of our Bible reading application, and if group action and community impact was of a higher priority than Bible knowledge and understanding, then missional activity in a context of pursuing “life . . . to the full” with Jesus may be implemented more quickly and consistently.

Third, I would meet in a third place, not in a group member’s home, or I would adopt a street, a business, a school, or a specific apartment complex or neighborhood. I would become “one of” those in my mission context (living incarnational among them) and meet in the home of a “person of peace” (Absalom, 2014) who is also a member of that community. I have just begun reading Absalom’s book and am very interested in his construct. Making this kind of intervention change, meeting every time we gather in an outside-of-our-church-box context, and spending time in Bible reading and study and prayer for one another in the mission field, most certainly would change the outcomes, and I can only think favorably so. We need to find or make third places where the environment is conducive to making new friends, conducive to mingling and cross pollination. This is a particular challenge in my current rural, southern American setting. We need to go to these places without our Bibles and be the Bible in whimsically holy ways that draw people to Christ because we have a sincere interest and concern for others no matter whether they start coming to our group or to our church, ever. Not persisting to find or create a third place to mingle with people was one of the greatest weaknesses in my project and making third-place presence the primary meeting place may be the single most game-changing thing that can be done when running experiments in discipleship and mission.
My take away is that we must enter the mission field, a place where we are put off balance by others who are there, where we must mingle with people that we do not know or relate well to, a place where without a doubt we are out of place so God can be in charge and teach us what we need to do to join him in what he is already doing. In the future I plan to go into the mission field first; then to sit down with my group and open our Bibles together and pray for one another to find what we need from the Bible and the Holy Spirit to be able to do what God would have us to do in that mission field.

Fourth, giving the church an iFollow Assessment every two years, along with continued expansion of LTTF discipleship groups, and providing regular preaching, teaching, and questioning resources for people, might yield some good long-term indicators of missional attitude and activity affected by this pursuit.

Fifth, collecting data on personality types, socio-economic status, educational levels, and marital status and age of group members may also be helpful information to assess the effectiveness of the pursuit of “life . . . to the full” as a catalyst for mission on individuals and groups with varying circumstances impacting their lives.

Sixth, it would be helpful to study the practices of Lordship in the Adventist Church as they pertain to having confidence in one’s personal salvation in Christ and learning not to live under the law and not to be condemning of others and, at the same time, learning to live in submission to Christ and to pursue holiness in a whimsically attractional way on a daily basis.

Finally, I believe we need a good theology for having fun while being missional together (a 29th Fundamental Belief?). My experience in the church has been that holiness and fun are anathema to each other (as reflected even in the classic Christian
film depictions of Christ from my childhood), yet my experience with Christ through Bible reading and prayer, seeing how he contextualized himself when he came from heaven to earth in New Testament times, causes me to see the modern Christian film depictions of Jesus as a whimsically holy savior to be more realistic. What might happen if our church became more missional and more fun at the same time, I wonder?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Never true</th>
<th>Rarely true</th>
<th>True once in a while</th>
<th>Some -times true</th>
<th>Often true</th>
<th>Almost always true</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I am concerned that our country is not doing enough to help the poor.</td>
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<td>2. I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died on a cross and rose again.</td>
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<td>3. My faith shapes how I think and act each and every day.</td>
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<td>4. I help others with their religious questions and struggles.</td>
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<td>5. In my free time, I help people who have problems or needs.</td>
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<td>6. My faith helps me know right from wrong.</td>
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<td>7. I do things to help protect the environment.</td>
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<td>8. I devote time each day to reading and studying the Bible.</td>
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<td>9. Every day I see evidence that God is active in the world.</td>
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<td>10. I take excellent care of my physical health.</td>
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<td>11. I am active in efforts to promote social justice.</td>
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<td>12. I seek out opportunities to help me grow spiritually.</td>
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<td>13. I take time daily for periods of prayer or meditation.</td>
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<td>14. I am active in efforts to promote world peace.</td>
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<td>15. I accept people whose beliefs are different from mine.</td>
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<td>16. I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.</td>
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<td>17. As I grow older, my understanding of God changes.</td>
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<td>18. I give significant portions of my time and money to help other people.</td>
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<td>19. I speak out for equality for women and minorities.</td>
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Add the total number of items marked in each column on this page:
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never true</th>
<th>Rarely true</th>
<th>True once in a while</th>
<th>Sometimes true</th>
<th>Often true</th>
<th>Almost always true</th>
<th>Always true</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20. I feel God’s presence in my relationships with other people.</td>
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<td>21. My life is filled with meaning and purpose.</td>
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<td>22. I am confident that I can overcome any problem or crisis no matter how serious.</td>
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<td>23. I care a great deal about reducing poverty in this country and throughout the world.</td>
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<td>24. I try to apply my faith to political and social issues.</td>
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<td>25. My life is committed to Jesus Christ.</td>
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<td>26. I talk with other people about my faith.</td>
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<td>27. I go out of my way to show love to people I meet.</td>
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<td>28. I have a real sense that God is guiding me.</td>
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<td>29. I like to worship and pray with others.</td>
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<td>30. I think Christians must be about the business of creating international understanding and harmony.</td>
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<td>31. I am spiritually moved by the beauty of God’s creation.</td>
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Add the total number of items marked in each column in this section (20-31):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Never true</th>
<th>Rarely true</th>
<th>True once in a while</th>
<th>Sometimes true</th>
<th>Often true</th>
<th>Almost always true</th>
<th>Always true</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32. I tend to be critical of other people.</td>
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<td>33. I have a hard time accepting myself.</td>
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<td>34. I feel overwhelmed by all the responsibilities and obligations I have.</td>
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<td>35. I do not understand how a living God can allow so much pain and suffering in the world.</td>
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<td>36. I believe that I must obey God’s rules and commandments in order to be saved.</td>
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<td>37. My life is filled with stress and anxiety.</td>
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<td>38. Religion has nothing to do with politics.</td>
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Add the total number of items marked in each column on this section (32-38):
Your Score Sheet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Totals from the first page:</th>
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<td>Totals from Questions 20-31:</td>
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<th>Totals from Questions 32-38:</th>
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Add all of the raw scores together for one total figure: ____________

The range of possible scores is 38 to 266.

If your score is 38 to 84, you are just beginning to work toward a mature faith. Consider using some of the following iFollow lessons to guide you toward your next milestone:

If your score is 85 to 130, you are making some progress toward mature faith. Consider using some of the following iFollow lessons to guide you toward your next milestone:

If your score is 131 to 175, you have an average level of faith development among Christians in North America. Consider using some of the following iFollow lessons to guide you toward your next milestone:

If your score is 176 to 220, you have an above-average level of faith development. Yet Discipleship is for all eternity. Consider using some of the following iFollow lessons to guide you toward your next milestone:

If your score is over 220, you have an exceptional level of faith maturity. Yet Discipleship is for all eternity. Consider using some of the following iFollow lessons to guide you toward your next milestone:

This instrument is based on the Valuegenesis research sponsored by the Office of Education, North America Division of the General Conference. (See Valuegenesis Report 1 by Peter L. Benson and Michael J. Donahue [1990]. Minneapolis/Silver Spring: Search Institute and NA Office of Education.)
What does today’s Bible reading teach me about God’s heart for me (& all of humanity)? In other words… What was God’s plan “A” for living “life . . . to the full?” and… What’s God’s love got to do with it?

How does God demonstrate His favor, or grace, for humanity (and for me) in today’s reading?

After reading, do this writing exercise:

1. Who else in my life needs to hear this good news? (Write down their names and pray for them now.)

2. What can I do to demonstrate God’s love by sharing God’s favor with others this week? Give examples.)

3. When and where will my DP and I reflect on our favor-sharing experiences and pray for each other?

4. What would I like my DP and I to do together this month to share God’s favor with others?

How can I serve and build up others within my mission group? What can my mission group and I do as a group to demonstrate God’s love to others around us in some practical way? Plan and carry out one mission activity each month with your group.

Finish with this prayer: Dear God, my Father, may what I read today help me to trust you to be fully involved in every aspect of my life. Thank you for your favor, forgiveness, and presence with me today. Open my eyes to the opportunities you give me to demonstrate your love and favor to others in practical ways. Reveal your heart to me and help me to choose your “plan A” for me today. Amen.
### Bible Reading Plan for Discipleship
(a nine month, 40 week, 15-30 min. per day plan)

**Start Tues. 8/28/12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2, 9/4</td>
<td>Genesis 1 – 24</td>
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<tr>
<td>3, 9/11</td>
<td>Genesis 25 – 50</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>4, 9/18</td>
<td>Exodus 1 – 20</td>
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<td>5, 9/25</td>
<td>Exodus 21 – 40</td>
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<td>6, 10/2</td>
<td>Luke 1 – 24</td>
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<td>7, 10/9</td>
<td>Leviticus 1 – 27</td>
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<td>8, 10/16</td>
<td>Hebrews and Ezra</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>9, 10/23</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 1 – 17</td>
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<td>10, 10/30</td>
<td>Deuteronomy 18 – 34</td>
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<td>11/3</td>
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<tr>
<td>11, 11/16</td>
<td>Acts 1 – 28</td>
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<td>12, 11/13</td>
<td>Joshua and Nahum</td>
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<td>13, 11/20</td>
<td>Judges and Lamentations</td>
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<td>14, 11/27</td>
<td>Isaiah 1 – 22</td>
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<td>15, 12/4</td>
<td>Isaiah 23 – 45</td>
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<td>16, 12/11</td>
<td>Isaiah 46 – 66</td>
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<td>17, 12/18</td>
<td>Matthew 1 – 28</td>
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<td>18, 12/25</td>
<td>Ruth, Neh., &amp; Esther</td>
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<td>19, 1/1</td>
<td>Hosea, Jonah, &amp; Malachi</td>
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<td>20, 1/8</td>
<td>Habakkuk thru Zechariah</td>
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<td>21, 1/15</td>
<td>Job 1 – 21</td>
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<td>22, 1/22</td>
<td>Job 22 – 42</td>
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<tr>
<td>23, 1/29</td>
<td>Mark &amp; Song of Solomon</td>
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<td>2/2</td>
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<td>24, 2/5</td>
<td>Proverbs 1 – 16</td>
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<td>9</td>
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<td>25, 2/12</td>
<td>Proverbs 17 – 31</td>
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<td>1&amp;2 Corinthians</td>
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<td>1 Samuel</td>
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<td>29, 3/12</td>
<td>2 Samuel</td>
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<td>30, 3/19</td>
<td>1 Kings</td>
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<td>31, 3/26</td>
<td>2 Kings</td>
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<td>Romans &amp; Colossians</td>
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<td>33, 4/9</td>
<td>Jeremiah 1 – 26</td>
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<td>34, 4/16</td>
<td>Jeremiah 27 – 52</td>
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<td>Ecclesiastes, Ephesians, 1 Tim., Titus, &amp; 2 Tim.</td>
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<td>Ezekiel 1 – 24</td>
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<td>Ezekiel 25 – 48</td>
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<td>38, 5/14</td>
<td>Phili. &amp; James thru 3 John</td>
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<td>39, 5/21</td>
<td>Philemon, Jude, &amp; Rev.</td>
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<td>Joel, Amos, Ob., &amp; Dan.</td>
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**Study Note:** Read thru the following questions before you read each day; after reading, reread and answer them.
7 Ways to Live Life to the Full
by Sharing God’s Favor,
that have the potential to change the world around you:

1. Smile and say “Hi” to everyone your eyes are able to meet.

2. Speak to all people with words that build up, encourage, and bless.

3. Ask people how they relate to God in their daily lives & listen.

4. Find specific reasons to like and pray for every person you meet.

5. Worship God by serving others in practical ways and being kind.

6. Demonstrate your faith in God and Christ by acting for social justice.

7. Use God’s law to silence the judges, and use God’s grace, mercy, and favor to bring healing, and help to others claim God’s best for their lives now,…and forever.

A Discipleship Support Group meets at

High Springs SDA Church, 230 NW 1st Ave.,
at 7 pm every Tuesday.

7 Ways to Live Life to the Full
by Sharing God’s Favor,
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A Discipleship Support Group meets at
Group Discussion & Application Questions:

1. What insights did you gain as you answered question #1 from your reading each day?

2. What insights did you gain as you answered question #2 from your reading each day?

3. What was your overall take-away from this week’s Bible reading and time with God in prayer?

4. How do you envision yourself living out “Christ’s method” individually, or how might we live it out together as a group?

5. Share a DP testimony from this past week, reflect on last week’s discipleship group service activity, or plan a mingling, serving, or fun social activity for our group.

6. What do you perceive as God’s plan “A” for your life this coming week?

“Life . . . to the Full” Discipleship & Mission Log
by Pastor Mark Swaisgood, M.Div.

Today is _______________________. This is Week _____.

I am to Read ______________________________________

Personal Learning Questions:
(to ask before and as you read, and to answer afterward in space below)

1. What says the Bible to me, concerning God’s plans to prosper me (Jer. 29:11) and Jesus’ desire for me to have “life…to the full” (Jn. 10:10) Now and Forever?
   [Give the Bible reference(s) with your answer.]

2. What says the Bible to me, concerning how I am called to follow Christ and be a servant-leader in my responsibilities at home, at school, at work, in my church, and in my community?

Wed.:

Thurs.:
**Mission Group Gathering Outline** (Tues., 6:00 – 8:00 pm weekly)

1. Opening Blessing for Food and Recitation of Jer. 29:11; John 10:10; Acts 2:42; Matt. 28:18-20; and our Discipleship Vision below (MH 143-144)

2. Eating and Sharing; then praying in groups of 2 or 3

3. Discussion: “Life . . . to the Full” and Leadership Questions

4. Planning: A Mingling or Serving Activity, 1x – 2x per mo. and A Fun Social Activity Together, 1x per quarter


**Discipleship Vision:**

“The world needs…a revelation of Christ. A great work of reform is demanded. . . .Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their
Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’ There is need of coming close to...people by personal effort,” weeping and rejoicing with them.

HS Bible Reading Plan for 2013/14 UPDATE
(Pastor Mark’s nine month, 40 week, 15-30 min. per day plan)

Start Sab. 8/3 thru 8/9  
Week 2, 8/10 thru 8/16 John 1 – 14  
Week 3, 8/17 thru 8/23 John 15 – 21  
Week 4, 8/24 thru 8/30 1, 2, 3 John; 1, 2 Peter  
Week 5, 8/31 thru 9/6 Luke 1 – 14  
Week 6, 9/7 Luke 15 – 24  
Week 7, 9/14 Acts 1 – 14  
Week 8, 9/21 Acts 15 – 28  
Week 9, 9/28 Genesis 1 – 12  
Week 10, 10/5 Genesis 13 – 24  
Week 11, 10/12 Genesis 25 – 38  
Week 12, 10/19 Genesis 39 – 50  
Week 13, 10/26 1 Corinthians 1 – 16  
Week 14, 11/2 2 Corinthians 1 – 13  
Week 15, 11/9 Exodus 1 – 13  
Week 16, 11/16 Exodus 14 – 27  
Week 17, 11/23 Exodus 28 – 40  
Week 18, 11/30 Romans 1 – 16  
Week 19, 12/7 Galatians 1 – 5  
Week 20, 12/14 Ephesians 1 – 5  

Week 21, 12/21 Matthew 1 – 7  
Week 22, 12/28 Matthew 8 – 16  
Week 23, 1/4 Matthew 17 – 28  
Week 24, 1/11 Joshua 1 – 12  
Week 25, 1/18 Joshua 13 – 24  
Week 26, 1/25 Judges 1 – 11  
Week 27, 2/1 Judges 12 – 21  
Week 28, 2/8 Hebrews 1 – 13  
Week 29, 2/15 Ruth and Esther  
Week 30, 2/22 James – 2 Peter  
Week 31, 3/1 1 Kings 1 – 11  
Week 32, 3/8 1 Kings 12 – 22  
Week 33, 3/15 1 John – Jude  
Week 34, 3/22 2 Kings 1 – 12  
Week 35, 3/29 2 Kings 13 – 25  
Week 36, 4/5 Daniel 1 – 12  
Week 37, 4/12 Revelation 1 – 11  
Week 38, 4/19 Hosea 1 – 14  
Week 39, 4/26 Revelation 12 – 22  

Three Recommended Bible Reading Questions:
1. What is God like, according to this Bible passage?
2. What says the Bible to me, concerning God’s plans to prosper me (Jer. 29:11) and Jesus’ desire for me to have
“life…to the full” (Jn. 10:10), both Now and Forever?

3. What opportunities to live life more abundantly does the Holy Spirit bring to my mind as I read?

*Life to the Full* DP Meeting Outline

(Spend approx. one hour each week doing the following)

1. **Discuss** the following during your time together:

From your reading, what is God like and how does He want to bless us?  [Give the Bible reference(s) with your answer.]

What have you seen God doing around you, or in the world, this past week?

2. **Share** things each of you did to share God’s favor with others (at home, at school or work, in your community) this week and what the reactions or results were, if any; then, affirm each others achievements, and each one pray for the other (out loud) a prayer of encouragement and blessing to help you each pursue *life to the full* with Jesus.

3. **Plan (or review)** “Christ’s method” activities that you will do (or have done) together as DPs to share God’s favor with others. Write about your best experience below to share with your discipleship group during *life to the full* testimony time.

This week my Discipleship Partner (DP) and I…

---

**A Vision for living *Life to the Full* with Jesus:**

“The world needs today…a revelation of Christ.  A great work of reform is demanded, and it is only through the grace of Christ that the work of restoration, physical, mental, and spiritual, can be accomplished.  ‘Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people.  The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good.  He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence.  Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’

“There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort….The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing ad the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled.  We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice.  Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.”  *MH 143-4*

**Life to the Full Questions for Bible Reading Time:**

(Ask these before and as you read.  Record your notes on next page.)

1. How is my Bible reading time helping me to now God better, how are my eyes being opened to what God is doing around me, and what do I see Him doing in the world today?

2. What says the Bible to me concerning God’s plans to prosper me (Jer. 29:11) and Jesus’ desire for me to have “life…to the full” (Jn. 10:10), Now and Forever?
3. As I contemplate sharing God’s favor and living life to the full, what opportunities to do so is God bringing to my mind: with me personally, with my family, at school or at work, in my community, or in the world we live in today?

My time-with-God Notes:

After your reading time each day… ask God to direct your way, for ears to hear, for eyes to see, and for courage to ACT on God’s leading by faith.

Life to the Full Group Gathering Outline

(1st Thurs., 7:00-8:30pm no meal and 3rd Thurs., 6:00-8:30pm with meal)

1. Sharing our Prayer Concerns and Praying Together

In 2013 Florida Conf. President Mike Cauley said, “Adventism is about restoring the image of God in humanity, about…helping people to live life more abundantly. This is why we have focused so much on behavior and sanctification in Adventism.” In Jn 10:10 (NIV) Jesus tells us, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” The goal of our time together is to help each other live LTTF.

2. Reading Check-in: What have you read since we last met? and What has God been teaching you through it?

3. Life to the Full Testimony Time: What have you and God been up to since we last met? or What have you been doing to live life to the full with Jesus recently? Or Share a recent DP favor-sharing story.

4. Group Bible Reading (rotate who chooses and does the reading)

5. Discussion of these Life to the Full Questions:

> What says the Bible to me, concerning what God’s plan is to prosper me (Jer. 29:11) and concerning what Jesus means by “life…to the full” (Jn. 10:10) for myself and for others around me.

> What opportunities to share life more abundantly, and to be Christ’s body in our context (1 Cor. 12:27), has God brought to mind?

6. LTTF Prayer Time: Share with the group member to your right one thing you would like to be prayed for: ask prayer for something that will build you up, or encourage you to cooperate with God as He restores His image in you, or that will help you live life to the full personally, with

Appendix F
your family, at school or at work, in your church, or in the secular community you live in. The person to the right prays out loud, immediately for the one who made the request, then shares his prayer request with the person to his right, who will pray for him, and so on until the whole group is prayed for, each one by one.

Christ’s Vision: Life to the Full (LTTF)

Biblical Core Value: Everything For Love (Jn 3:16)

Three Vital Behaviors:

1. **Pursue God’s Heart Daily.** (Gen 1:26-28; Jn 17:3, 19-21)
   a. Through daily Bible Reading or listening
   b. Through **asking “Heart Questions,”** like, “Lord, what are you trying to teach me about Yourself, or What are your thoughts for my future (Jer. 29:11), or What does “life…to the full” for me mean to you (Jn. 10:10), or What might “Thy kingdom come…on earth as in heaven” (Matt. 6:10) look like if I lived it out with a group of others in my context, or What’s your love got to do with it (1 Jn. 4:8)?
   c. Through Prayer and Quiet Listening for God to speak
   d. Through Contemplation on God’s word throughout the day and upon Christ’s life, death, and resurrection
   e. Through weeping, laughing, and journaling

2. **Group Up to Be Christ’s Body on Earth.** (Rom. 16:5)
   a. Meet with a **Group Weekly** to prioritize God’s mission in your context and to participate in God’s kingdom “on earth as in heaven”
      Now (Matt. 6:10; Acts 2:42-47)
   b. **Report Favor-sharing Activities** done with your DP
   c. **Invite Others** to come, taste, see, and join your group in following and imitating Christ

3. **Pair Up to Share God’s Favor and Make Disciples.**
   a. **Meet weekly with a Discipleship Partner (DP)** for accountability, encouragement, and prayer support
   b. **Demonstrate God’s love in practical ways using Christ’s method** (MH 143; Luke 4:14-19 and 10:1; Matt. 28:18-20; Rom. 12:21)
   c. **Plan, carry-out, and critique mingling and ministering activities**

together (Mark 6:7)

d. **Spend time discipling 1 same-gender person who’s ear you have:** doing ministry together, explaining why you do things the way you do and what the goal of that ministry is; then asking them to take the lead when they are ready (This may be DP or a second person.)

The Ministry of Healing, by Ellen G. White, pages 142-143

We are living in the midst of an “epidemic of crime,” at which thoughtful, God-fearing men everywhere stand aghast. The corruption that prevails, it is beyond the power of the human pen to describe. Every day brings fresh revelations of political strife, bribery, and fraud. Every day brings its heart-sickening record of violence and lawlessness, of indifference to human suffering, of brutal, fiendish destruction of human life. Every day testifies to the increase of insanity, murder, and suicide. Who can doubt that satanic agencies are at work among men with increasing activity to distract and corrupt the mind, and defile and destroy the body?

And while the world is filled with these evils, the gospel is too often presented in so indifferent a manner as to make but little impression upon the consciences or the lives of men. Everywhere there are hearts crying out for something which they have not. They long for a power that will give them mastery over sin, a power that will deliver them from the bondage of evil, a power that will give health and life and peace. Many who once knew the power of God’s word have dwelt where there is no recognition of God, and they long for the divine presence.

The world needs today what it needed nineteen hundred years ago—a revelation of Christ. A great work of reform is demanded, and it is only through the grace of Christ that the work of restoration, physical, mental, and spiritual, can be accomplished.

Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, “Follow Me.”

There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counseled. We are to weep with those that weep, and rejoice with those that rejoice. Accompanied by the power of persuasion, the power of prayer, the power of the love of God, this work will not, cannot, be without fruit.

The vision of Christ, biblical core value, and 3 vital behaviors presented on the reverse side of this sheet express guidelines for how the High Springs SDA Church can work in harmony with the Florida Conference of Seventh-day Adventists’ mission “to make mature disciples within biblical communities,
preparing people to meet Jesus.” Our Sabbath School classes, Pathfinders, Deacons and Deaconesses, weekday Bible study and ministry groups, and any other groups that meet as followers of Christ are already biblical communities, but to help us all continue to mature in our walk with Christ it is hoped that we each will make the pursuit of life to the full, the love of God and our fellow human beings, and the 3 vital LTTF behaviors described on the back of this sheet our own personal roadmap to discipleship maturity. —Thank you, Pastor Mark
REFERENCE LIST


Hellerman, J. (2009). *When the church was a family: Recapturing Jesus’ vision for authentic Christian community* [Kindle version]. Nashville, TN: B&H.


VITA

Name: Mark Swaisgood

Date of Birth: November 28, 1958

Place of Birth: Ravenna, OH

Married: December 19, 1993 to the former Carmen M. Estrada Torres

Children: Marco (1999), Maiah (2005), and Melina (2005)

Education:

2016 DMin in Missional Church, Andrews University Theological Seminary

1987–1989 MDiv, Andrews University Theological Seminary

1989 –1989 North American Division Evangelism Institute, LaGrange, Illinois

1989–1989 Jerusalem Center Study Tour, O.T. studies w/Dr. Richard Davidson, Israel

1988–1988 Summer, Postgraduate School of Theology, Newbold College, England

1984–1987 Bachelor of Arts in Religion at Southwestern Adventist College

Ordination:

1994 Ordained to the Gospel Ministry, Reynoldsburg SDA Church

Experience:

2012–Present District Pastor of High Springs and Jennings Lake Seventh-day Adventist Churches, FL

2011–2012 District Pastor of Warren, Evergreen (Youngstown), Ravenna, and East Liverpool Seventh-day Adventist Churches, OH

1999–2011 Pastor, First Seventh-day Adventist Community Church, Chesterland, OH

1996–1999 District Pastor of First Seventh-day Adventist Community Church and Suburban East Seventh-day Adventist Churches, OH
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<th>Year Range</th>
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