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ABSTRACT

A DISCIPLESHIP PROJECT FOR NEW MEMBERS AT THE
ST. JOHN'S SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Wayne Rupert Knowles

Adviser: Steve Willsey

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A DISCIPLESHIP PROJECT FOR NEW MEMBERS AT THE ST. JOHN'S
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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Date completed: August 2015

Problem

During the first decade of the 21st century, a review of the ministry structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in St. Johns, Antigua, was done. It revealed that there was a need for a systematic plan to nurture new members into leaders. Although there were new converts classes held and materials were available for study, there were few organized plans within the church that would assist new members to become spiritually mature and equipped for ministry. This lack of structure has resulted in very few people being prepared to serve in the ministries of the church. Something needed to be done to move new members to spiritual maturity and into ministry. The creation of a discipleship

model for new converts at the St. John's SDA church was deemed to be most important to help it fulfill its mission.

Method

A 12-week discipleship small group structure was developed in 2013 to help the congregation mature its members. It included the learning components of linking theory to practice, fostering personal spiritual development, and utilizing mentoring relationships. Five goals for a spiritually healthy life were the central focus. These included worship, fellowship, nurture, ministry, and evangelism. The success of this process was measured by how each member magnified God, matured, and involved themselves in ministry and mission.

Results

All six persons completed the 12-week small group discipleship session. The results showed minimal but consistent growth in the five areas of spiritual health that were measured as mentioned above. Only one of the six persons in the group did not show any growth. The short time used was the main weakness of this program. However growth was shown in areas that were not measured by the instrument used in this project.

Conclusions

This study demonstrates that a well-structured small group model with a clearly defined plan for spiritual growth of each member of the group can assist new believers to achieve spiritual maturity. Spiritually matured members should improve the leadership

potential of a congregation. It may also have implications for how we plan, organize, and apply conservation methods in our congregations.

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Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A DISCIPLESHIP PROJECT FOR NEW MEMBERS AT THE
ST. JOHN'S SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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

by
Wayne Rupert Knowles

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CHAPTER 1

THE NEED FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

History and Purpose

In 2009, a review of the ministry structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at St. Johns, Antigua, was done. It revealed that over the past nine years there were few organized plans within the church that would assist new members to become spiritually mature and equipped for ministry. This assessment by the church board revealed that, although there was a new convert's class, nothing else was being done to move new members to spiritual maturity and into ministry. This lack of structure has resulted in very few people being prepared to serve in the ministries of the church.

The purpose of this project is to use a small group approach to the leadership challenge of the St. John's Seventh-day Adventist Church. It will focus on a group of new members and help them to realize spiritual growth and maturity.

Statement of the Task

The task of this project is to develop, implement, and evaluate a discipleship program for the St. Johns Seventh-day Adventist Church to retain new members, grow them spiritually, and equip them for ministry.

Justification of the Project

Failure to have a well-organized discipling structure within the church for new converts has resulted in a decrease in spiritually mature leaders to assist in the ministries of the church. As a result, more members need to be prepared for ministry and deployed into service as part of their spiritual growth process. This is evident from the lack of young leaders in the church. The eldership office is a typical example. At the start of this project, there were nine elders, and five of them were over 60. Only two of them were below 50 years old. In fact, there was no elder under the age of 30. A similar pattern can be found in many of the ministries of the congregation.

The church needs to develop new ministries. With a church membership of over 1,000 members and a large ministry area with a population of over 20,000, the congregation is well placed for several new ministries to be developed.

New members need to become more active within the congregation and thus develop a sense of belonging. A new convert's discipleship small group will give them an opportunity to get involved at their own pace. It would also help them to have a dedicated group of leaders who cater to their spiritual needs.

Finally, new converts need to retain their membership by growing towards spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity ought to be the goal of the church for all believers. Mature members rarely ever leave the church; instead, they become core members of the church.

Expectations for the Project

There are several expectations of the project. These are listed below:

By the end of this venture, the new believers should be well on their way to becoming mature and active members of the St. John's Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Also, the group members should develop strong friendships with each other that will help them in their spiritual bonding among themselves and the church.

The new believers should be able to show positive spiritual growth and demonstrate that they can share the love of Christ with those around them using their areas of giftedness.

They should be able to show leadership potential that can benefit the church in the future. This project should also provide a strategy for other pastors to lead their members to effective and genuine discipling ministry using small groups.

In addition, it should also help the missions and conferences within the Caribbean Union Conference to attain sustained church growth by developing strong discipleship structures within each congregation. This should result in helping to advance the kingdom of God through more baptisms and greater involvement in ministry by new members.

Limitations of the Project

The research exercise will be in process for three months. This process will involve the time between the first and second evaluations. It will involve a small group of adult new believers who are within the first year of their conversion. The small group will be one in which all members of the group will be expected to participate in the activities.

There will only be one group of new believers. This will limit the ability to compare how different groups respond to the small group life experience. As a result, there will be no comparison made with other group results. This study will only be done with one congregation.

Description of the Project

Four biblical stages of spiritual growth will be the central focus for theological reflection. The first stage will focus on the meaning of a new relationship with Christ. The second stage will focus on the believer's commitment to Christ. The third stage will focus on the necessary victories of the maturing Christian's life. Then the fourth stage will focus on the faithful and fruitful life of the Christian. The central Bible passages that will be considered are Mark 4:1-20; 1 John 2:12-14; Ephesians 4:11-15; 2 Timothy 3:2; and Acts 2:41-47.

Past and current literature that describes the need for a discipleship program in each congregation will be reviewed. These will include books, articles, and magazines that describe and define how, spiritual maturity, small groups, spiritual health, and ministry relate to discipleship.

The assessment that was chosen focuses on five main purposes of the disciple's life. These purposes are implied in the great commandment (Matt 22) and the great commission of Jesus (Matt 28). These are to evangelize, to nurture, to fellowship, to minister, and to worship or magnify. It is important to note that although this project assesses magnification, it is not addressed as a core intervention on a corporate level in its implementation. Rick Warren is the author of this evaluation. His spiritual SHAPE

material has been used to measure the spiritual health of new members in many congregations. This measurement was done at the beginning and end of the 13-week period of this project.

Current materials that have been used by a few growing “healthy” churches have been studied to help in the development of the program of assimilating, equipping, and mobilizing the new members.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Two concepts can be looked at to help develop a theology of discipleship: that of becoming a disciple *of* Christ and that of making disciples *for* Christ. The call of Christ on the sinner's life leads to spiritual transformation as he becomes more like Him. On the other hand, obeying the command of the Master to "make disciples" fulfills His commission to transform the lives of others (Matt 28:20). He is now called a branch of the True Vine because he bears much fruit, and his status as a true disciple is confirmed (John 15:8).

The concepts of discipleship resonate throughout the Bible. From the Old Testament patriarch Abraham, who mentored his son Isaac (Gen), to Moses, who mentored Joshua and the Israelites (Exod to Deut), to Samuel, who mentored a school of prophets (1 Sam), to John the Baptist and his radical disciples (Matthew to John), to Jesus and His disciples (Matt to John), and to the apostles and the early church of the New Testament (Acts and the Epistles), the Bible is replete with models and examples of discipleship.

There Old Testament has several examples of discipleship. A father mentors his son (Gen 18:19) or a leader passing on the principles of success to his chosen successor (Deut 31:14; Josh 1:1) The prophet Isaiah also spoke of at least a group of disciples (Isa

8:16), even though it excludes the details, methods, and structures used to accomplish discipleship.

In the New Testament, the example of Jesus and His disciples gives us much information on how discipleship happened. The majority of this information can be found in the four Gospels. They can help us to understand discipleship then and apply the principles to our lives and to churches today. Like a king, Jesus summons everyone to follow Him with a commitment that requires giving up all, even life itself (Matt 10:38; 16:24). These disciples did all they could to follow Jesus, the Servant King (Lunde, 2010).

The need to look at this topic in depth comes out of Jesus' Great Commission to His disciples, who became the leaders of the early New Testament Church. Here He commanded His followers to "go and make disciples of all peoples" (Matt 28:19-20). The book of Acts documents how the church was formed around Jesus' mission mandate (Acts 1 & 2). A study of the Gospels, the book of Acts, and the Epistles to the churches, gives us further insights on how to become and how to make disciples.

A Biblical-Historical Look at Discipleship

A theology of discipleship finds its roots both in the Old and New Testaments. The English word disciple normally designates a "follower," "adherent," or "student" of a great master, religious leader, or teacher (Merriam Webster, 2003). It refers to one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another. Disciple is the word used most commonly to translate the Greek word *mathētēs* and the Hebrew words *talmid* and *limmūd* (Green, Knight, & Marshall, 1992, p. 176).

We must be careful to note that the Greek word for “disciple” does not carry with it the idea that that person who is named a disciple is necessarily a saved person. The word does not contain any implications of salvation. A person may learn something from someone else and yet not put that knowledge into practice or make it a part of his life. John 6:66, in its context, is an example of an unsaved disciple. In Matthew 10:1, the gospel according to Matthew gives a fitting illustration of saved (the eleven) and unsaved (Judas) disciples. The word merely refers to one who puts himself under the teaching of someone else and learns from him. The verb is found in Matt 13:52 (instructed); 27:57; 28:19 (teach); Acts 14:21 (taught) (Wuest, 1997).

The New Testament Emphasis

This project places a greater emphasis on the meaning and practice of discipleship in the New Testament than that which is found in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, the word disciple, μαθητής always implies the existence of a personal attachment which shapes the whole life of the one, described “as μαθητής, and which in its particularity leaves no doubt as to who is deploying the formative power” (Kittel, 1964). The disciples of Jesus demonstrated this when they said to Jesus, “Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). Jesus Himself highlighted His authority over His disciples at his Last Supper, when He said to Peter, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me” (John 13:8).

The word disciple, μαθητής, means more in the New Testament (NT) than a mere pupil or learner. It is an adherent who accepts the instruction given to him and makes it his rule of conduct, e.g., the disciples of John (Matt 11:2; Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; 7:18;

John 3:25); and the disciples of the Pharisees (Mark 2:18). In John 9:28, the Pharisees told the healed blind man, “Thou art his disciple; but we are Moses’ disciples.” Jesus had disciples in the sense that they believed and made His teaching the basis of their conduct (Matt 5:1; 9:19; 14:22; Luke 14:26, 27, 33; John 9:27; 15:8) (Zodhiates, 2000). Though the word has several applications, in the widest sense it refers to those who accept the teachings of anyone, not only in belief, but in life. However, Jesus had an authority that was previously unknown (Matt 7:28; Mark 1:22, 27; Luke 4:32; John 7:46). Thus, μαθητής in the context of His ministry took on a meaning that cannot be merely deduced from the word itself (Balz & Schneider, 1990, p. 372).

The use of the word “disciple” to refer to followers of Christ has its emphasis mostly in the Gospels and the book of Acts. All 261 references in the NT are found in those books. The larger portion of the usage clearly lies in the Gospels, inasmuch as only 10% of the references occur in Acts (Freedman, 1996, p. 1091). Although the word occurs infrequently outside the Gospels and Acts, it would be a mistake to think that the idea of discipleship is either absent or less dominant in the remainder of the NT. Rather, though the idea of following Jesus is by no means absent, it focuses more on being united to Him (1 Pet 2:21–23).

As Christ called His disciples both to self-denial (Mark 8:34) and to follow His example (John 12:26), so Paul wrote of the need for those who are in Christ to mortify their old nature and to yield themselves to God in consecrated obedience (Rom 8:13). As Christ taught His disciples to pray (Luke 11:2), so Paul and the other disciples insisted on the need for prayer (1 Thess 5:17). Yet, while the Gospels refer to “disciples,” the apostles refer to those who are “saints” (1 Cor 1:2), “the called” (Eph 4:4), “in Christ” (2

Cor 5:17), “pilgrims” (1 Pet 2:11), and “servants” (1 Pet 2:16). This variety of expression is evidence of the richness of the idea of discipleship in the full NT conception (Elwell & Beitzel, 1988).

Jesus’ method involved choosing twelve disciples to teach them the ways of God (Matt 3). From Matthew to Revelation, we read of the impact this approach to discipleship has made. After Jesus’ death and resurrection, this matter of discipleship continued to be one of the central focuses of the early church (Acts 2:41-47). Hence, the term “disciple” is also used in the book of Acts to describe believers, those who confess Christ. They wanted to replicate the method of discipleship that Jesus left them. This was done with much success (Acts 2-4). Though they have not been directly called by Christ Himself, such disciples are called by Christ spiritually, through the message delivered by the first disciples. The disciples that Jesus called after His ascension are not in any sense inferior to the first disciples, even though they are less privileged. “It was proper for early Christians to be called disciples of Jesus of Nazareth or simply ‘the disciples’ (Acts 6:1–2, 7; 9:36; 11:26) because they were carrying on the teaching of Jesus and living the life he had exemplified” (Elwell & Comfort, 2001).

Becoming a Disciple

In Jesus’ ministry, “being” has always taken precedence over “doing.” For example, He called on His disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit so that they could be empowered to be witnesses before they could consider doing witnessing (Acts 1:4-8). From first to last, Jesus’ mission then has always been about saving the lost (Luke 19:10). In fact, in His longest recorded prayer Jesus prayed specifically for His disciples that

none of them would be lost (John 17:12). Jesus prayed that the disciples would be “set apart” for God and His purposes by the truth (v. 17). His emphasis then was that His disciples would all be saved. This can only happen when they have a relationship with God. Jesus says follow me and I will make you fish for people (Matt 4:19). He was interested first and foremost in changing their lives. “By the transforming agency of His grace, the image of God is reproduced in the disciple; he becomes a new creature” (White, 1973).

Knowing God is the key element in effective discipleship, which results in eternal life (v. 3). The essence of what Jesus did for His followers was to convince them that He was a true reflection of the Father (John 17:7). Jesus’ commission to the disciples was an extension of God’s commission of Himself (17:18). As imitators of their Master, the Son of God, the disciples would become Jesus’ representatives (Hughes, & Laney, 2001). As a result, Jesus suggested at least seven basic essentials for becoming a true disciple of His. One must make Him pre-eminent in their life (Luke 14:26-33); be guided by His Word (John 8:31); say no to the old nature (Luke 9:23); live a life of self-sacrifice (Luke 9:23; 14:26-27, 33); obey Christ’s commands (John 15:8-13); actively love each other (13:34-35); and reproduce as disciples (15:8, 16). This will result in a spiritually transformed life.

Spiritual Transformation and Discipleship

At the very heart of the call of Jesus to discipleship is the goal for the spiritual transformation of the lives of the disciples. Discipleship is seen by many to be inseparable from spiritual transformation. When a person accepts Christ, the Spirit of

God begins the transforming process in that person's life so that they can become more and more like Christ (Weaver-Zercher & Willimon, 2005). The transformation is evident in the call of fishermen to become fishers of men (Matt 4:19). Sheldrake (2007) agrees with Weaver-Zercher and William when he suggested that discipleship and Christian spirituality are one and the same. However, he placed emphasis on the degree to which this transformation takes place in the new believer's life. Sheldrake added that discipleship is not reducible to devotional practices or a set of beliefs, but a complete way of life for the new believer.

Turner (2007) suggested that Jesus highlighted four principles for spiritual transformation. These are love (John 13:34-35; 15:7-17), intimacy (15:4-5; 17:24-26), fellowship (vv. 14-15), and encouragement (Matt 5:1-13; John 14:1-3). This is the process of discovering discipleship through experiencing God, and through a personal walk with Him (John 14:7-9). When this is done, spiritual transformation will have taken place.

Disciples are "Called"

Disciples are called to become sons of God (John 1: 12). The call of anyone to become a disciple is the initiative of Jesus. A fundamental mark of the disciples of Jesus is that they are called by Him to discipleship. This aspect dominates all the gospel accounts of the way in which they began to follow Jesus. Though it is implied, it is not always linguistically clear, in every case when Jesus called a disciple, that they are being called to discipleship. This can be seen when Jesus called Levi (Mark 2:14)), the rich young ruler (10:21), Philip (John 1:43), and when He addressed Peter and Andrew to

“come after me” (Mark 1:17; Matt 4:19). In each case, the challenge Jesus gave is “follow me.” But, materially, every such incident is exclusively marked by the initiative of Jesus (Kittel, 1994).

Jesus called ordinary people that they might accept Him as master (Matt 4:18-20; Mark 3:13). He said to them, “But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, *even* Christ; and all ye are brethren” (Matt 23:80). They were fishermen, tax collectors, and other like men. They all had human failings. They were not considered to be much in the religious world of His day, yet Jesus chose to identify with the least so that He could make them great in the Kingdom of Heaven (5:19). These calls were given with conscious reference to an ulterior end, even apostleship.

Disciples Follow Their Master

In their quest to become like their Master, the disciples had to follow Him. The disciples left their livelihoods and responded to the call. Simon Peter and his brother were fishermen by profession. Immediately, they left their nets and followed Him. Two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John, were mending their nets in the boat with their father Zebedee when Jesus called them. “Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him” (Matt 4:18-22).

Even Matthew, the tax collector, left all for Christ. When the Savior invited Matthew to follow Him, the publican did not stop to think of earthly loss. He considered nothing as profitable to him as discipleship to Christ; and without framing one excuse, without waiting to ask what he should do to obtain a livelihood, he arose and followed Christ (Matt 9:9)

The purpose of their call was made clear to the disciples when Jesus invited them to be with Him. These words show that the great Founder of the faith desired not only to have disciples, but to have about Him men whom He might train to make disciples of others. His words show us and His disciples that He attached supreme importance to that part of His work, which consisted in training the twelve (Bruce, 1995).

The first reason for “following” Jesus was so that the disciples would be with Him (Mark 3:13-14). This association was intended to result in the spiritual transformation of the disciples’ lives. Like the prophet Elisha following Elijah (1 Kgs 19:15-19), the disciples were expected to follow Jesus by going where He went and doing what He did. In this way, Jesus showed them how His life would become the ransom for their lives and for that of the world. “For even the Son of man,” He said, “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Thus, the disciples were expected to sacrifice their lives for the saving of souls for the Kingdom of Heaven. They could only do this if they loved others like Jesus loved them (John 13:34-35; 15:13).

Secondly, following Jesus as their Master meant that He would train them in all things. The specific goal of their calling was that they would be spending time learning *of* Him and *from* Him. Mark’s gospel tells us that Jesus ordained twelve that they should be with Him, to preach, to heal, and to cast out demons (Mark 3:13-15). This did not happen by just following Jesus around, but by intentionally being trained by their Master. He gave them special instructions when He said to them, “Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but unto them that are without, all *these* things are done in parables” (Mark 4:11). Jesus told them that following Him would not be easy.

“Behold,” He said to them, “I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles (Matt 10:16-18).

Jesus’ instructions to His disciples varied widely. There were times when Jesus instructed them publicly, as Matthew highlighted, in His great discourses (5:3-7:27; 10:5-42; 13:3-52; 18:1-35; 23:2-25:46). On each one of those occasions He addressed the disciples specifically, as well as the crowds. Several times Jesus introduced learning situations, as when He told them to provide food for the crowd (Matt 14:16), or puzzled them with an enigmatic statement about the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:6, 15:32; 16:13-14; 19:23-24; 24:2). When others objected to His disciples’ actions, He often times used these as teaching opportunities for His disciples. For example, when they did not fast (9:14-17), and when they plucked grains on the Sabbath (12:1-2). Other times, the disciples themselves asked questions of Jesus (17:10; 18:1; Mark 19:28-29), or reacted to something He said or did (Matt 19:10; 21:20; 26:8-9; 14:15) (Fee, 1996). Luke 24 gives us an idea of how keen Jesus was to ensure that His disciples understood His mission. After His resurrection, Jesus visited with them in the upper room, ate with them to prove He was human, and showed His scars to prove He was the same person. “Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day’” (vv. 45-46). Jesus even visited with Peter privately to confirm his call and conversion and then commissioned him with these words, “Feed my sheep” (21:15-19).

In spite of all that Christ the Master Teacher did to train His twelve disciples, they did not always grasp what Jesus was trying to teach them: Philip did not know that Jesus and the Father were one (John 14:9); Peter did not understand the purpose of His suffering (Matt 16:23); nine disciples could not cast out one demon from a child (Mark 19: 28-29); and Judas eventually betrayed Him (John 18:2). Their training had to be continuous. Discipleship is the work of a lifetime. Thus, we are always disciples of Christ, no matter our level of maturity. One can never say they are fully matured and thus do not need Christ. A disciple is, therefore, always in a maturing state—ever growing, yet never fully grown, ever bearing fruit, but never can he say that he has borne enough.

Disciple-Making

Prior to His ascension to heaven, Jesus commissioned His disciples to get busy making other disciples. The importance of this commission is wrapped up in the fact that all the gospel writers made note of it. “Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations...” (Matt 28:19); “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21); “Go ... and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15 NASB); “Repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached ... beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47); “You will receive power ... you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth” (Acts 1:8 NASB). This is what they were called to be and do (Matt 4:19).

Disciple-Making is a Process

After Jesus called His disciples to be with Him and to follow Him, He started the process of showing them how to witness like He did. Jesus mentored them into becoming

productive citizens of the Kingdom of God and then He commanded them to do the same for others. It took some time, as Jesus worked with them gradually. "He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness" (Matt 10:1). This is the first mission of the twelve without Jesus. They were on their own; Jesus was not looking over their shoulders. Hull (2007) stated that "the disciples' judgment, words, courage, and ability had to bring God's power to bear on human need. Indeed, they had to do more than just declare that they were disciples; they had to practice their faith and seek to perfect it."

Fruit-bearing is evidence that a tree is worthwhile or that a branch is worth keeping (John 15:2). Yet, it takes significant time for the tree or the branch to mature. In John 15, the apostle John paints an interesting picture of discipleship, where Jesus stated, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples (v. 8). Jesus made it clear that fruit-bearing is synonymous with discipleship.

Jesus added further that His disciples are "ordained" by Him, that they "should go and bring forth fruit" (v. 16). According to one Bible scholar, Vincent (2002), "Should go" (ὁπάγητε) means that the disciple should *withdraw* from his personal society and go out into the world. Thus, a disciple is a missionary. Vincent further suggested that the word used for ordain is better translated "appointed" (ἐθήκα [ethēka]). He noted that there are three present active subjunctives with ἵνα [hina] (purpose clause) to emphasize continuance (ὁπάγητε [hupagēte], keep on going, φερητε [pherēte], keep on bearing fruit, μενῇ [menēi], keep on abiding), not a mere spurt, but permanent growth and fruit-bearing (Robertson, 1997). A disciple of Christ is indeed expected to bear much fruit (v. 8).

Making Disciples Within a Structure

Jesus had a discipleship structure for teaching and applying the principles He taught. First, He *showed* them the power and principles of the kingdom of God (Luke 4:18-20; John 8:45-47; Luke 24:19; John 14:9-11). Secondly, He *shaped* their understanding on becoming mature citizens of His kingdom (Matt 5-7; Matt 13; Mark 9:28-29; Luke 11:1). Third, He *supported* their progress as ministers of the kingdom of God (Mark 3:13-15; John 6:66-69; John 14:8-9; Luke 24:44-48). Finally, He *sent* them on a mission to multiply disciples for His kingdom (Matt 28:18-20).

Jesus seemed to have had a relational structure within His discipleship process where He spent more time with some of His disciples more than others. First, He had the three disciples who were given greater privileges with Him than others (Matt 17:1; Mark 13:3; 14:23; Luke 8:51). They were Peter, James, and John, two of whom later became the primary leaders after His ascension (Acts 3:1; 4:19; 8:14). Then there was the full group of twelve disciples, who later became the twelve apostles (Matt 10:2; 11:1; 20:17; Luke 6:13; 22:14; Rev 21:14). The next group was made up of seventy followers, who He sent out in groups of two “before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come” (Luke 10:1). This group of disciples (though not officially called disciples) “returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name” (v. 17).

Then there was also a group numbering 120 disciples, whom Peter addressed to get a replacement for Judas after the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 1:15). Peter described them as men “which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken

up from us” (vv. 21-22). Then there was the crowd of 500 brethren who saw Him all at once after His resurrection (1 Cor 15:6). All these were disciples of Jesus.

Small Groups

It is obvious, then, that small groups formed a significant part of Jesus’ structure for training of His disciples. The gospels reveal that the group Jesus worked with most was the group of twelve, followed by the group of three. This highlights how valuable small groups were in the process of discipleship. So much so that, as the disciples begun the “early church,” they started to meet from house to house in small groups (Acts 2:41-47).

Disciples Make Other Disciples

Concepts of Christianity that make of conversion and salvation a simple assent to faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior—important though that be—omit a most important part of the gospel commission. It is fully as important to teach men to observe the things Christ has commanded as it is to baptize (Nichol, 1980). Baptism, then, merely marks the beginning of the disciple’s new life. That person is only a newborn at baptism. He or she must therefore be mentored to worship, fellowship, minister, and evangelize others; using spiritual gifts, abilities, personality, experience, knowledge, understanding, and calling at every stage of their growth to build up the kingdom of God.

When Jesus gave the great commission to His disciples, the goal, the process, and the assurances were very clear. First, it was given with a divine authority, mandate, and backing. Jesus commanded His disciples, “Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations...” (Matt 28:19). When Jesus said to His disciples “go,” He also told them what

to do when they go - “make disciples.” The word Μαθητεύσατε, to make disciples, suggests an intentional goal. This was to be the primary work of the disciples who were sent to continue His mission.

The imperative aorist μαθητεύσατε is, as it were, decomposed by the two following present participles, “baptizing” and “teaching.” The new disciples are admitted into the Christian society by baptism, and then instructed in faith and duty (Spence-Jones, 2004). In this way, Jesus built up the kingdom of God through the practice of disciple-multiplication that would make a present and enduring impact on the earth (Matt 4:17; Acts 1:8). They became the foundation teachers of the newly emerging Christian Church (Elwell & Comfort, 2001). Their authority in the church, given by Christ (Matt 16:19; 28:16–20), was to be characterized by a unique style of self-giving service (Luke 22:24–30).

Second, the Great Commission set the disciples in motion for action (Matt 28:18–20). Jesus said, “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth” (v. 18). The word power (ἐξουσία) is better translated authority. When Jesus made this astounding claim, “He spoke as one already in heaven with a world-wide outlook and with the resources of heaven at his command. His authority or power in his earthly life had been great (7:29; 11:27; 21:23.). Now it is boundless and includes earth and heaven” (Robertson, 1997). The disciples of God now had heaven’s resources at their disposal. In Acts 3, as Peter and John healed a lame man they made reference to the name of Jesus as the Source of their healing power (v. 6).

The process for making disciples after Christ’s ascension was made very clear to the apostles. Jesus emphasized two main things; “baptizing” (identifying believers with a

local assembly), and “teaching” (laying the foundation for spiritual transformation and maturity) (Hughes & Laney, 2001). Just as the teachings of Jesus were comprehensive, creative, and powerful, the disciples had to be the same. All that they had learned they were expected to impart to others. Pentecost was a typical fulfillment of some of this (Acts 2). In Acts 4, the disciples boldly witnessed for Christ (vv. 19-20).

Third, Jesus gave assurances of His presence. “I am with you always,” He said, “even unto the end of the world.” Jesus would fulfill His name, “Immanuel,” meaning “God with us,” by being present with His people through the work of the Holy Spirit “even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:20; Acts 1:1–8; 2:1–4). He had already assured them of His authority (Matt 28:18); now He assures them of His presence (v. 20). Seeking the presence of God and living in His presence are priorities for the disciples of Jesus.

In the “Name”

When translated correctly, εἰς τὸ ὄνομα, means “*into* the name.” Baptizing *into* the name means baptizing into *union* or *communion with*, as in Romans 6:3, “baptized *into* Christ Jesus; *into* his death;” i.e., we are brought by baptism into fellowship with His death. Εἰς, *into*, is the preposition commonly used with *baptize*. See Acts 8:16; 19:3, 5; 1 Corinthians 1:13, 15; 10:2; Galatians 3:27. In Acts 2:38, however, Peter says, “Be baptized *upon* (ἐπὶ) the name of Jesus Christ (Vincent, 2002). The disciples did not represent themselves after Christ’s ascension; they always represented their Master (Acts 3:6).

Discipleship and the Early Church

The beginning of the outworking of the Great Commission is seen in the activities of the generation that first received it. Peter's procedure at Pentecost was evangelistic preaching, then baptism and teaching (Acts 2:41–42). The approach of Paul seen in Acts 14:21–23 is evangelism in order to “make disciples” (the only use of *mathēteuō* outside Matt). Then he instructed the disciples (*mathētai*) and organized them into churches. Such examples imply that the apostles understood that Christ's church (Matt 16:18) was to be built up by making disciples of all nations throughout the age (Matt 28:19–20) (Freedman, 1996, p. 1091).

The word church (ἐκκλησία) is a compound word in which ἐκ means *out* and καλέω, to *call* or *summon*. In Christ's words to Peter, the word ἐκκλησία acquires special emphasis to distinguish it from the Jewish synagogues of which *synagogue* is a transcription; σύν, together, ἄγω, to *bring* (Acts 13:43). The Christian community in the midst of Israel would be designated as ἐκκλησία, without being confused with the συναγωγή, the Jewish community (Vincent, 2002). Though the general use of the word “church” is somewhat disconnected from its actual meaning, one may suggest that it fits into the concept of Christ's teaching on discipleship, for the disciples are all called by Christ (Mark 3:13).

According to Luke, the members of the early church were known as disciples (Acts 6:1, and frequently thereafter). This makes it clear that the earthly disciples of Jesus formed the nucleus of the church and that the pattern of the relationship between Jesus and His earthly disciples was constitutive of the relationship between the risen Lord and the members of His church (Marshall, Millard, Packer, & Wiseman, 1996).

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul refers to believers in Christ not as disciples, but as those who have faith—transforming faith. “And be not conformed to this world,” He said, “but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom 12:2). In first and second Corinthians and in Philippians, he taught that believers should desire to become imitators of Christ. Paul declared, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also *am* of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). The word translated follow, μιμέομαι, means “to imitate.” This refers to one who imitates someone else—“imitator, one who does what others do.” μιμηταί μου γίνεσθε “be my imitators” (1 Cor 11:1) (Hawthorne, 1993).

Implications for the Church Today

The disciple of Christ today may be described as one who believes His doctrines, rests upon His sacrifice, imbibes His spirit, and imitates His example. The making of disciples, then, must be the primary focus of the church. In every church, growing people for the Kingdom of God must precede all things. Such spiritual growth is therefore the all-encompassing result of true discipleship.

On the other hand, a modern intellectual in this field, Michael W. Foss (2000), focuses on how the church can become more structured for greater discipleship. In order to have effective discipleship, Foss sees the pastor’s role shifting from caregiver to leader, and the members shifting from being maintained to being mobilized to ministry. This would result in decentralizing ministry in the church. Foss does not dispute that disciples need to sacrifice all, but he focuses on how church members can become better disciples.

White (1942) gives good counsel. “Let the teachers lead the way in working among the people, and others, uniting with them, will learn from their example.” One example is worth more than many precepts. Knight chided the ministers for doing most of the work in the churches. Knight said, “Ministers should not do the work which belongs to the church, thus wearying themselves and preventing others from performing their duty. They should teach the members how to labor in the church and in the community” (2005).

Small Groups and Spiritual Maturity

A very important aspect of small group and spiritual maturity is that it helps to develop leaders. Hertless (2010) joins this discussion by placing emphasis on discipleship through small groups as a power of the church that has been neglected for far too long. He used Jesus’ example as the model. Jesus chose twelve and worked with them faithfully for three years. This model of Jesus would certainly help the church to produce many more leaders who are so needed in our churches today. Putman (2010) posited that small groups are not about closing the back door or building relationships, but as conduits for real discipleship, which includes real teaching. Jesus was called Teacher (John 3:2). A few years after Jesus, the apostle Paul was also called teacher (2 Tim 1:11). It may be fitting, then, to conclude that teaching is a primary role of the discipling process. This function can be easily fulfilled in small groups.

Conclusion

Discipleship is necessary for success in life. It involves teaching, training, and leadership. Parents, teachers, and businesses need to administer discipleship for future

progress. It leads to transition from one generation to another and one group to another. Discipleship is about progress. Jesus' model of discipleship placed all these principles in the context of the Kingdom (Matt 24:14). He was intentional about calling others to be a part of His kingdom. Thus, He personally called all His disciples and trained them for service (Matt 4:19; John 6:7). His plan was to make sinners into citizens of the Kingdom of God (Luke 6:20). He therefore instructed them and watched them grow for about three years.

There are several principles that helped them to grow. Disciples grow spiritually because they stay in love with Christ (Matt 22:37), love the people of God (John 15:17), are teachable (Matt 28:20), serve others (Mark 3:14-15), and win others for Christ (Acts 13:47-49).

Not only are disciples made, but they are expected to make other disciples (Matt 28:18-20). This is the ultimate goal of discipleship. This is the evidence of true disciples who are interested in carrying forward the Gospel of Christ. This is the area that the early church focused on and, as a result, they grew from 3,000 on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) to 5,000 a few days later (Acts 4:4).

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE RELATING TO DISCIPLESHIP AND SMALL GROUPS

Christian leaders vary in their views and definition of discipleship. However, the current trend for many scholars and practitioners is to view discipleship as the transformation of a person's whole life into one that is more like Christ. Discipleship is being seen less and less as a ministry, a program, or a church activity. Pastors today therefore need to see discipleship as a spiritual life process and not as a spiritual product of seminars and workshops. Malphurs (2006) sees disciples as learners, committed believers, ministers, or converts who have agreed to make Christ the Lord of their lives. Here is a question that needs to be answered: What are some of the essentials for successful discipleship in the local church? This chapter will begin to answer this question through a review of current literature from 2001-2011 that offers direction for developing a discipleship structure within the congregation.

For many years, our churches in the Caribbean have seen many significant additions of members through public evangelism. They have mastered the art of getting people baptized. Unfortunately, many of the persons who have been baptized are not disciplined and, as a result, leave the church very soon after their baptism. Several programs have been tried, but much more investment is needed to create a strong discipling structure within the church. There are many churches around the world that

have had similar struggles with the discipling of members. This is why a significant portion of literature on discipleship has been written over the past ten years.

The majority of literature on discipleship issues that have been written during this time period focused on one of five primary subtopics. These are spiritual maturity, small groups, spiritual transformation, ministry, and church health. Thus, this chapter will be structured around a review of literature on discipleship in relation to these five areas.

The matter of discipleship is one of the central themes of the Bible, thus it is incumbent upon us to give a biblical overview of what the Bible says about discipleship. The concepts of discipleship resonate throughout the Bible. From the patriarch Abraham, who mentored his son Isaac, to Moses, who mentored Joshua, to Samuel, who mentored a school of prophets, to Jesus and His disciples and the early church of the New Testament. The Bible is replete with models and examples of discipleship.

However, these examples do not come with very detailed descriptions. From that of a father mentoring his son, to that of a leader passing on the principles of success to that of his chosen successor. A typical example of this is Abraham and his son Isaac. Abraham took his son with him to the mountaintop and there he taught him spiritual lessons (Gen 22). Most prominent, though, is the suggestion that Jethro gave to his son-in-law Moses to divide the people into small groups (Exod 18). This would result in better management and mentoring. Moses not only divided his workload among the people, but he went on to mentor Joshua as his successor (Exod 24:12). Discipleship could be seen then as including succession leadership.

In the New Testament, Jesus was the greatest exponent of discipleship. The example of Jesus and His disciples gives us much information that can help us. Like a

king, He summons all to follow Him with a commitment that requires giving up all, even life itself (Matt 10:38; 16:24). These disciples did all they could to follow Jesus, the Servant King (Lunde, 2010).

Jesus' method involved choosing twelve disciples to teach them the ways of God (Matt 3). From Matthew to Revelation, we read of the impact this approach to discipleship has made. After Jesus left, this matter of discipleship continued to be one of the central foci of the early church (Acts 2:41-47). They wanted to replicate the method of discipleship that Jesus left them. This was done with much success (Acts 2-4).

Many churches over the years have sought to replicate, augment, or adopt portions of Jesus' method of discipleship. They have approached it in different ways, emphasized different things, and have actually defined it differently. This has led to a big debate that is seeking to help us understand God's plan for His followers. Some suggest it can be done best with house churches, while others believe that it should be small groups within a congregation (Stetzer & Dodson, 2007); others argue for a one-on-one approach (Herman, 2008). And then there are those who say that the church should be structured to use many methods and facets to ensure that proper discipleship takes place for all who are baptized (Craig, 2010). A few of these approaches and understandings will be looked at in this project.

On the other hand, Foss (2000) focuses on how the church can become more structured for greater discipleship. In order to have effective discipleship, Foss sees the pastor's role shifting from caregiver to leader, and the members shifting from being maintained to being mobilized to ministry. This would result in decentralizing ministry in

the church. Foss does not dispute that disciples need to sacrifice all, but he focuses on how the church can become better disciples.

Barna (2001b) agrees with Foss when he used his sociological research to demonstrate the absence of real disciple-making in the evangelical church in America. However, his definition of discipleship is more mechanical, including things like taking a spiritual growth class or participating in an online Christian chat group as possible models. Barna does not place great emphasis on spiritual transformation, which is at the core of discipleship. At its heart it is a living relationship with Christ that the disciple should seek to emulate; one that would result in the disciple giving himself in his loving service to the Master (Sanders, 2007).

In fact, even the person who is modeling or teaching others to become disciples has to make some hard decisions at times. Hybels (2009) sets out to show that when the human laws of leadership and the scriptural demands of discipleship collided, Jesus always decided on the side of discipleship every time. Discipleship, then, is one of the core reasons why leaders exist. It is Spirit-led.

Spiritual Maturity

Many modern Christian scholars and leaders have seen spiritual maturity as the primary goal of discipleship. They believe that any attempt at true worship will always lead believers to spiritual maturity (Stetzer & Dodson, 2007). These authors suggest a variety of approaches and methods to Christian maturity. Some of these approaches have their challenges. Enell O. Hall in his research, discovered that the primary challenge to spiritual maturity is when the church does not meet the felt needs of the members (1999).

This is very true. Too often our churches focus on plans and activities that have worked for 50 years but are not current. Since 1984, research has been done to show that the more people connect with the church in ways that they can relate to, the more likely they are to grow and stay in the church (W. Arn & Arn, 1984).

A significant proportion of writers focus on the process of discipleship that leads towards Christian maturity. These include authors such as Bill Hull, Gary McIntosh, and Rick Warren. Then there is also theological research done by persons such as YongBo Lee, Waldie N. Nuefeld, and Matthew Blake Judkins. Though they differ on the content and duration of the process of discipleship, they all agree that effective discipleship cannot happen without an intentionally structured process.

For example, Warren (2004) sees this as a gradual, progressive, and life-long process. McIntosh (2003), on the other hand, sees the process through the fulfillment of three stages: evangelism, assimilation, and maturation. Judkins (2010), in his research, had three stages in his process as well. However, he called them believe, belong, and become. Lee (2009), in his research, looked at John Wesley's four-step process of discipleship as a good model to follow. The steps are: a) Preventing Grace: Coming; b) Justifying Grace: Encountering; c) Sanctifying Grace: Discipleship; and d) Perfecting Grace: Reproduction.

Some authors seem to suggest that spiritual maturity is a goal to be achieved. They see it as more than just a process that believers go through. It is a goal or a product to be achieved. Frazee, Crabb, Gallup, and Willard (2001) look at spiritual maturity as the counter to the modern day consumerism, individualism, and isolation. In their view, the church helps the spiritually matured Christian connect to a common purpose, common

place, and common possession. When we look at Frazee et al's. summation, we must ask ourselves whether if that is really all there is to spiritual maturity. For there are, indeed, many persons who, through discipline, have accomplished those said goals.

Others argue over the nature of discipleship. Is it a product we achieve, or is it a process of growth we go through? Is it a place we arrive at, or is it a never-ending journey that we are on? This idea of discipleship as process or product seems to have been an age-old argument. One of the great historical proponents of discipleship has always argued for spiritual maturity as a product. Arnold and Nouwen (1994) see spiritual maturity as first being a zealot for Christ and then producing zealots for Christ. For them, both are intrinsically tied—being and doing. Warren (1995), from the same era as Arnold and Nouwen, argued that there are many keys to discipleship. He sees the fulfilling of these keys resulting in individual spiritual health, which eventually leads to a spiritually healthy church. Even earlier than these authors and leaders, the renowned Bible scholar Eims (1978) posited that making disciples is about multiplying leaders. In order for us to be a witness, we need to be constantly training others.

Other authors took different emphases in their arguments about spiritual maturity. Moon (2009) argued against what he called the modern evangelicals, who believe that it is all about soul winning. For him, it is more about being than doing. Hull (2007) added that spiritual maturity happens best when the pastors see it as their duty to train others to be like them. Unlike most other professions that just provide a professional service, pastors not only serve but also train others to be like themselves. Pastors can be seen, then, as models and mentors. Most pastors should be aware of these roles, but may not practice them to the same degree.

Many years before, well known professor of mission and church growth, Donald McGavran promoted a similar view to that of Hull's. McGavran placed emphasis on post-baptismal care (1990). Without proper care and intentional teaching from church leaders, the new believers in our churches can generally become stagnated. They lack the knowledge and relationships that they need to help them grow (Putman, 2010). New believers need a strong spiritual relationship in order to mature the way they should.

Frazee et al. (2001) continued the debate on spiritual maturity, but placed emphasis on true worship as the key. They see preaching and praising God as major faith building factors, which would lead to obedience to Him. This has been a long held view by some world-renowned evangelists, such as Robert Coleman, Billy Graham, Paul S. Rees (1993). Hull (2004) sees this as fitting into the primary plan of the church, which is to develop other men and women into disciples.

Another major spiritual maturity element is the building of the disciple's faith in God. Faith building will always lead to greater resistance against the enemy. No wonder Ogden (2003) argues passionately that Satan is delighted when the church does not make it its priority to grow people to maturity. Therefore, one must agree that the least the church can do is to develop a curriculum for disciple making (McDonald, 2007). In this way, ordinary people like Jesus used as His first disciples can and will do extraordinary deeds for their Master (Koessler, 2003). Johnson (2010), in his research, suggested very strongly that memorization of scriptures actually helps in spiritual growth. His research showed that those who participated in the memorization exercises demonstrated significant improvement in spiritual interest and discipline.

Though many see the value of a discipleship curriculum, world-renowned proponent of discipleship, Bonhoeffer (1959), would not settle for a mere discipleship curriculum. Instead, he sees the call to discipleship as one that requires a bodily sacrifice, as believers seek to follow their Master, Jesus Christ. Like Bonhoeffer, Christian (2000) also views discipleship from the perspective of sacrifice. One must sacrifice all and commit all to Jesus. He points to a revolutionary call that costs us our family. We must “hate” our families if we are to become true disciples. Christian is not recommending that we have hatred for our parents, but that we love Christ enough to choose Him above our parents.

Sanders (2007a) re-echoed these sentiments about discipleship when he mentioned that Jesus did not tell us that discipleship is thrilling and exciting, but costly, with difficulties and challenges. Sanders (2007b) reiterated this point further by stating that the life of discipleship is a life of obedience. Obeying God may lead us to make very difficult choices in life. This is indeed what a disciple’s call entails. Obedience may lead us to make many sacrifices.

A spiritual maturity program within the church should call for churches giving it their full focus. Hull (2006) suggested that all churches must commit to being and making disciples as their central act. This resonates from the Great Commission of Jesus (Matt 28:19-20). All true disciples should desire to be like their Lord and Master and they should be obedient to their Master’s biddings. These two characteristics, though not emphasized by Hull, are quite clearly laid out in the Bible. Jesus asked His disciples to become witnesses before they do witnessing. First of all, they had to be filled with the

Holy Spirit so that they could rightly represent their Lord and Savior in their life (Luke 24:44-47; Acts 1:8). Then they are ready to do witnessing for their Master.

Small Groups and Discipleship

We now look at structures that help in making disciples. One of the discipleship tools that have been used for many years is small groups. Jesus Himself chose twelve disciples and trained them to become more like Him (Matt 3). There are a wide variety of small groups that have been used for many years to fulfill this purpose. Some of the most popular are cell groups, evangelism groups, LTGs, simple church, and holistic small groups. Others include home groups, house churches, community groups, neighborhood churches, and home fellowships. According to world-renowned Christian researcher Barna (2011), close to one-quarter of adults are currently involved in such an assembly across the United States. Most churches, though, may not have mastered small groups, yet they have seen the biblical value of this method of discipleship, which contributes to a significant increase in adult attendance to many of our church services today.

Small groups have become such a prominent fixture in many churches today that some persons see this as the way that God designed the church to operate. T. Dale, Dale, and Barna (2011) stated that the Holy Spirit is leading the churches today in this direction. Others go as far as to suggest that churches are becoming smaller before they can become bigger; they are shrinking before they can grow (Simson & Barna, 2009). Thus, bigger is not necessarily better or more beautiful. Growth might be considered qualitative and not just quantitative. How do the home cells affect the theory that small is

better? Should not they work together as opposed to one or the other? Should not the small groups work within or with big groups and vice versa?

The home cell argument has been around for decades and placed a different emphasis on discipleship. Comiskey (2002) studied the cell-church movement as exemplified by Paul Yonggi Cho's church in Korea. He identified eight other huge cell-churches and did a survey of the cell leaders as a basis for his book. Most of the leaders expected their cell groups to double and multiply in six to 12 months. Leadership development goes forward in each cell as existing leaders train assistant leaders. The central church leadership typically adds a leadership class of several weeks to a year in length, although with the longer programs, the students are already leading groups during most of the training. The cell-church model is being adopted by a growing number of large churches in America. The model assumes extremely rapid growth. This mechanical approach by Comiskey, though it does not deny the need for a spiritual approach, places emphasis on structure and multiplication.

There are those who focus on small group benefits and structure to show how they help in discipleship. Small groups help to foster biblical community, which exudes the presence, purpose, and power of God (Stetzer & Dodson, 2007). Park's (2010) research has indicated that even the environment fostered by small groups is a major benefit to the participant. It gives them the necessary skills and training needed for ministry as well. Putman was very frank when he added that discipleship happens best in small groups, for it is the best way to get people into relationships (2010).

Small groups also help to foster loving relationships. We have already established that not all small groups do the same thing. Thus, it is fitting to conclude that they do not

play the same role in discipleship. Layer (2009), in his research, made a comparison between Triad Discipleship Groups (LDG) and Life Transformation Groups (LTG). Here he concluded that LTGs are much better for spiritual discovery and for building a balanced relationship with God and neighbor. Augsburger (2006) agrees with this emphasis on small groups. He sees small groups as a medium by which one finds self-discovery, a loving relationship with God, and loving relationships with neighbors. This he sees as the ultimate measure of spiritual maturity (p. 189).

Others suggest that the main contribution of small groups to discipleship is that of creating fellowship with other believers. Searcy and Thomas (2008) suggest that this is God's plan for the church. Since the start of the Christian Church, Christians have gathered in large groups and in small groups for discipleship, fellowship, worship, evangelism, and ministry (Acts 2:46-47). Park (2010), in his research, showed how when a small group tries to build community with the whole group as against a few in the group, the group becomes a more caring unit. They serve each other better because most of the activities they carried out were done as a collective unit.

Small groups offer the opportunity for hands-on learning. Thus, it is one of the preferred tools for discipleship. It is one of the better ways to take advantage of the in-the-field experiences. This is a learning format which is the method that Jesus used most for teaching His twelve disciples (Willis, 2008). Donahue (2009) agrees with Willis when he suggests that the one who is not willing to serve is not fit to lead because ministry and service are the words that characterize leadership. The disciples were always with Jesus, observing what He did and listening to His instructions.

Spiritual Transformation and Discipleship

Another very important aspect of discipleship that has been discussed in this literature is spiritual transformation. Discipleship is seen by many to be inseparable from spiritual transformation. When a person accepts Christ, the Spirit of God begins the transforming process in that person's life so that he or she can become more and more like Christ (Weaver-Zercher & William H. Willimon, 2005). Shelgrake (2007) agrees with Weaver-Zercher and William when he suggests that discipleship and Christian spirituality are one and the same. However, he placed emphasis on the degree to which this transformation takes place in the new believer's life. Shelgrake said that discipleship is not reducible to devotional practices or a set of beliefs, but a complete way of life for the believer.

On the other hand, there are those who see discipleship and spirituality as two different things. Augsburger (2006) sought to make what seems to be a strange distinction between the two. He argues that spirituality focuses on the inner desires and effects for the godly life, but discipleship focuses on the outward and actual expressions of the godly life. A. Hirsch and Hirsch (2010) also agree with Augsburger in that they also made a distinction between discipleship and spirituality. However, the difference is that they describe spirituality as something that exists within the context of discipleship. So, a part of discipleship is spirituality. Spirituality functions within the context of the disciple's life. It is not discipleship, just one of its many facets.

Pettit (2008) agrees that there is a difference between the two activities. Unlike the two sources above, where one views discipleship and spiritual transformation as just different and the other who sees spiritual transformation as part of the discipleship

process, Pettit sees spiritual transformation as a much broader concept than discipleship. For him, discipleship is a tutoring process, whereas spiritual transformation is the process by which God brings us to spiritual maturity. In other words, everything involved in the process of Christian maturity is spiritual transformation. This means, then, that discipleship is part of spiritual transformation. Paul seems to have enforced this view in 2 Corinthians 3:18, where he speaks of how God transformed the believer into the image of Christ. The question one may need to ask here is whether this is not also the goal of discipleship as it is for spiritual transformation (Matt 3:18). It is difficult to see that they are not one and the same thing.

Spiritual transformation has a lot to do with the care of the soul. Peterson, Lyster, Sharon, and Santucci (1997) argue that biblical spirituality has to do with the attention we give to our soul. It removes the attention from us and places it on Jesus. It is only by having such a focus that we can really experience true biblical spirituality. This idea is not much different from Pettit's view, but Peterson et al. does give a comparative view between discipleship and spirituality. Then we see Peterson making a similar definition of discipleship as he and his colleagues had done of spiritual transformation. Here he describes discipleship as the process of paying more and more attention to God's righteousness and less and less attention to our own (2000, p. 133). So again we see him suggesting that the attention shifts from ourselves to that of Jesus in order for us to have the spiritual growth that we desire. No wonder, Jesus began His ministry declaring that those who want to be a part of His kingdom need to repent (Putman & Stetzer, 2008).

Then there are others who seek to suggest steps, principles, or spiritual disciplines that would aid in spiritual transformation. Christian educator, Wilhoit (2008) shares a few

principles. Wilhoit suggests that spiritual transformation should be intentional; be communal; require our engagement; be accomplished by the Holy Spirit; be to the glory of God and the service of others; and have as its means and end the imitation of Christ. So there is no one thing that makes spiritual transformation happen in the life of the Christian. Renowned scholar on spiritual transformation, Boa (2001) suggests strongly that mentorship is one of the key practices that will aid in spiritual transformation.

The Holy Spirit plays a significant role in shaping lives into the image of Christ. He will empower their weak wills and make them strong to do the will of God (Sanders, 2007). Jesus Himself emphasized that the Holy Spirit is valuable in the life of the believer. In Luke 24:48 and Acts 1:8, when Jesus asked the disciples to wait for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit before they did anything in His name, He declared that the Holy Spirit must take precedence in the believer's life. The Holy Spirit was sent to help every disciple to become the type of witnesses God wanted them to be (Acts 1:8). It was about being before it was about doing. The Spirit brings transformation, which is reflected in our service towards others and our commitment to God.

When the Spirit of God comes into a person's life, He makes that person holy. That disciple is now sanctified. This quality of life distinguishes God's people and makes them different from the world—"a kingdom of priests" (Exod 19:6). Sanctification, the making of saints, lies at the heart of biblical discipleship (Coleman, 2011). Combs (1999) agrees with Coleman completely. In fact, he sees the object of the calling of the disciples as the establishment of the process of sanctification. For Combs, this is a process where the disciples are being made pure and "without blemish."

The Spirit of God works on the believer's heart and brings about transformation in that person's life. Some authors see this as being facilitated best within a small group context. One such writer and pastor, Icenogle (1994), suggested that it is the work of the Spirit to enable the small group community to be transformed, to become like Jesus, and to share more fully in His intimate community with the Father.

Rabary (2006) in his research, looked at how spiritual growth happens in a spiritual transformation group. Six areas of spiritual disciplines were studied. These spiritual disciplines are: daily prayer, weekly worship, daily Bible reading, service in and outside the church, nurturing relationships, and generous giving. He discovered that when practiced over a six-month period, the spiritual maturity of the members showed significant improvement. Jesus Himself promoted spiritual disciplines as part of the mature disciple's life (Luke 11; Matt 16).

Jones (2006), in his research, came to a similar conclusion to that of Rabary. However, Jones sees four spiritual disciplines that will contribute significantly to spiritual transformation. His research on the life of Jesus showed that, if we model our life after Him, we too can grow to be more like Jesus. According to Jones, Jesus practiced at least four disciplines. These are: creating time and space for God, praying, reading Scripture, and worshipping. His research found that people who practiced at least these four disciplines also saw significant spiritual growth as well (p. 133).

Turner (2007) agrees with a four-principle model of spiritual transformation in the life of the disciple. However, he suggested four different principles, for which the acronym is LIFE. These are: love, intimacy, fellowship, and encouragement. This is the process of discovering discipleship through experiencing God, and through a personal

walk with Him. Rabary's four-fold principle focuses on the individual and God and Turner's four principles seem to focus more on the group growing and supporting each other on a spiritual transformation journey. Wilhoit (2008, p. 23) seems to sum it up well when he states that, "While small groups, teaching, accountability structure, and individual spiritual practices can all have a role in spiritual transformation, no single dimension of the church life can carry out this task alone." It is obvious, then, that the focus of the leader usually determines the type of approach taken towards spiritual development.

Another person who placed emphasis on the individual in the spiritual life approach is Bruce (2000). He sees fellowship with Christ as the form of an uninterrupted focus on who God really is. This is coupled with habitual abandonment of secular occupations to help in spiritual transformation. What repentance brings is a change in the Christian's focus and a willingness to sacrifice all for the Kingdom of God (Matt 13:44). Christ taught that there should be a complete change in every person, and that this change should begin in our inner being. This personal spiritual change that comes through the act of repentance will affect one's life practically and economically (Arnold & Nouwen, 1994).

Discipleship and Emotional Health

One of the great benefits of discipleship is spiritual health. This is best achieved through the context of small groups, since they act as support systems for those enlisted. Seo (2009), in his research, confirms this. Seo used the term "healthy discipleship" to describe this state of spiritual and emotional health. He sees healthy discipleship as the

process by which the disciples become more like Christ in their thoughts, emotions, and actions. The author believes that small groups play an important role in bringing about changes in people's thinking, feeling, and acting.

Jesus often addressed the spiritual-emotional well-being of those whom He ministered to, like the woman at the well, and Mary and Martha after the death of Lazarus (John 4, John 11). Jesus said to His disciples, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (John 15:9-10).

Warren (1995), one of the leading proponents of church growth and church health, sees spiritual maturity as having a good balance between five biblical purposes. These include: worship, fellowship, evangelism, discipleship, ministry. Fellowship in particular helps in emotional health. He suggested that people grow warmer when they are involved in good Christian fellowship. Thus, it is fitting to see discipleship as encompassing spiritual health. Salsburey (2009, p. 71), in his research, agrees with Warren on the value of spiritual health as part of the goals of discipleship. He stated that the Healthy Church Initiative (HCI) is "a practical, biblically based strategy that gives churches a compass to follow. The prayer base and the love environment strategies are foundation blocks built on the Word of God to support the discipleship strategy"

Discipleship and Ministry

Ministering is one of the fruits of a maturing disciple. In John 15, Jesus placed great emphasis on this when He challenged His disciples to bear much fruit. Jesus said,

“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (v. 15). Fruit bearing involves the spiritual obligations placed on a disciple, which includes serving others. Jesus, in His parable of the sheep and goats, made it clear that serving others is one of the priorities of discipleship in His kingdom (Matt 25). Disciples master the art of ministering to the needs of others over time. It requires time and prayer for disciples to grow in their knowledge and skills as they become equipped towards ministry (Herman, 2008). Turner (2007) seems to have agreed with Herman on this point when he mentioned that all believers who are growing, developing, and maturing are recovering and rebuilding the ministry of discipleship.

Frederick (2010), in his research, sees discipleship as a ministry. He stated that if the church desires to strengthen its discipling ministries, it should learn how to work intentionally to implement strategies based on experiential learning theory with specific focus on conversational learning. Malphurs (2010) went a step further when he looked at a model of discipleship for full-time gospel workers. He shares that some persons see those in professional ministry as the true disciples. They equate them with the twelve that Jesus called in Matthew 10.

Ross (2010) proposes another interesting view of discipleship as ministry. This author suggested that the gifts of the Spirit are an essential part of discipleship. In fact, Ross suggested that discipleship would not reach its fullest potential if the ministry of the prophet is not a part of the discipleship team. Wells (2003) is more general in his description, but also refers to discipleship as a ministry.

Hull (2006) disagrees with those who see discipleship as a ministry. He argues that the “most damaging result [of program-based discipleship] is that churches

categorize discipleship as just one of the ministries of the church, rather than the core of its ministry.” This might be very true, because most models of discipleship in the Bible involve not just part of the disciple’s activities, but it involves the disciple’s entire life (Matt 4).

Conclusion

It is quite evident, then, that, based on the definition placed on discipleship, people view it differently. Discipleship is not just a word attached to different activities of the church; it is the beginning and end of the new believer’s life. There are many different approaches to discipleship, different definitions, different descriptions, and different structures to fulfill it. Most importantly, discipleship is a life calling in which all believers commit their entire life to follow Christ fully for the rest of their life. It requires sacrifice, but it results in a close relationship with God. This is the ultimate aim of discipleship. Whether it happens through corporate worship, small groups, or one-on-one, it all boils down to one point—how we can best grow to become more like Jesus.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW CONVERTS’ DISCIPLESHIP GROUP

As was stated in the introduction, the purpose for this study was to develop and assess a holistic small group model for growing and maturing new converts at the St. John’s Seventh-day Adventist Church. The preceding chapters show that discipling others through small groups is a biblical approach to the mission of the church. This chapter will show, in practical ways, how this can be done. It will include a concise review of the ministry context in which this study takes place, the description of the research method used to help determine the intervention, the development of the intervention, and the introduction of a small group approach which is supported by the proposed theological foundation. Also included are a brief description of the five growth areas to be measured, the spiritual practices that will be taught to help achieve the desired growth, and the structure of the group meetings.

The material described below also suggested that the purpose of having a holistic small group for the new converts was achieved. However, there are unmeasured factors that may have influenced the outcome of this project positively or negatively. These are also documented and explained below.

Ministry Context

In 2009, a review of the ministry structure of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in St. Johns, Antigua, was done. It revealed that over the previous nine years there were few organized plans within the church that would assist new members to become spiritually mature and equipped for ministry. This assessment by the church board revealed that, although there was a new convert's class, nothing else was being done to move new members to spiritual maturity and into ministry. Merely completing a lesson book was not enough to reach the desired results. This lack of structure for development has resulted in very few people being prepared to serve in the ministries of the church.

Description of the Research Method

In 2009, I presented my project proposal to Dr. Allan Walshe, my cohort coordinator. Once we went through the description of the problem I was facing in my local congregation, he immediately recommended that a small group approach should be taken. It took me over a year to understand fully why he made that suggestion. My intention was to use the regular new convert's class format and determine the outcome by measuring the health of the new believers at the beginning and at the end of a year after using the *Profiles Lesson* series. This is a new believer's Bible study guide. The *Purpose-Driven Life Health Assessment* measuring instrument was considered as against the more specific *Purpose-Driven Small Groups Health Assessment* (See Appendix B).

These two assessments, which were prepared by the Saddleback Church, give different results. One is to measure the individual progress of persons who have studied and practiced five specific areas of spirituality and the other measures the same areas in

the context of a small group. The assessment instrument for the small group, however, measures the expectations of spiritual health in a small group context. The dynamics and goals of a holistic small group are generally different from other types of groups. The activities to achieve these goals also have some differences. Some of these activities or practices will be described in more detail below.

Once I understood the value of small groups as a primary medium for fostering discipleship, the choice became much easier. The *Purpose-Driven Small Groups Health Assessment* by Rick Warren was chosen after exploring other similar materials.

The data collected from this type of evaluation measures a person's growth in five areas of spirituality, as mentioned above. Each spiritual growth area used a total of five questions as the basis for its assessment, with each question carrying a maximum of five points. A score of one means one's spiritual growth is *Just Beginning* and a score of five means its *Well Developed*. This is an excellent way to gauge the scores of individual participants in a new convert's class over time.

A person who completes the assessment can get a maximum of 25 points for each of the five evaluated areas. This would result in a grand total of 125 points when each of the five areas is added together. Consequently, the grand total will determine how much the individual has grown over the specified time of the group life. However, a low score in any specific area will show where growth is needed.

Development of Intervention

As was noted above, discipling new converts requires more than completing Bible lessons. They need to experience internal spiritual transformation. A small group

discipleship model should therefore see new members spend quality time in the Word, with each other, and with the Lord. In 2004, Willow Creek Mega-Church did a survey among its members and discovered an amazing truth; they were not growing people as spiritually as they thought. Bill Hybels, founder and senior pastor of Willow Creek Community Church said, “We learned that the most effective strategy for moving people forward in their journey of faith is biblical engagement.” He emphatically stated, “Not just getting people into the Bible when they’re in church—which we do quite well—but helping them engage the Bible on their own outside of church” (Hawkins & Parkinson, 2011). Small groups is one of the tools that many churches have used over the years to engage people in the Word of God and grow them spiritually. Many types of small groups go even a step further by helping people step into scripture on a daily basis.

For genuine transformation to take place, the disciples of Jesus must have spent a lot of time with their Master. Hull (2004) suggested that the disciples certainly had an intimate and ongoing experience with Jesus. “It was intimate because the group was small; ongoing, because the commitment was for life. This personal intimacy afforded Jesus the opportunity to concentrate on each man, to impart his heart for the world to each one.” Discipleship, therefore, should contain an individualized focus when done in the context of small groups. Such groups are expected to create an atmosphere that promotes cooperative learning. In this way, each individual is given opportunity to grow spiritually.

Review of the Theological Foundation

The process of transformation begins with responding to Jesus' invitation to come and be taught by Him (Matt 11:28-30). The apostle Paul affirmed that we would be renewed and become like Christ as we learn to know Him better. He, however, cautions against conforming to an external standard, but encourages us to let God transform us by changing the way we think (Rom 12:1, 2). His prayer is that we not only have our thinking changed, but that we come to understand and experience the vast love of God. God assures us that He will work out this process within us (Eph 3:16-20). Peter further suggested that when we come to know Him, we have everything we need for living the godly life (2 Pet 1:3).

Two leaders at Willow Creek church, Hawkins and Parkinson (2011), declared in their book, "Nothing has a greater impact on spiritual growth than reflection on Scripture. If churches could do only one thing to help people at all levels of spiritual maturity grow in their relationship with Christ, their choice is clear." They reasoned further that the church should "inspire, encourage, and equip their people to read the Bible—specifically, to reflect on Scripture for meaning in their lives." Cloud and Townsend (2009) added that the Bible points to God as the Source of all growth which is called spiritual growth. By beholding Christ and the love God has for us, we experience a transformation of character that reflects His own. So the key to the transformational process is to intentionally contemplate the attractive loveliness of Christ daily. Its simplicity has been lost on us, as we think there must be more we need to do. Yet, all that is necessary is to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and allow the Spirit to perform the transformational agent within us (Heb 12:2).

While it is evident that our response to God is rather dependent on a relationship with Him, it seems pointless to lecture people with excess knowledge of the Bible and God that only gives more biblical information and not spiritual transformation. The results just do not seem to last very long. It is not difficult, then, to observe from the Bible that Jesus focused on the spiritual growth of His group of disciples (Matt 4:16-19). In John's gospel we learn that spiritual growth is fostered best through relationship with God and others (John 15:8). No wonder Boren and Neighbour (1997) argued, "All successful small group models are built on a foundation of relationships." One may conclude from this that a group of people in a spiritual communion will soon build authentic relationships.

In the Great Commission, Jesus told His disciples how they were to become disciple-makers. They were to teach and share with others how to observe all the things that Christ had taught them (Matt 28:19-20). Hence, if this was to become a reality, the presence and power of Jesus had to be the dominant feature in their own lives (v. 18). Pettit (2008) suggested that the process of such spiritual transformation, in which the believer becomes more like Christ, takes place best in the context of community. This community is three-dimensional, for it involves God's initiative over time, a concerted response or action plans by the individual believer, and regular interaction with others.

Research Methodology

A qualitative approach was taken to measure the outcome of this activity. Each participant was invited to be part of a new convert's group, which has an intentional plan to develop spiritual growth. These volunteers were given a questionnaire, *Purpose Driven*

Small Group Health Assessment (see appendix B), to determine their level of spiritual health. Five areas of spiritual growth were measured by this assessment: membership, maturity, ministry, mission, and magnification. These are explained below.

Membership

To be a member is more than being baptized and having one's name on the church records. Membership is the fulfillment of true biblical fellowship (Acts 2:44; John 13:35). This part of the assessment, therefore, measures a person's ability to connect with other people. It emphasizes the fact that God formed us to be a part of His family (James 1:18, Eph 1:5). As a result, each new disciple is expected to build authentic relationships with other Christians and their spiritual mentors (1 Pet 2:17; Rom 1:12). Appendix B also highlights areas that should strengthen relationships such as sharing love, grace, forgiveness, and facilitating conflict resolution (1 John 3:18; Rom 12:18).

Maturity

God made us in His own image and likeness (Gen 1:26). Spiritual maturity is the sum total of everything that we are and do in Christ. This refers to one who has grown and become more like Christ (Eph 4:22-24). Hence, there are some areas mentioned in the assessment that are vital markers for gauging spiritual maturity. These include spending quiet time with God through His Word and prayer, being confident in Him, avoiding addictive behaviors, budgeting, and tithing (Mal 3:6-8).

Ministry

Ministry is serving those who are in need. Everyone who accepts Christ is born again to serve Christ. We are designed and shaped by God for His service (Job 10:18). In this module, ministry is measured when a person uses all he is and all he has in service towards others. Warren, on his pastors.com website, refers to this as his spiritual SHAPE. SHAPE is an acronym for Spiritual gifts, Heart (passions), Abilities, Personalities, and Experiences. Each believer is expected, over time, to use his or her SHAPE for Christ (Phil 2:4; 1 Cor 4:2). The assessment also measures a person's commitment to serve, willingness to serve, aspiration to be creative in service, and motivation to lead in ministry (2 Tim 2:23; 1 Cor 15:8).

Mission

Mission is that part of church life that takes you beyond the local church into the unsaved world. This is the same as evangelism, inclusive of all its components. God has called all of us out of the world of sin and has sent us to take salvation to those who are yet unsaved (Matt 28:18-20). In this track one is expected to pray for his unsaved friends, cultivate relationships with them, and invite them to attend church or a church group (Acts 2:43). Individuals are expected to pray as to how God can use them cross-culturally and to intentionally invest in the spiritual life of another person or group. All these areas mentioned above are measured in this track

Magnification

Magnification or worship is the greatest homage one can pay to God. Barna makes it clear that the number one expectation that people have of the church is to feel

God's presence (S. Kidder). In worship, we feel God's presence (Ps 16:11) and we magnify Him by giving glory to Him (Ps 34:1). This is the essence of true worship (Rev 11:16-18). In this track, several areas of worship are measured. These include faithful attendance to church services for spiritual renewal, having a growing desire to worship God through music and praise, honoring God with personal health, and pleasing God by having a balance to all His purposes in his life (Ps 100).

Spiritual Practices

In an effort to make true disciples of Christ and help them to achieve optimum spiritual health, several spiritual practices were used during the group meetings. Over the thirteen-week period, these spiritual practices were applied. These were prayer, spiritual companionship, Bible study, devotional Bible reading, service, and fellowship. A description of each of these practices is given below and the time when they were introduced to the group.

Prayer

Each week's meeting began with a discussion on the spiritual blessings and challenges that the group members had over the past week. Each group member was given the opportunity to share. The group leader then prayed for all the individual concerns as we huddled in a group. At the conclusion of each group meeting, we took some time to have short sentence prayers offered for each other's needs as they became apparent. This is one of the powerful ways to connect people in a small group with each other. It is called conversational prayer. As the group members get to know each other better, they will feel comfortable to share more personal things among themselves.

Hence, prayer is central to the small group experience. It is a weekly and daily emphasis of the group. It is considered to be one of the most critical opportunities that help the group members to build community with each other and relationship with God.

Spiritual Companionship

The supreme gift that anyone can give another person is to help him or her live life more aware of the “presence of God.” A spiritual companion accompanies people on a journey that is made spiritual not by their presence, but by the “presence of God” (Walshe, 2011). Each person in the group was also assigned a spiritual companion with whom they would pray and give encouragement. They spoke with this partner each week about God’s invitation. They shared with each other what God has said to them through this experience. Then they prayed for their spiritual companion.

In this group of six new converts we had two couples, one single male, and a single female whose husband was the longstanding member who won her to Christ. For the 13 weeks, I had the couples pairing up as spiritual companions and the single male partnering with the long-standing member and his wife. It seems as though it worked well.

Their role was to ask appropriate questions and listen effectively. Samples of questions are: What do you think God has been trying to communicate to you recently? How has God been present for you in the recent weeks? What devotional habits have been particularly meaningful to you recently? Do you sense any invitation from God? Most times the spiritual companion would pray with and give words of encouragement to their companion.

Bible Study

During each session, the participants would use the Bible study lessons that they had completed over the past week as the guide for Bible discussion. We used a summarized format for the first three weeks. In this way, we were able to highlight the main points of the lesson, answer many questions on the topic, and focus more on each person having a better understanding of the key points of the lesson. This also gave us the opportunity to teach the new believers how they could apply Scripture to their lives. We started by sharing stories and giving tips on how to experience Scripture in their lives.

To accomplish this, we started with Bible stories from the life of Jesus. Gathered in groups of four, each group member was given one of four characters depicted in the story from which to choose and identify their life with. In the story of the blind man, told by Mark in chapter 10:46-52, they chose from being the blind man, a disciple, a Pharisee, and an onlooker present who was not healed. I would then read the story while they imagined themselves in the scene described by Scripture. After the story was read, they were given three questions to reflect upon. First, what would it have been like to be this person? Then, are there any similarities between yourself and the character you have chosen? Third, what is God inviting you to do or to be? Once the allotted time of reflection was completed, the new believers were asked to share what they had discovered within their group. This type of Scripture application helped these believers to personalize the experience of the Bible stories.

A different story was used for each of the first three weeks of the group meetings. This gave each person the opportunity to apply the three questions mentioned above to other characters as well. As a result, they were being prepared with tools as to how to use

the Bible devotionally. By the fourth week, these principles were transferred to general Scripture passages, which were often comprised of one to three verses. Hence, the new disciples were taught how to use and read the Bible devotionally, which will be explained in more detail below.

Devotional Bible Reading

Intimacy with God requires intentionality. There are habits that need to be formed which enable us to disengage from the pace of life we live, enabling us to get alone with God as Jesus did. Jesus went to have time alone with His Father either early in the morning (Mark 1:35) or in the evening (Luke 6:12). One of the primary objectives of small groups is to help each individual develop a strong and consistent devotional life. As each member practices certain spiritual disciplines, they will develop an unbreakable habit of spending quality time with God. In these small groups, the devotional exercises are expected to take place seven days a week. They use the Bible application principles that they would have learned in the group to apply to their daily Scripture meditations. Once per week, when the group meets, the members will share about their devotional exercises and what Christ has done for them that week.

Shutting down the electronics and adopting a reflective approach to life and Scripture enables us to engage God intentionally. Reading the Bible devotionally and not merely cognitively, seeking not to just to find out about God but to actually find God and to grow an intimate relationship with Him, is the core of the devotional life. One should therefore respond to His word with heart and spirit instead of just with rational, cognitive, and intellectual powers. This is helped when one intentionally takes familiar verses of

Scripture and goes to a deeper level with God by meditation, reflection, prayer, and pondering. This allows the Spirit to speak to our hearts and not just our minds. It should also allow the Holy Spirit time to work on the heart of each group member. The group leader guides the process above by giving each group member a few minutes to: a) Reflect on what it would have been like to be the character chosen. b) Reason out whether there are any similarities between them and the chosen character. In this way a life comparison is made. And c) Respond to the main points of the character by giving an answer to the following question: “What is God inviting me to be or to do?”

Service

After one spends time with God they usually find it a joyful duty to serve others. There are many around us who have spiritual, financial, social, and physical needs (2 Cor 9:8-12). As God blesses us, the love of God in our hearts will overflow to share these blessings with others who are in need (Gen 12:2-3). After the sixth week, the new believers were therefore asked to pray for those who are in need on a daily basis (Matt 9:38). They were then encouraged to ask God to use them in His service to share with others who are in need (Matt 10:1-5). Each week the new converts reported on how God was able to use them in His service towards others, whether at home, at church, or at work.

I started this discipleship group in August 2013 and ended in December of the same year. During these weekly meetings, the group members were involved in several spiritual practices that would help them to achieve growth in the five spiritual areas mentioned above.

Every weekend there was an assignment given to each group member to be completed during the week. Upon the completion of the series of lessons and the other group activities, the group was given the Assessment Profile Questionnaire to complete a second time. According to the final results of the *Purpose Driven Small Group Health Assessment* (See Appendix B), all of the participants have shown spiritual growth in all but one area of their lives. According to the areas measured, the weakest area was the ministry aspect of their spiritual life.

Development of Intervention

I believe that if people build a strong relationship with God and with each other, and enjoy each other's company, they can build lasting, trusting relationships that will allow for positive Christian growth. My intention is to enable the participants in a small group context to discover how to experience the Scriptures through personal application, learn spiritual practices, and develop community with each other. The goal of this process is to encounter God, to be internally transformed by His Spirit, and connect with other disciples.

Selecting a Study Group for the Journey

This was done by personal contact with the new converts. Before they were baptized, they were also encouraged to be a part of this group. There were six persons who were contacted. When the time came to begin the group life activities, the six newly baptized persons indicated an interest and desire to be a part of the group. This unit comprised of a married couple in their 50s, both of whom were former Adventists who had left the church for over 20 years. There was a second couple who signed up, in which

the wife was new to the faith and the husband had left the church two years before. The list is completed by two others who were new additions to the church. They were a single male and a married female whose husband was an active member of the congregation. The age ranges of the last four people mentioned above were from the 20s to the 40s.

Once it began, the group membership was generally consistent for the duration of the 13 weeks. Two other persons were added to the group to help the group to make smooth spiritual progress. One of these was an elder and the second person was a long-standing member of the church who helped to get one of the individuals baptized.

The elder was added to the group as an assistant leader to help give additional modeling of the principles to the group members. His role was also to give support to group members during the sessions and outside of group meeting times. This role was fulfilled admirably and the elder was able to form very good relationships with the group members since he had made personal contact with them over the 13-week period.

The long-standing member was placed in the group as a regular member for two reasons. One was to help him to participate in the growth process with at least one of the members. This would provide the group members with an additional model to follow. Secondly, he would give support and guidance to the person he led to Christ.

These two persons were considered integral parts of the discipleship process that took place in the group. Our church leaders often merely tell new converts what to do. Sometimes they even share information with them from a distance, but often do not get a chance to disciple them. Hence, this discipleship process was meant to get the new converts connected with the membership and leadership of the church they have chosen to be a part of.

Implementation Narrative

One week before the 13 weeks began, I invited all the new converts to meet me in a small room. The room was retrofitted with chairs that were placed in a semi-circle. It was explained that they would study the Bible devotionally through their own personal meditation, Bible study, ministry, and conversational prayer. A covenant was given for each group member to sign (see Group Covenant in appendix A) to encourage commitment. We also discussed the structure of the weekly sessions, the time we would meet, and the location where we would meet.

Once people's questions were answered, the group covenant signed, and the assessment questionnaire was completed, the group leader then functioned as a coach as he gave guidance to the group of new believers. Coaching is listening, asking good questions, and providing some guidance to the conversations. Hall, Cooper, and McElveen (2009) suggest "Coaches care genuinely and work tirelessly to germinate and grow human potential. We do this because we believe deeply that God has given people potential to release." In this way, the group leader can give each person of the group some individual attention as well. Jesus often gave individual attention to His disciples. Here are a few Scripture references that highlight some of those specialized teachable moments:

- 1) Judas Iscariot (John 12)
- 2) Peter (John 21:15ff)
- 3) Thomas (John 14:5)
- 4) James and John (Luke 9:54ff)
- 5) Philip (John 14: 8)

6) Judas/Thaddeus (John 14:22)

7) Andrew (John 6:8)

Personal Growth

The next aspect of each weekly meeting was to introduce spiritual practices that would deepen their personal spiritual growth. There were five personal spiritual practices that were used with this group. These included devotional Bible reading, conversational prayer, spiritual companion, Bible study, and witnessing. Each one of these practices was described briefly above.

Discipleship as a Journey

There is a spiritual continuum that people take in their journey with Christ which has been described by Hawkins and Perkins (2011) as four progressive stages. *Exploring Christ*: “I believe in God, but I am not sure about Christ. My faith is not a significant part of my life.” *Growing in Christ*: “I believe in Jesus and I am working on what it means to get to know him.” *Close to Christ*: “I feel really close to Christ and depend on him daily for guidance.” *Christ-Centered*: “My relationship with Jesus is the most important relationship in my life. It guides everything I do.”

Between each of these four steps there are three movements that take place in a person’s life. There are also activities and beliefs that impact these movements. The activity that is present in each of the three movements is reflection on Scripture (Hawkins & Perkins, 2011). While this journey is not linear or predictable, it does seem to be progressive.

Group Assignments

After the third week, a verse of Scripture was given to each group member to contemplate and meditate upon daily. Each day they were to read the passage and consider the three devotional questions we discussed above. a. What is the Bible saying? b. How does my life compare with the message in the passage? c. What is God calling me to do or be based on the message of the said passage of scripture? This practice continued for each of the weekly sessions.

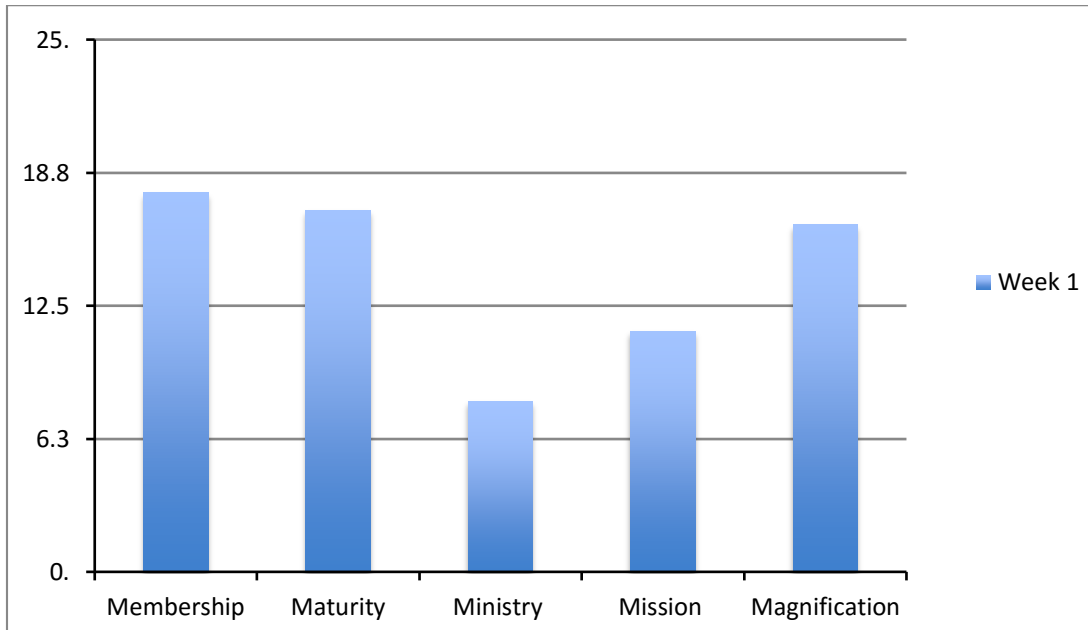
Spiritual Health Assessments

When the 13 weeks were completed, the *Spiritual Health Assessment* was administered once again. The results will be compared with the assessment taken the first week. The tables below give an analysis of how the persons have or have not grown in different areas of their spiritual lives and how they have grown in general.

This first table shows where each person was, based on how they answered the questionnaire as they entered the sessions. The membership growth area was scored the highest and the ministry area was scored the lowest. The maximum points for each of the assessed areas were 25. This meant that most of the areas were reasonably high to start with for new converts. This may have been so since all of the new converts had some measure of Christian background prior to their baptism. The overall total score for the class was 70.4 out of a maximum of 125 points.

Table 1

Average spiritual ratings of group members at week 1



The second table shows the group's average score after the thirteenth week together. The only area of major significant improvement was that of ministry. Apart from a slight increase in magnification, the other areas that were measured remained the same or dipped slightly. However, when all the scores were summed up after 13 weeks, there was some overall growth. The grand total for the group was 71.5 at the end of the 13th week, as against 70.4 at the first week. This comparison is shown in the third table below. The maximum amount of score that the group could have achieved was 125 points.

Table 2

Average spiritual ratings of group members at week 13

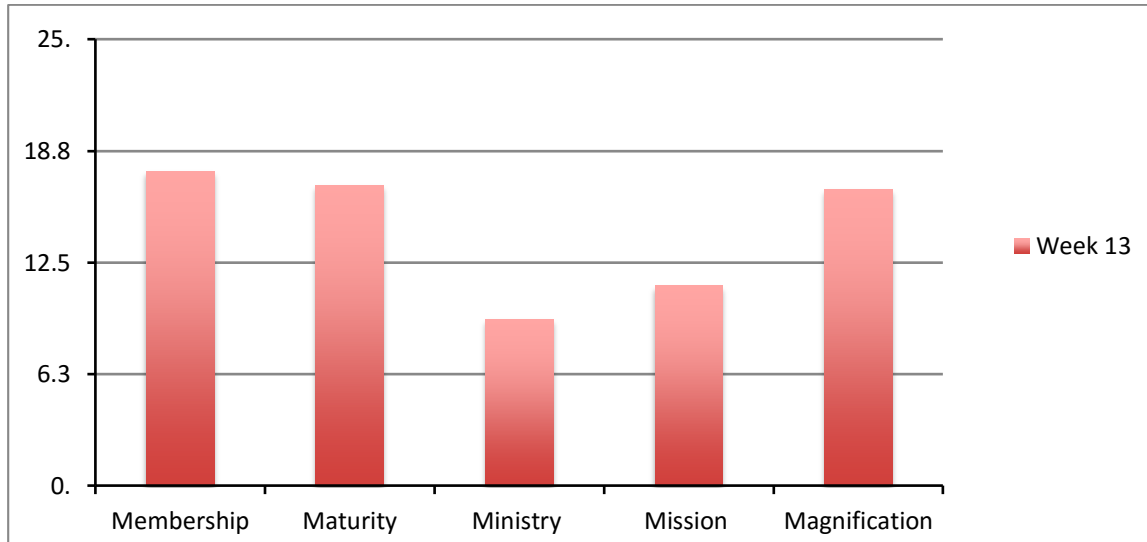


Table 3

Comparisons of average spiritual growth for the group between weeks 1 and 13

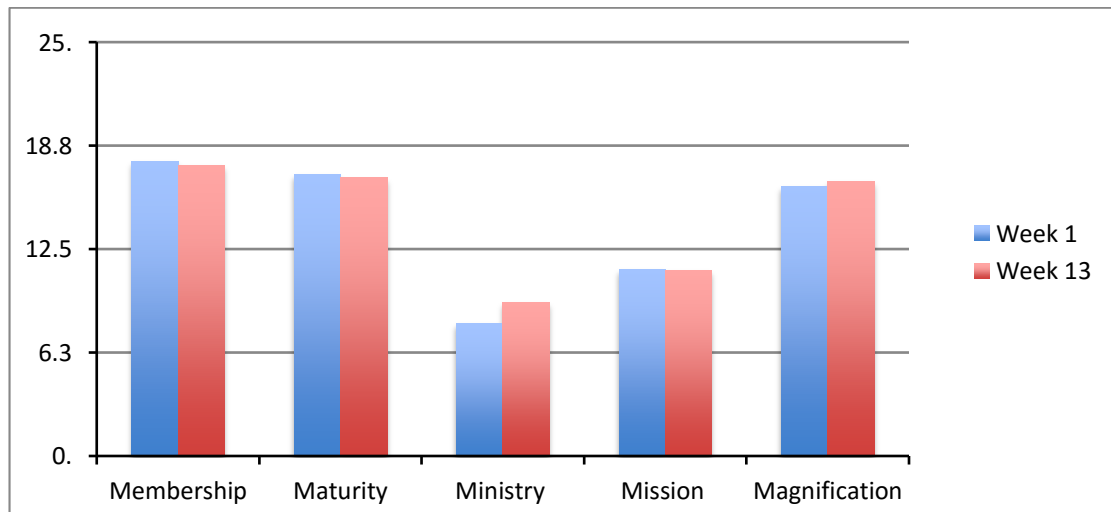
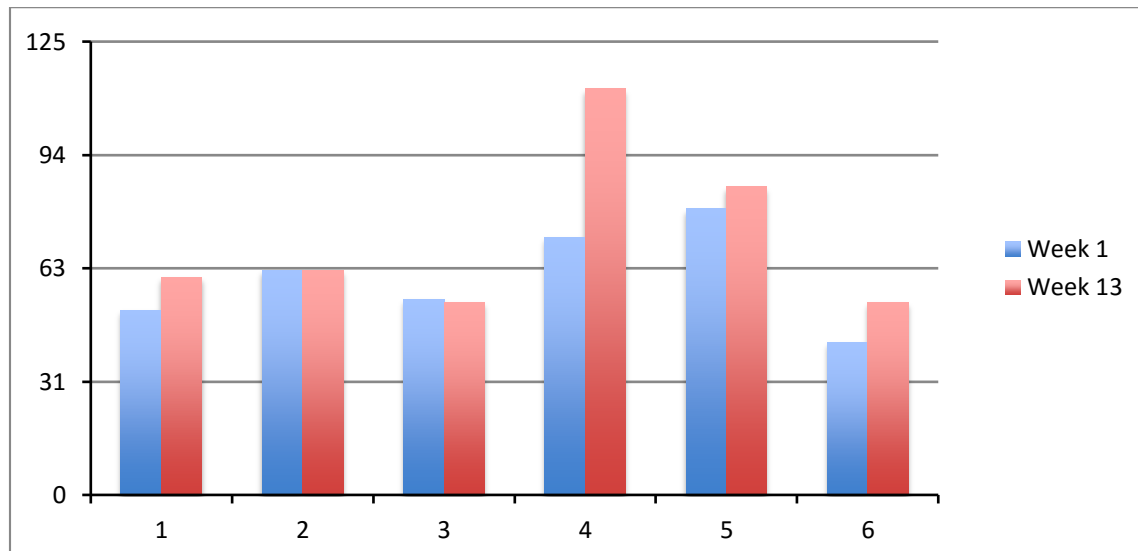


Table 4

Comparison of total scores of individual members in the group from weeks 1 to 12



It is important to note that when we look at Table 4, only one person's scores show that there was no growth, while the other five people showed moderate to significant growth.

Conclusion

The context of this ministry was briefly described, as well as the need to lead new converts into a deeper experience with Christ using small group principles. It was expected that at the end of the thirteen weeks there would have been individual spiritual growth for most, if not all, of the participants. There were five areas that were measured by the questionnaire provided. These were: Membership, Maturity, Ministry, Magnification, and Mission. Several spiritual practices were used to help fulfill these

areas of the new converts' lives. These included Bible study, praying, spiritual companionship, devotional Bible reading, and service.

This combination of activities resulted in spiritual growth for most of the members of the group. However, this is according to how they answered the questions. From my personal interaction with the group members, however, all of them declared that they experienced significant spiritual growth. I believe that the participants scored the week one questionnaire too generously and, as time went on, they became more realistic about their spiritual journey. This might be the reason for some of the growth areas showing lower scores after week thirteen.

The new convert's class will be continuing for one year. This will give them the opportunity to apply more of these spiritual practices and build much stronger relationships with God and with each other. I believe that after the year, the results will be even more positive for the group and for the individuals.

CHAPTER 5

FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION AND EXPLORATION

There are many questions that arise from a study like this. However, the main question of this project has been answered. Small groups that are based on creating group health for new converts do show improvement in the spiritual lives of its members. The process requires a lot of intentional work and constant analysis for it to reach its desired goals. Areas that deserve further study include using holistic small group concepts in other congregations for new converts, length of time a new convert stays in the group, and the Bible study materials that are being used by the group. Each one of these is discussed below.

Holistic Small Groups

In recent years, there has been a major shift in churches towards the use of holistic small groups as a means to disciple new Christians into the kingdom of God. Once the right components are employed, any group can become a holistic small group. Johnson emphasized that the core values of small groups are timeless. “How a culture, a generation, or a local church carries them out is optional. However, we must not make optional methods, models, and applications an excuse to ignore God’s plan of meeting “house to house” and in the “temple” (2012, pp. 50-51).

Evidence suggests that, across the Seventh-day Adventist Church, there is a need to use small groups to disciple others. The Caribbean Union, in particular, has a great need for small groups' usage in this area, because of its high member dropout rate. Nevertheless, this would require giving attention to certain features for it to be successful.

1. Nurturing a Culture for Small Groups

In our division, many believe that small groups are culturally bound. Many of our leaders have made this an unofficial position statement. Such information has constantly been passed onto our pastors and their congregations. A reorientation into the biblical usage of small groups and the value that it brings to the discipling process into the church is necessary. Fortunately, we have had a few people who have been championing the use of small groups in the South Leeward Mission. Pastor Bill Watson-Payne did a small groups workshop with our pastors, and our division Personal Ministries Director has been placing significant emphasis on this subject as well.

During the year 2013, our Mission Personal Ministries Department has placed several books in the hands of all our pastors. These books include George Barna's *Growing True Disciples*, Andy Standly's *Deep and Wide*, Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III's *Essential Church* and S. Joseph Kidder's *The Big Four*. All of these books place emphasis on discipleship while underscoring the value of using a small group model. Other books, such as Russell Burrell's *Revolution in the Church* and Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson's *Comeback Churches* have also been promoted. These, along with Wayne Knowles' *Spiritual Growth Groups Handbook* that has been placed in the hands of each pastor of the Mission and that of our Caribbean Union administrators and should

help in bringing greater awareness of the benefits of a small group model of discipleship for our newly baptized members. This should foster a better context for spiritual maturity.

The program-based culture must be changed if we would see greater results. It is our custom, in the Caribbean Union, to have tent crusades and then place the new converts in a Bible class to go through some lessons. Not much more is generally done to integrate them into the church. These classes are usually held at Sabbath school time, which is often affected by the many programs of the church. Hence, it affects the consistency or the time needed to share on anything more than the lesson. This fosters a culture of “information sharing” and not discipleship. For this project, we had to shift the time from the Sabbath school time to Sabbath afternoon. This not only gave more time and priority to the new converts, but it helped them to fulfill other small groups’ activities as well. They were in a better position to learn how to share their lives with each other for spiritual growth and development (Putman, Harrington, & Coleman, 2013, p. 153).

2. Train Leaders

Identifying and training pastors and lay leaders is fundamental to the success of small group ministry. Without leaders who have an appreciation for what they are doing, the groups cannot work well. Leaders of small groups should be equipped and experienced. He or she must first seek to apply the spiritual principles that they are seeking to themselves, before they share them to the group (1 Cor 4:6). It begins with a leader living the life himself or herself—as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Through this process we would be able to see the new converts whose development involves more than Bible study for the group members. Hence, new

converts should be disciplined through trained leaders who themselves are being mentored. “Leaders need small group leadership training, followed by an internship under a small group leader. The training aspect is essential, but it does not fully equip a person for leading a small group” (Boren & Neighbour, 2011).

In His quest to save mankind, Christ spent a relatively brief time here on earth. He needed leaders to carry the good news of salvation and to build up an institution that would not fail (Matt 16:16). Therefore, He made the training of disciple-makers one of the most essential tasks to be fulfilled.

At the St. John’s SDA Church we were able to identify lay leaders who had a strong interest and passion in discipling new converts. Two leaders were chosen to assist the class. One was an elder who assisted in the teaching and sharing aspect of the class. The second person was assigned to help mentor two persons in the class as their spiritual companion. The training process was then a more hands-on approach where the leaders were given specific task to accomplish with the group. From week to week, the elder was giving other assignments, such as doing the parts of the lesson, conducting the sharing time, discussing the evangelism plan, and leading the prayer sessions.

This type of familiarization gives the leader comfort in leading the group himself. It was quite heartening to know that, after I left that congregation after the first three months with the new converts’ class, the elder was assigned by the new pastor to be the leader of the same group. Without such buy-in the group dynamics can easily become less and less significant. This would result in the group becoming more a Bible study group for the new converts.

It would have been good for me to be there to help to mentor the new leader as he mentored the group of new believers. As Stetzer recommends, one should meet “regularly with leaders in a ministry community, or one-on-one, for accountability, training, and coaching” (Stetzer, 2010). This would be the ideal thing if leaders are going to be successful. Barna’s research also has a similar conclusion. He said, “Unless there is ample training for facilitators, a tight accountability process, strong relational connections, and a purposeful selection of material to cover, the small groups will fail to produce disciples” (2013, p. 122).

3. Prioritize Leadership Development for New Converts

Not only do we need trained leaders, but we also need to develop all our new converts to become leaders themselves. If our pastors plan well for their new converts, then the development of new leaders will become a steady stream in their congregations. This can only happen when spiritual maturity has become the key goal of all our leaders. Jesus Christ Himself made this the main focus of His ministry while He was here on earth (Matt 11). He placed His energies into the development of the twelve disciples whom He chose. Christ did not merely baptize them, but from the very outset He challenged them to lead others into the Kingdom of God (Matt 4:18-20).

It is important to note that Christ understood that spiritual maturity and leadership was cultivated best within the context of small groups and not mass-produced through orations. Hence, limited numbers were chosen for Christ’s initial new converts’ discipleship class. “He emphasized personal experience governed by scriptural messages

and efficacious prayer. He cultivated industriousness. These formed the building blocks for spiritual leadership” (Solis, 2013).

According to Matthew 28:18-20, one may see discipleship as “trusting God’s presence as we intentionally enter into the lives of others to guide them to trust and follow Jesus and obey all his teachings” (Hull). This begins the cycle of discipleship. As the new converts become mature leaders, they, in turn, are expected to carry out the Great Commission.

Stetzer and Dodson researched over 300 churches that have reformed themselves to become more effective in fulfilling God’s mission. They discovered that these churches used the small-group system to identify and train new leaders. “Small groups helped identify new leaders, and those leaders were trained through an apprenticeship process. Healthy small groups become like a “farm system” for discovering and developing leadership talent and potential” (2010, p. 159).

In the new convert’s class at the St. John’s SDA Church, we placed emphasis on the need for each new convert to become a leader and thus share their lives with those around them. It would take at least a year for most new believers to become mature enough to master this part of their spiritual vocation. This process takes time. Hence, conference leaders would need to be very supportive of pastors who are willing to put in the hard and patient work that is needed to produce mature disciple-makers.

4. Teach the Characteristics of Small Groups

One of the challenges that I have observed from the new convert’s class that was conducted at St. John’s Church was that there was insufficient explanation of several of

the things that they would need to accomplish. Though it takes time for the new converts to grow and practice what they learned, they must first understand what they need to learn. Things that are introduced incrementally should be thoroughly explained and demonstrated so that there will be clarity for the new converts. For example, if the *Purpose Driven Small Groups* questionnaire was better explained at the beginning of the group sessions, I believe that the new converts would have given themselves lower scores.

Based on the verbal feedback from the new converts and my regular interaction with them, I can see that the level of growth exceeds what was reflected for most of them by week thirteen. Hence, if pastors within other conferences were to apply this small groups approach to their new convert's classes; this is something I would strongly recommend. Nevertheless, each quarter's evaluation should help to give clarity as the new believers grow.

5. Dedicate Time and Place

According to Johnson, the weakness of the Sabbath school action unit is that, "In some cases, the location of the class and the time available are not conducive to healthy group life" (2012). It was for this reason that the new believer's class at St. John's SDA Church did not follow the recommended new believer's Sabbath school time as prescribed by the General Conference Sabbath School Department.

Here are a few more challenges that the regular Sabbath school time brings. Most of the time, the members sit in pews together with other classes in the sanctuary. This often leads to inadequate time in a less-than-ideal location. Hence, the group interaction

does not lead to as much bonding between members as it should. Instead, “This leads to discouragement and lack of participation by the members and a negative attitude toward small groups in general” (Johnson, 2012, pp. 50-51). For new believers, the bonding of group members is a critical component for proper development.

Sufficient time must therefore be given to practice the principles of small groups effectively. The leader of the group does not have much control of the time when it is during the Sabbath school time. Oftentimes, the adult division leaders or pastors cut the time to accommodate other activities and programs of the church. This leads to inconsistencies, which are not good for the dynamics of small groups to play out effectively.

As a result, for the duration of the 13 weeks, we met in a separate room on Sabbath afternoons. The regular Sabbath school class time is one hour, as was mentioned above. However, most new convert small group sessions would require around an hour and a half of class time if they were to be effective. This must be done on a consistent basis. Hence, it is best to identify a time when the leader of the group can be in control of when to start and finish the sessions. Consistency must be a priority for groups to work well. The group covenant suggests that we start and finish on time (See appendix A).

When the leader has more control of the time, it gives him time to observe the group dynamics at work. He or she will also be able to spend more time with the group members as they grow. Spiritual bonding will be fostered and the group members will not feel rushed. This approach is highly recommended.

Gradually Equipping Each Group Member

Holistic small groups are dynamic. They take time to develop and become entrenched in the minds of the persons in the groups. The various characteristics of small groups should be learned incrementally. These should take time for new converts to grasp. Many of these persons have never experienced spiritual small groups before. The challenge is to ensure that every step taken, activity given, or principle applied is clearly articulated and carefully implemented. Hence, there is a need for the learning process to be one that is built on the model of cooperative learning and spiritual companionship. These will be discussed further below.

Cooperative Learning

There are certain elements of cooperative learning styles that can work very well in a small group context. According to Slavin, “There are many quite different forms of co-operative learning, but all of them involve having students work in small groups or teams to help one another learn” (as cited in Dumont, Istance, & Benavides, 2010). Cooperative learning results in certain spiritual benefits to group members. They learn to work closely with others, see their point of view, show love and concern, encourage and trust each other, and build close friendships. These match the primary goals of learning in a spiritually-based small group context where each person helps the other (Gaikwad, 1996).

The Bible tells us that we are not to look on our own things alone (Phil 2: 4), instead we are to bear one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2). Hence, small groups are meant for group members to grow together in a spiritual learning community. The apostle Paul has

outlined the significance of working together by using the analogy of the body. He says, "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body" (1 Cor 12:12). The point of cooperation is emphasized when he said, "And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you" (verse 21).

Jesus demonstrated that the number one principle of discipleship is love for each other (John 13:34-35). In this way, the group members should be willing to make sacrifices for each other to grow. In fact, Jesus chose twelve disciples and often gave them group activities to be accomplished. The outcomes of these activities were later discussed corporately. Some of these include the feeding of the 12,000 (Matt 14), the dispossessing of the demoniac (Mark 9), and the sending out of the twelve apostles (Matt 10). In other cases, Jesus used life experiences as corporate teachable moments for the disciples. These include Peter walking on water (Matt 14), the widow's mite (Luke 21), speaking in parables to the crowds (Matt 13), and the conversation with the Samaritan woman (John 4).

The early church followed Jesus' example by using small groups to share life and grow together (Acts 2:31-37). Small groups should seek to replicate such practices as exhibited by the early disciples of Christ. The book of Acts shows us how the early Christians demonstrated love towards each other and experienced the manifestation of God's presence. As a result, His people shared life together and individuals voluntarily made sacrifices for one another (Boren & Neighbour, 2011, pp. 13-14).

White saw the value of the cooperative learning style as well when she said, "Cooperation should be the spirit of the classroom, the law of its life . . . Let the older

assist the younger, the strong the weak, and so far as possible, let each be called to do something in which he excels. This will encourage self-respect and a desire to be useful" (1952, pp. 285, 286). Though White refers here to a classroom setting, the principles are applicable to that of a small group as well. In essence, small groups foster a vibrant learning experience.

The groups and subgroups practiced in the group of seven for the project embraced cooperative learning. This was the fulcrum upon which the group life was built. The group members were able to share their weekly experiences, reflection on Scripture, pray for each other's wellbeing, and encourage one another. No wonder there was some measure of spiritual growth in the areas measured by this study.

Churches who wish to apply holistic small groups for new converts may need to consider that the growth is not phenomenal for all group members for the first thirteen weeks, which was the limitation of this study. In fact, the group dynamics determines the pace of progress. Leaders of such groups would do well to be guided by the amount of transformation that takes place within and among the group members and not the amount of information shared.

Spiritual Companionship

One of the characteristics that really helped in equipping and maturing new believers is called spiritual companionship. Spiritual companion, in our context, refers to someone who calls and prays with the other person. This prayer is based on a specific passage of Scripture or on any issues or concerns that the person may have. This leads to

accountability among group members as they seek to live out the truth of God's Word in their lives (Chan & Beuving, 2012).

It was Spurgeon who said, "Whenever God determines to do a great work, He first sets His people to pray" (as cited in Maxwell, 1996). A great work has begun in the lives of these new converts and should be maintained by the spirit of prayer. The groups at St. John's SDA Church had each new convert paired off with a partner. They were placed with a husband or wife in most cases, since we had three couples in our group of seven. The other person was placed with one of the couples, where the husband was responsible for being his partner.

After the first three months, the pairing was beginning to take shape. One of the challenges we encountered was that couples did not take each other as seriously at the initial stages. They made a number of excuses for each other. It, therefore, seemed quite fitting, to consider placing people in gender-specific groups rather than marital groups. This would also help to build other relationships among group members. Such activities, though introduced by around the second week, take time to develop and may require around six months of consistent participation to see real benefits.

Growth Areas

The tables above have shown limited growth in the five areas measured. These five areas are Worship, Fellowship, Nurture, Ministry, and Evangelism. It highlights the fact that, to see the full impact of the group's principles that were applied, there was need for much more time than the thirteen weeks. In fact, there are four study guides that comprise a year of nurture for the new converts. This would give sufficient time for the

new converts to grow significantly. It is therefore obvious that much more time was needed to better assess how the group members grow and develop in their relationship with God and with each other (Johnson, 2012, pp. 50-51). This research confirms that people in groups do take time to grow and develop spiritually.

It is, therefore, most important that each goal of the group, such as the growth areas, must be carefully understood before they can be properly applied. Jesus Himself took time out to teach His disciples the principles of the Kingdom of God (Matt 5-7, Mark 9, etc.) and yet still they failed to capture the essence of His teachings when He died on the cross (Luke 24). Taking a progressive approach is most important.

When the newly baptized persons and those still seeking Jesus are placed in groups, there is weekly accountability and a ready-made family to assist in the spiritual growth of the individual. Building a close community takes time. This process cannot be rushed. Jesus is our perfect example, for He “spent time with the multitudes, time with the individual, and time in homes” (Johnson, 2012, p. 28). Churches that endeavor to use a small group structure for new converts must, therefore, pace themselves well to achieve the goals they desire.

It is also very important to note that the new converts learned a lot outside of the group that they attend. During this project, it was observed that they learned from their Sabbath school classes, the corporate group, as well as Christian and non-Christian friends. Hence, an outlet was provided for this group to share openly on biblical or church related issues. This was an integral part of the growth process that we established. At least 15 minutes were given each week for persons to share or ask questions. In this way, the group was able to have their greatest concerns, questions, and fears addressed.

Open discussions lead to greater transparency, motivation, and community building. In a small group, transparency helps others, because it shows them that they are not alone in their difficulties, challenges, and even their successes (Maxwell, 1996, p. 57). Transparency often leads to greater conviction, as concerns and fears are alleviated in the group, while hopes and joys are affirmed. Conviction, therefore, provides that motivation which is necessary for developing small groups (Boren & Neighbour, 2011, p. 287). All these lead to greater bonding within the group, as people share real life together.

Length of Time in the Group

This study has shown that 13 weeks of interaction with the new converts is not sufficient to establish the new believers. These three months of sharing and growing only set the foundation for what is to come. A good foundation will lead to something very positive. It is like planting seeds in solid and fertile ground. As has been noted above, it takes time for people to grow and bear fruit. Any congregation that has new believers should be mindful that they must be given time to grow and mature. The reasons for this will be further established below.

Newborns

We often see new converts as newborns in a family. In fact, on this very point, the apostle John records Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus. Jesus made it very clear that when a person comes to Christ, he or she must be born again (John 3:1-17). It's the start of a new relationship. Thus, like a baby that is born into a family, the knowledge, understanding, and practices must be carefully cultivated.

The apostle Peter tells us that, like newborn babes, the new believer should desire the sincere milk of the word; they should long for it so that they will grow with respect to salvation (1 Pet 2:2). The reason for sharing the word and emphasizing its principles, then, is for the spiritual growth and development of each person. Too often we make the information the goal to be achieved. Our thinking must change from one where we inform people to one where we equip and transform them (Putman et al., 2013, p. 98).

Spiritual Maturity

Babies take time to grow and mature. There is no difference in the spiritual life. They desire the use of the word in a manner that they can assimilate it easily. Maturity does not just mean knowing more doctrine. It can only be judged by the standard of Christ. The new believer is becoming more like Christ. Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Jesus is our great model of spiritual maturity. He chose to humble Himself (Phil 2:5-8), teach others (Matt 5), showed love to all sorts of people (Mark 10:21; John 11:5-7), forgave them of their sins (Luke 23:24), and died for the world (1 Cor 15:1-4). This is what it means to be Christ-like, to be mature. It means to be humble, to teach, to love, to forgive and, if need be, to die for someone else. This moves the new believer from a receiver of benefits to one who gives his or her life to benefit others (John 15:13).

It also requires sufficient time to prove that a small group format is better than a regular Bible study class for new converts. However, this project shows that new converts can successfully apply the basic spiritual practices that should govern a

Christian life. It is a known fact that discipling others takes time. Jesus spent three and a half years nurturing His disciples and yet they did not have it all together at the time of His death and resurrection. Any congregation working with new believers should be very mindful not to rush the process, but to be intentional about each person's spiritual growth.

It is also import to note that application of the spiritual practices, along with the other concepts of small groups, takes time to understand and apply. It is a lifelong learning process. As we noted before, Jesus was teaching His disciples and opening their understanding of His mission and the nature of His kingdom even after His death (Luke 24). This should show us that the learning process cannot be rushed.

The transitional process to leadership must be gradual. Remember, these eleven men had been through approximately three years of training by the greatest Teacher who ever lived. He had established them as disciples and equipped them as laborers. Now He was teaching them the essentials of leadership (Hull, 2004). Making disciple-makers is the same purpose that the new convert's small group seeks to fulfill.

The Lesson Curriculum

The lessons within a new convert's small group are specifically geared towards new believers. The curriculum would, therefore, consist of the prearranged and unstructured areas of the lesson. The prearranged lessons are those outlined in the study guide that were used and those instructions given on the various dynamics of small group life. The unstructured curriculum refers to the open discussion forum given to each new convert on a weekly basis. These areas are discussed below.

The Prepared Lessons

In Step with Jesus is the Sabbath school guide for new members. This is a new resource produced by the General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department as a means of welcoming new members to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It seeks to introduce these new members to the doctrine, heritage, and lifestyle of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This study guide is comprised of four subtitles: *The Journey Begins*, *The Power of Love*, *The Power of the Word*, and *The Power of Mission* (www.instepwithjesus.org).

Each subtitle is comprised of 13 lessons. *The Journey Begins*, the first of the four-part series, was the one we chose for the new members (See Appendix C). This lesson is nicely laid out for the new converts and takes them through the various subject areas that will help them to grow in a relationship with the Lord. It also gives good information on the structures and jargon of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

However, this project has shown that there was always much more information in these lessons than what the new members could regurgitate on a weekly basis with the 45 minutes that we use. With a much more interactive format of lesson discussion, many of the important points were unable to be covered adequately. Using a cooperative format was a challenge, since there was so much to learn and apply. The findings of this research suggests that a lesson based mostly on stories and supporting passages may have been better for at least the first subtitle of these lesson guides. Other churches in my Mission that may choose these lessons should be careful to consider not rushing the lessons through, but to adapt them to their ministry context.

Here are a few other things that were done for teaching purposes in our new members group. Each member was taught how to pray using conversational prayer. Prayer moments and opportunities were provided for the all the group members to participate. This process was started in the first week of the group life experience. Each member was given a spiritual companion from within the group who they made contact with and prayed for on a weekly basis. This proved to help with the transparency and bonding of members of the group.

The group members were also taught how to use the Bible devotionally. This included the use of Bible stories and, later, Scripture passages and applying them in their lives for spiritual growth. For the first three weeks, Bible stories were given and then, each week after, one or two Scripture passages were given for meditation and application over the week. This project emphasized that, unlike other small groups that focus on a daily Scripture meditation plan, new members require time to grow into this habit. This is a new practice for all of our group members. By the end of the 13 weeks, the group was still using one passage per week for meditation.

On a weekly basis, group members were given a simple assignment in which they shared a little bit about themselves with the members of the group. This proved to be an invaluable tool in relationship-building among the group members. As a result, group members knew more about a person than their name and face. One of the primary purposes of small groups is to build authentic relationships among members and non-members and this proved to be a winning combination.

After week five, group members were asked to share their faith with those around them. They were taught the power of a personal testimony and how to pray for God to

make them light bearers. Some of the group members struggled to share their faith, but it became progressively easier as time progressed. This exercise continued weekly for the duration of the thirteen weeks, as the members shared their experiences with the group.

Unstructured Teaching Moments

Each week, around ten minutes of our sharing time was given to open discussion. This study has shown that new members have many experiences that challenge and they wish to talk about them. They need a forum where they feel comfortable to share or ask questions about church, the Bible, and life issues in general. As time progresses, they become more comfortable to share on a deeper level. The leader does not have all the answers, but it gives him or her the opportunity to look into the mind of the new believer and thus create an opportunity to give guidance.

Any conference or congregation that considers using new member small groups may need to consider this aspect of the group experience. Group members learn a lot in their Sabbath school classes, in corporate worship, and from saved and unsaved friends. Sometimes they have unanswered questions from their personal study or a curiosity that needs to be answered. This can help to build confidence in their new Christian walk.

Unexplored Factors

This study shows that a small group for new believers can contribute to their spiritual maturity, which is the basis for spiritual leadership. However, a study of this nature comes with several limitations and areas that could have challenged its outcome. I have listed four of them below.

First, the present study does not give a comparative analysis with the other new convert's classes. If this was done, there would have been sufficient information to compare and contrast the growth of the new believers at the end of the 13 weeks.

Second, the new believer's study guide was very comprehensive for the first thirteen weeks. They were not designed for small group usage. I recommend the use of expository studies for at least the first half of the first 13 weeks.

Third, the 13-week period was a bit short to achieve significant growth. A full year would have given more time to assess how new believers developed in their spiritual life. It takes time to grow.

Fourth, this small groups approach and its methods should be tested in other congregations in my Mission and in other world cultures. This would help to determine which small group elements are universal and which must be modified.

Further examination of these four areas will advance ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Such improvements will help the Church to make a better contribution to the *missio dei*.

Conclusion

This project has shown that the new believer's small group has the potential to improve the leadership quality of the St. John's Seventh-day Adventist Church. The dynamics that play out in a small group involve participation and mastering of several spiritual and ministry practices. In this way, new members are being conserved and new leaders are being developed over the duration of their small group experience.

For this reason, churches and conferences are encouraged to look at the approach we take to mature our new believers. A small group approach can only help in advancing the work in a more comprehensive way. This would require conferences to invest more time and training in equipping more of its leaders with the necessary skills to make small groups successful in their congregations.

Finally, further study by several congregations who may wish to use the (preferred) full year to complete the new believer's class would give greater clarification as to the real benefits of a small group approach with the necessary modifications.

APPENDIX A
SMALL GROUP COVENANT

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SMALL GROUP COVENANT

The two-fold purposes or goals for the spiritual growth small groups are ---

Building Authentic Community – John 17

Foster Spiritual Growth and Maturity

John 17 should be our creed – by Ellen G. White *SM*, vol. 3, p. 21 (1899)

In order to achieve these two goals, this has to be a **closed group**. You are seeking to create an environment where the HOLY SPIRIT can get access to the people in your group. *The horticulturist wants the young plants to be well nurtured.* The group is, however, open to building authentic relationships.

By the grace of God, we will:

1. Meet for **13 weeks**, after which we will have the choice to continue or start new groups.
2. Meet from **4:30 pm to 6:00 pm**, and we will strive to start and end on time.
3. Meet **upstairs the welfare center at the St. John's SDA Church**.
4. Make the group a **priority** with each person represented.
5. **Take ownership** and share responsibility for the group and its goals.
6. **Prepare** for and **participate** in the study and discussion during small group meetings.
7. Use the **Bible** as our main tool for study.
8. **Respect** each other. Everyone has the right to his or her own opinion and all questions are encouraged.
9. **Provide** a safe, **confidential** environment. What is said in the group stays in the group.
10. Regularly assess our own **personal growth** goals and encourage one another in our pursuit of Christ-likeness.
11. **Share** with other members in the group for support and **accountability**.
12. Call upon each other at any time for **care & support**. Provide care to every member of the group.
13. **Pray** for members regularly.

Leader _____

Group members:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____

5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

12. _____
13. _____
14. _____

APPENDIX B

PURPOSE-DRIVEN SMALL GROUP HEALTH ASSESSMENT

APPENDIX B

PURPOSE-DRIVEN SMALL GROUP HEALTH ASSESSMENT

	B	G	W		
CONNECTING with your church family (Membership)					
We are intentionally cultivating our relationships with Christian friends & spiritual mentors.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are connected in Christian Community under the care of a Shepherd Leader.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are more loving, grace giving, & forgiving to others than we were a year ago.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are authentically connecting with our immediate family relationships.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are resolving conflict with others in a biblical manner, and supporting the leadership of this church family.....	1	2	3	4	5
Membership Total _____					
GROWING in your spiritual journey (Maturity)					
We are growing spiritually through regular quiet time in God's Word & prayer	1	2	3	4	5
We respond to challenges with peace and faith rather than anxiety and fear to protect us from pain	1	2	3	4	5
We are using a growth journal to develop spiritually.....	1	2	3	4	5
We avoid using addictive behaviors (food, television, busyness, etc.).....	1	2	3	4	5
We are honoring God with our finances & our personal giving (budget) to God.....	1	2	3	4	5
Maturity Total _____					
DISCOVERING your SHAPE (Ministry)					
We have attended the 301 CLASS, discovered our SHAPE and completed our SHAPE interview.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are serving in a regular (monthly or better) ministry to the church body.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are expressing our gifts (S.H.A.P.E.) as a way of life at work and at home.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are sharing responsibility within our small group by taking a role.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are praying, discipling, or mentoring another person in the group or community.....	1	2	3	4	5
Ministry Total _____					
SHARING your life mission (Mission)					
We are actively praying for & cultivating relationships with unchurched friends & family.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are inviting seekers to church and sharing our spiritual story with them.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are participating in cross-cultural missions by discovering their needs and praying for them	1	2	3	4	5
We are praying and considering on where God can use us cross-culturally in the future.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are reproducing our life spiritually and/or praying for when this will happen.....	1	2	3	4	5
Mission Total _____					
SURRENDERING your heart as worship (Magnification)					
We are faithfully attending corporate worship services on the weekends.....	1	2	3	4	5
We have created a life mission statement and are seeking to fulfill it.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are growing in our personal worship to God through music & praise.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are surrendering our whole life by improving my exercise and nutrition.....	1	2	3	4	5
We are honoring God with every dimension of our life by balancing His purposes in our life...1	2	3	4	5	
Magnification Total _____					

JUST BEGINNING 0- 5	FAIR 5-10	GETTING GOING 10-15	VERY GOOD 15-20	WELL DEVELOPED 20-25
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APPENDIX C

NEW CONVERTS' LESSONS

NEW CONVERTS' LESSONS

This is a summary of thirteen lessons from book one of the *Sabbath School Bible study guide – New believers' edition*. This first edition is called *In step with Jesus*. It is the first in a series of four books. Each new convert was expected to complete all thirteen lessons from this book and participate fully in all the related exercises.

LESSON 1

A SINFUL WOMAN FORGIVEN

Bible Story: Luke 7: 36-42 (NKJV)

36 Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. 37 And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, 38 and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." 40 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." 41 "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

Group Discussion: *Divide into groups of four. Read the passage carefully by yourself. Think careful about what it says. Then reflect on what it means. Each one in the group of four will chose a character from the story and put himself or herself in that person's role as you answer the questions below. These characters are the disciple, Simon, the woman and a sinner in the crowd. Share your answers with your group.*

1. What would it have been like to be this _____ person?
2. Are there any similarities between yourself and the character you have chosen?
3. What is God inviting me to be or to do?

Key Concepts

Call: In the Bible there are two kinds of calls. The first is an invitation to be a disciple of Jesus, and it is given to everyone. The second is an invitation to serve God in a way that is unique to the individual receiving the call. This week's lesson deals with the first meaning of call.

Disciple: A disciple is one who has accepted Jesus' promise of eternal life and is becoming like Him as he or she lives in relationship with others.

LESSON 2

JESUS HEALS A BLIND MAN

Bible Story: Mark 10: 46-52 (NKJV)

46 Now they came to Jericho. As He went out of Jericho with His disciples and a great multitude, blind Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, sat by the road begging. 47 And when he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” 48 Then many warned him to be quiet; but he cried out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” 49 So Jesus stood still and commanded him to be called. Then they called the blind man, saying to him, “Be of good cheer. Rise, He is calling you.” 50 And throwing aside his garment, he rose and came to Jesus. 51 So Jesus answered and said to him, “What do you want Me to do for you?” The blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, that I may receive my sight.” 52 Then Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus on the road.

Group Discussion: *Divide into groups of four. Read the passage carefully by yourself. Think careful about what it says. Then reflect on what it means. Each one in the group of four will chose a character from the story and put himself or herself that person’s role as you answer the questions below. These characters are a disciple, Bartimaeus, Timaeus and a sick person in Jericho. Share your answers with your group.*

1. What would it have been like to be this _____ person?
2. Are there any similarities between yourself and the character you have chosen?
3. What is God inviting me to be or to do right now?

Key Concept

Small group: A group of six to twelve persons who provide a discipling community, meeting regularly in an informal setting. It offers these elements: unconditional acceptance, Bible study, prayer, accountability, and ministry.

I Commit to:

LESSON 3

WHO IS JESUS?

Bible Story: Matthew 17: 4-8 (NIV)

4 Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.” 5 While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” 6 When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified. 7 But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.” 8 When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.

Group Discussion: *Divide yourselves into groups of four. Read the passage carefully by yourself. Think carefully about what it says. Then reflect on what it means. Each one in the group of four will choose a character from the story and put himself or herself in that person’s role as you answer the questions below. These characters are two persons as disciples and two as Jesus. Share your discoveries with your group.*

1. What would it have been like to be this _____ person?
2. Are there any similarities between yourself and the character you have chosen?
3. What is God inviting me to be or to do right now?
4. How does my understanding of who Jesus is affect the way I live?

Key Concept

Messiah/Christ: Both words mean “the anointed one.” Messiah is the Hebrew word used in the Old Testament. Christ is the Greek word used in the New Testament.

I Commit to:

LESSON 4

HIS OWN TESTIMONY

Memory Text - Philippians 2: 9-11 (NKJV)

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Read the passage of scripture slowly and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Then discuss the questions below in your group of four.

1. What titles did Jesus claim for Himself
2. What titles do I accept as Belonging to Jesus?
3. What do the titles of Jesus imply for my relationship with Him?
4. What is God asking me to be or do in this passage of scripture?

Key concept

Lord: This title carries a variety of meanings from supreme master to any person with authority. Meaning must be determined by the context and the original Hebrew or Greek word. Sometimes it was used simply as a term of respect, like “sir.” When the early Christians used “Lord” with the name Jesus the title carried the highest possible meaning.

I Commit to:

LESSON 5

MY UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD

Memory Text: Luke 24: 25-27 (NKJV)

25 Then He said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?” 27 And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

Acts 17: 6

6 But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some brethren to the rulers of the city, crying out, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.

Read the passage of scripture slowly and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Then discuss the questions below in your group of four.

1. Why does becoming a disciple turn my world upside down?
2. How does the Word of God challenge every worldview?
3. What happens when my world view changes, but the world view of my family and friends does not?
4. What is God asking me to be or do in this passage of scripture?

Key concept

Breaking barriers: The Gospel goes beyond the social prejudices that dominate our world. Just as Jesus presented the message to an educated, famous, and respected man, He also presented it to a poor woman with a bad reputation and no education. A distinctive element of the Christian message is that it can breakdown cultural, ethnic, social, economic, and spiritual barriers.

I Commit to:

LESSON 6

GOD'S PRIORITIES AND MINE

Memory Text: John 10: 9-10 (NKJV)

9 I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. 10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

Read the passage of scripture slowly and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Then discuss the questions below in your group of four.

1. What are my highest priorities?
2. How do my priorities relate to God's priorities for me?
3. What should I do with my life?
4. What is God asking me to be or do in this passage of scripture?

Key Concept

Priority: Giving God first place in our lives.

I Commit to:

LESSON 7

LIFE AS A NEW DISCIPLE

Memory Text: Mark 5:18-20 (NKJV)

18 And when He got into the boat, he who had been demon-possessed begged Him that he might be with Him. 19 However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you.” 20 And he departed and began to proclaim in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marvelled.

Read the passage of scripture slowly and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Then discuss the questions below in your group of four.

1. How can I cope with the major changes in my life that come from my discipleship?
2. What do these changes mean with regards to telling my friends about Jesus?
3. Now that I am a disciple, how will I relate all of life’s problems?
4. What is God asking me to be or do in this passage of scripture?

Key Concept

Sons of God: Once we accept Jesus as our Savior and testify to it by the act of baptism, God adopts us as His children. Of course, now that we are children of God does not mean we will not have problems.

I Commit to:

LESSON 8

JESUS' PATIENCE WITH HIS DISCIPLES

Memory Text: Mark 16: 6-7 (NKJV)

6 But he said to them, “Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. 7 But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.”

Read the passage of scripture slowly and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Then discuss the questions below in your group of four.

1. Think about what a disciple of Jesus should do after he or she has sinned.
2. What relevance does the story of Peter's failures have for me today?
3. How can the Lord restore me despite my falls?
4. What is God asking me to be or do in this passage of scripture?

Key Concept

God is patient: Two of the characteristics that identify the character of Jesus are that He is patient and merciful. His patience was a key element in the spiritual growth of the apostle Peter.

I Commit to:

LESSON 9

THE BIBLE AS A GUIDE FOR LIFE

Memory Text: Psalm 119: 105 (NKJV)

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

*Read the passage of scripture slowly and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart.
Then discuss the questions below in your group of four.*

1. Since the Bible was written thousands of years ago, how can it be a guide for my life today?
2. What help does the Bible give me for the issues I face today?
3. How much academic training do I need today to understand the Bible?
4. What is God asking me to be or do in this passage of scripture?

Key Concept

The Word of God: As has been shown in the life of Jesus, the Bible is the surest guide for knowing God's plan for each of us.

I Commit to:

LESSON 10

THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

Memory Text: 2 Timothy 3: 16, 17 (NKJV)

16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Read the passage of scripture slowly and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Then discuss the questions below in your group of four.

1. Why do we have the Bible?
2. How does the Bible differ from any other book?
3. How can I be confident that the Bible was inspired by God?
4. What is God asking me to be or do in this passage of scripture?

Key Concepts

Revelation: Christians believe that God has revealed Himself to us by: 1. His word and 2. Creation - The Bible is God's special revelation to mankind. Indeed, being a document that reveals what we know about God, we can rely on the instruction it contains.

I Commit to:

LESSON 11

THE BIBLE AS A GUIDE FOR LIFE

Memory Text: Isaiah 55: 10, 11 (NKJV)

10 “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven,
And do not return there,
But water the earth,
And make it bring forth and bud,
That it may give seed to the sower
And bread to the eater,
11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

*Read the passage of scripture slowly and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart.
Then discuss the questions below in your group of four.*

1. What is God’s Word compared to?
2. How much time is required to understand what the Bible says?
3. What can God’s word accomplish?
4. What is God asking me to be or do in this passage of scripture?

Key Concept

Interpretation: Since the Bible was written at a very different time, culture, and language from ours, we need to have the necessary elements to help us understand the biblical message in the context in which it was given, and also allow us to extract the timeless truth that a particular passage has for us.

I Commit to:

LESSON 12

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE (PART 2)

Memory Text: Hebrews 4: 12 (NKJV)

12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Read the passage of scripture slowly and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Then discuss the questions below in your group of four.

1. What can the Word of God do?
2. What can I do to make the Bible relevant to my own life?
3. Should reading or studying my Bible always give me understanding and joy?
4. What is God asking me to be or do in this passage of scripture?

Key Concept

Meditation: Not only should we read and study the Word of God, but we should also take time to meditate on its instructions. Meditation involves quiet and deep reflection. It is enjoying God's presence.

I Commit to:

LESSON 13

MAKING TIME FOR GOD

Memory Text: John 15: 5, 6 (NKJV)

5 “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. 6 If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

Read the passage of scripture slowly and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Then discuss the questions below in your group of four.

1. How can I keep from being influenced by my secular culture to doubt God?
2. How much time does it take to get to know Jesus?
3. What elements help create Spirit-filled devotions?
4. What is God asking me to be or do in this passage of scripture?

Key Concepts

Staying in God: The Christian life is not a passing momentary experience. The true believer will have a permanent experience with God through prayer, Bible Study and obedience to the truths received.

I Commit to:

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