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### A Discipleship Program for Developing Community in the Amazing Grace Seventh-day Adventist Church Plant in Johannesburg

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ABSTRACT

A DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNITY  
IN THE AMAZING GRACE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST  
CHURCH PLANT IN JOHANNESBURG

by

Samuel O. Misiani

Adviser: Steve Willsey

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNITY IN THE AMAZING GRACE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH PLANT IN JOHANNESBURG

Name of Researcher: Samuel O. Misiani

Name and degree of faculty adviser: Steve Willsey, DMin

Date Completed: August 2014

Problem

Many believers hunger for a deeper experience with Christ in their spiritual life, but do not know how to go about it. This discipleship and spirituality project was an attempt to discover a model that one could use to develop an authentic community in the ministry context of the researcher. Discipleship is a loving relationship with Christ in which the one whom He calls submits to His Lordship, and makes God's purpose and glory the sole reason for being. In essence it is about total commitment to the Lordship of Christ, and cooperation with the Holy Spirit in His work of life transformation.

## Method

The study had two basic sections that were administered in a session of one hour and 30 minutes each. The groups met for a total period of 16 weeks.

The first section was called “Grace Moments.” These were selected biblical stories intended for use in the small groups. The second section was an experience-based Bible study designed to lead the participants into a deeper practical walk with God and to continue building their spiritual life habits.

This study followed a relational model. That is, while content was important, the group facilitator would also be sensitive to other factors existing between the group members. Content should be lived out in a relational model. In this model, I advocated that for a small group to develop, become, and remain community, it needed to be a closed group. The group was closed after the second meeting. Rationale for a closed group was that community is built around openness and honesty.

## Results

The program has initiated a discipleship process for creating authentic community at Amazing Grace Seventh-day Adventist Church in Johannesburg. The interview responses have indicated a notable spiritual growth among the participants. The average rating of the whole experience showed that most of the participants were very happy with the discipleship process and had spiritual growth during the exercise. The participants actually felt that they had been transformed into an authentic community with a deeper and growing spiritual life than before they engaged in the discipleship journey. This expectation has been largely met, as shown by what participants scored on their expectations from the community of Grace experience (87.2% rating average), and the

measurement on effectiveness of the program in developing community among the group (88% average rating).

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNITY  
IN THE AMAZING GRACE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST  
CHURCH PLANT IN JOHANNESBURG

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

by  
Samuel O. Misiani

August 2014

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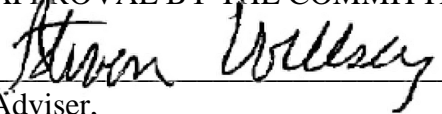
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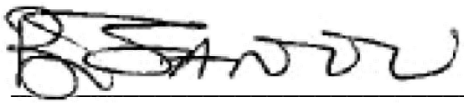
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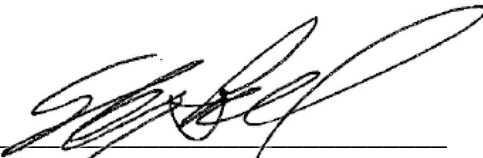
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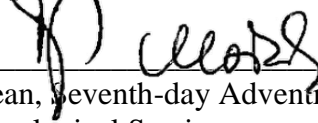
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Amazing Grace Ministry Context**

##### Adventists in Johannesburg, South Africa

The Adventist Church is not well known in South Africa in general. According to the Conference and community demographics, from LEAD, 2013-2016, the penetration of the Adventist Church in South Africa is about 1:480. The population of Adventists in the Northern Conference is about 18,000 and in the Trans-Orange Conference about 36,000 (in LEAD, 2013-2016). These are the two Conferences covering Johannesburg in Gauteng Province. South Africa has a population of around 53 million, according to LEAD 2013-2016. In Johannesburg the population is 10.3 million but the number of Adventists is less than 25,000. The penetration of Adventists in this city is 1:412 as compared to the national ratio of about 1:480.

##### Amazing Grace Congregation

Amazing Grace Seventh-day Adventist is a church plant within the Northern Conference (formerly known as Transvaal Conference until the end of 2013) of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Southern Africa Union, South Africa. The physical location is on the corner of Cumberland and Grosvenor roads at the Knowledge Base Centre in Bryanston, Johannesburg, South Africa. At the start of this project it had about

40 people who regularly worshipped at Amazing Grace, but by January 2014 regular weekly attendance has averaged about 130 people.

### History of the Congregation

The vision to plant Amazing Grace Seventh-day Adventist Church was conceived by a cell group that met every Tuesday at the residence of Pastor Samuel Misiani to study the Bible, pray, and have fellowship. In 2010, this group started making strategic plans to plant Amazing Grace as a new congregation in Johannesburg. The church plant was inaugurated in October 2010, but effectively took place in January 2011. It was organized into a full-fledged church according to the Seventh-day Adventist organizational policy in August 2012. Figure 1 shows demographics excluding children under 13 years.

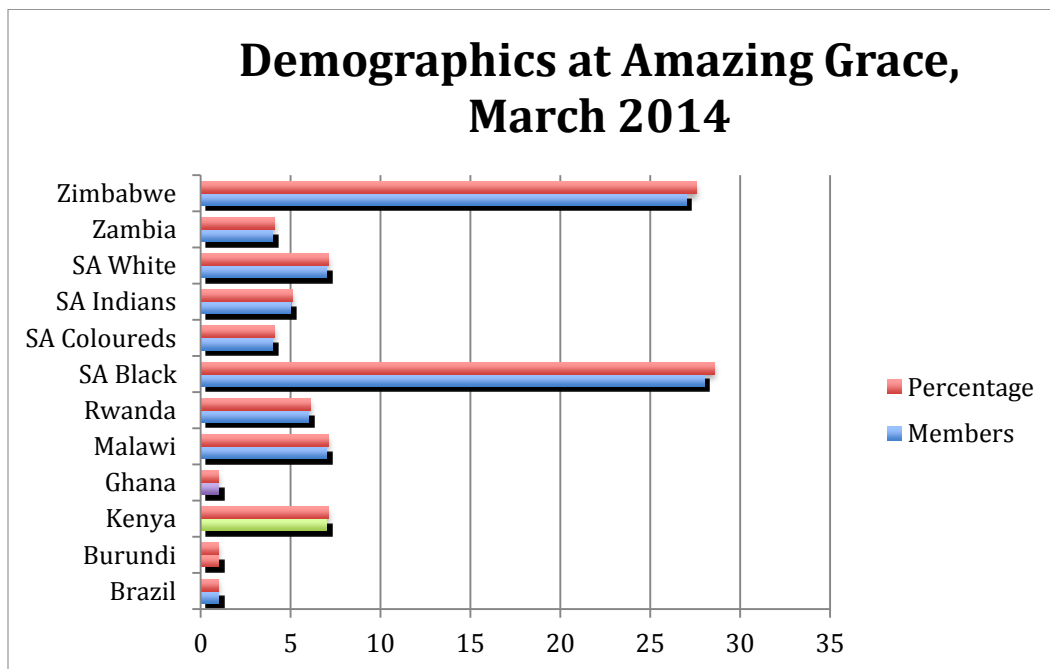


Figure 1. Demographic overview of Amazing Grace as per March 2014.



The ratio of men to women ages 14 and above was 35:53. The total number of children ages 0-13 years was 39: ages 1-7 were 26, and ages 8-13 were 13.

### Internal Statistics and Trends

During the church plant period, Amazing Grace had children ranging from ages 8 to 12 coming from Hillbrow, a heavily populated and notorious area of Johannesburg City, especially noted for crime and other things. Some of the children attending had no religious background at all as their parents had no church affiliation and were not attending anywhere. This was a positive thing for Amazing Grace because it meant that we were reaching non-Adventist parents through the children's ministries. The children were able to share with their parents their experiences. One of the programs for the children involved keeping a diary every day, noting down their prayer requests, thanksgiving, and answered prayer. It has been a humbling experience to listen to the children share answered prayers for their parents and friends. Several parents of these children have since then become members of the Amazing Grace congregation.

When the church was planted we did not have many young people between the ages of 15-30. By March 2014 the youth Sabbath School had over 100 young people in attendance mostly visitors. This number does fluctuate from Sabbath to Sabbath.

At Amazing Grace the leaders try to empower everybody to discover their ability in sharing the Word of God through preaching from the pulpit at the church and also sharing the Word through other forms of personal witnessing. Several of the adults and young people participate in the preaching program. The young people, male and female, are encouraged to participate in this exercise, and the response has been encouraging. The growth at Amazing Grace is, however, attributed to the children from Hillbrow.

## Ministry Overview

The ministries at Amazing Grace are still in the formation stages and have not quite picked up according to the strategic plans for the church. The community of Grace discipleship and spirituality project has been a great booster in the development of Amazing Grace as more members have now become committed and active.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In my pastoral practice in Kenya and in Johannesburg, South Africa, I have met Christians who are hungering for a deeper experience with Christ in their spiritual lives but do not know how to go about it. They have knowledge of the church's fundamental beliefs and are faithful to the church. However, when challenged by life issues such as barrenness, sickness, attack by demonic forces, they resort to consulting with traditional spiritual healers and diviners, known as *sangoma*, for solutions. Other members attend churches of other denominations to find fellowship and encouragement to face life's challenges.

The root cause of both of these dynamics seems to be a lack of authentic community in the Seventh-day Adventist churches in Johannesburg. The implementation of a discipleship program focused on experiencing biblical spirituality would lead to the realization of a deeper devotion to Christ in an authentic community of grace that would help people meet their life challenges without resorting to other denominations or visiting a *sangoma*.

### **Statement of the Task of the Project**

The task of this project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a discipleship

program that promotes the experience of biblical spirituality in the religious and cultural context of Johannesburg thereby creating an authentic community in the Amazing Grace church plant.

### **Justification for the Project**

#### The Command to Make Disciples

The theological foundation of this project is rooted in the Great Commission of Christ Jesus to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to make disciples (Matt 24:14; 28:19-20). Through the church God is forming authentic community, a Kingdom of God, where Christ reigns as Lord. In this community love is the principle of action in every heart, according to the command of Christ in John 13:34-35 and as was practiced in Acts 2:42-47. The teaching of the disciple's union with Christ, found in passages of scripture such as John 15:1-8, Eph 1:3-7, 2 Cor 5:14-17, Col 3:1-3, are key passages constituting the biblical foundation for the research project. This union with Christ demands a life of total commitment and transformation of the mind through the power of the indwelling Christ. As the believers learn to focus on the love of God in Christ Jesus, they will desire to submit themselves to Him, and allow Christ to be formed within them (Col 1:27).

#### The Experience of True Biblical Spirituality

The need to experience true biblical spirituality is a constant reality in my ministry context. In my pastoral experience in Johannesburg we do have people, young and old, who when emotionally challenged and feeling a need for a spiritual boost, visit non-Adventist congregations in pursuit of warmth of fellowship, but continue to come to the Adventist church for the Word of God. It is believed that the Adventist congregations

have the Word, but others have the warmth of fellowship. As a result, we have members of the church with divided loyalty. There is a need for creating an authentic community where the teaching of biblical doctrines is balanced with the practice of biblical spiritual habits to enable members to grow in Christ and experience an “emotionally healthy spirituality” as Scazzerro (2006) puts it in his book by the same title.

### The Fear of the Forces of Darkness

The problem of the *sangoma*, and the fear of forces of darkness within the traditional beliefs system in my ministry context have not been dealt with effectively. There are Adventists who visit traditional healers and diviners, commonly known as “*sangoma*,” to consult the dead or get spiritual counsel to address their problems. Such practices weaken the personal growth of the individuals involved and diminish the witness of the church as a community. A deeper experience with God, through the practice of the biblical spiritual habits, would strengthen the ability of the participants to resist the devil and to overcome the temptation to resort to the traditional ways of handling spiritual challenges.

### Fellowship in an Authentic Community

People need to experience fellowship of love without the hypocrisy written in Rom 12:9. The importance of Christian fellowship where loving and mutual support are experienced need no emphasis. A new member of my congregation reported to me that her teenage daughter refused to go to church with her because she felt rejected by some of the church members because of her style of dressing. Such experiences suggest a need for an authentic community where believers can experience acceptance and spiritual

growth as depicted in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-35. The warmth of fellowship generated in the community of grace groups that were formed would be reflected in the worship of the Church, creating an environment where new members joining the Adventist Church would feel welcomed and enjoy worship and spiritual fellowship.

### **Description of the Project Process**

1. The *in Christ* motif, or the believer's union with Christ, was the main component of the theological foundation of this project and formed the basis for the formation of authentic Christian community as in Acts 2:42-47, a Kingdom of God, where Christ reigns as Lord and love is the principle of action in every heart and the basis of worship to God as in Rev 14:6-7. The *in Christ* motif describes both what God accomplished for us in Christ from the foundation of the earth and through the story of redemption objectively, and in our subjective Christian experience through life transforming faith in Christ (Eph 1:3-7, 2 Cor 5:14-17, Col:13-14, Rom 12:1-3). The theological chapter captured this concept in the context of the project.

2. The literature review included material on various aspects of authentic community, discipleship, and spiritual development. The theoretical understandings of community in the secular society, as well as biblical perspectives on authentic community, were reviewed. Literature on biblical understanding of discipleship and spiritual development, biblical spirituality, and a description of the challenges of *Sangomas* dynamics in Johannesburg context have also been reviewed. Adventist perspectives on discipleship and spiritual development, and the concept of Sabbath rest as an experience of spirituality, including some Ellen G. White insights into spiritual development and discipleship, were surveyed.

3. Participants were encouraged to grow in Christ through small groups known as Community of Grace that met together to practice biblical spiritual life habits such as reading the Bible, meditating on the Word of God, praying, sharing, and seeking to experience and implement the teachings in practical living.

4. Christ-centred lessons that emphasized a Kingdom mindset and the formation of spiritual life habits were developed and used by the small groups. There were three such small groups meeting once a week on Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday. The researcher led all three groups.

5. The researcher periodically asked the small group participants to share their spiritual journey. The participants gave two written reports on their progress, as well as filling out the questionnaire at the end of the course. A qualitative research questionnaire was developed to assess the growth of the participants. The questionnaire had both open ended and Likert scale type questions that was used for evaluating the participant's overall experience with the Community of Grace. The personal testimonies of Christian experiences as a result of adopting the biblical spiritual life habits that promote Kingdom living were noted. Growth in personal devotional activities, as well as improvement in important relationships such as friends and family, were observed.

6. The study was initially intended to take only four months but actually took six months because of the unforeseen eventualities regarding work situations of both the researcher and the participants. The groups met once a week for six months.

7. Findings have been documented and further recommendations and modifications of the discipleship program suggested.

## **Expectations From This Project**

It was the hope of the researcher that this project would result in a Christian fellowship where members experience a loving and mutual support. Those who join the church also feel the need to stay because their need to experience God both with the mind and the heart are satisfied and they are emotionally healthy. That is, they feel empowered by the Holy Spirit to love God, others, and have a right attitude about themselves. This expectation has been largely met, as shown by what participants scored on their expectations from the community of Grace experience, and the effectiveness of the program in developing community among the group as shown in Chapter 6.

It was also hoped that this project would nurture an authentic community with a balanced, vibrant, and authentic spiritual life that had the power to resist and overcome the forces of darkness and spiritualism that attract people to alternatives such as consultation with *sangoma* and other worship experiences outside the Adventist Church.

It was further thought that this project would provide a possible model for other pastors to follow in promoting spiritual development and discipleship of young people in South Africa and other areas with similar needs.

Moreover, the researcher also hoped to grow spiritually by taking this journey with other participants, and to become a better small group leader through the experience.

Finally it was hoped that this project would empower the researcher's ministry and his congregations by providing new skills and abilities for ministering to small groups and mentoring others in the spiritual development and discipleship process.

## **Delimitations**

This project was limited to those members of Amazing Grace congregation who

had expressed a desire to participate in the discipleship program through the community of Grace. It was further limited to the members who could afford to attend using their own means of transportation since the researcher had no funds to provide transportation for the participants. It was limited to a period of six months even though others felt a longer period was needed. The number of groups involved was limited to suit the researcher's ability to manage the process and still carry out other work obligations.

### **Limitations**

There were a few notable limitations to the project, namely:

**Time.** Discipleship is a process and a journey and best results can only be realized when time is adequate.

**Financial resource.** With sufficient funding the project could be expanded to include several small groups.

The participants were working people with different schedules and office or school demands, making it impossible for perfect attendance that would yield total participation in the program.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Community of Grace:* Community of Grace is used to refer to believers meeting in small groups for discipleship and spiritual growth in Christ through closed fellowship to practice spiritual life habits.

*Closed fellowship:* A closed fellowship is when the small group is composed of a number of people that remain together for a specific period of time without accepting



new members within that specified time. At the stated time period the fellowship will open up to receive new members or divide to form new small groups.

*Sangoma:* *Sangoma* is a Zulu word for traditional healer and diviner often inherited through the family. A *sangoma* line is generally thought to be able to communicate with ancestral spirits and give guidance to the living on various matters including physical health, emotional, and spiritual matters.

*Spiritual development:* From a biblical perspective spiritual development is the harmonious growth in Christ in the physical, mental, social, spiritual faculties, and well-being of the individual in the context of community. It involves the sanctification of the whole spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23), in the context of community.

*The In-Christ motif:* The in-Christ motif is used to refer to the believer's union with Christ both objectively as in Eph1:4 and subjectively as in Col 1:27.

*LEAD:* This is an acronym for Living Evangelism As Discipleship, a Northern conference Strategic plans initiative for 2013-2016.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY, DISCIPLESHIP, AND SPIRITUALITY

The ministry context of my project demands a clear biblical and theological understanding of what it entails to live in union with Christ and to rely on the power of Christ in overcoming the evil forces of darkness that seek to dominate the lives of people. Is there a clear model in the early church that one can use to develop an authentic community in my ministry context today? In this chapter we will explore a biblical and theological foundation for authentic community in the light of biblical discipleship and spirituality. We will look at not only how authentic community was formed in the early church, but also concepts of discipleship in the gospels, in the early church, in the book of Revelation, and from Ellen G. White's writings, particularly the book *Steps to Christ*. The "in Christ" motif as found in the Pauline epistles will also be examined in the context of discipleship and biblical spirituality.

There is a connection between good theology and spirituality. Whitney (2003) in his presentation of spiritual disciplines for the overwhelmed argues, "Theology drives and determines your spirituality" (p. 58). The writer concurs with Whitney in that even the way one prays, or not prays, is determined by the theology one holds. The theology that will inform this chapter is biblical theology leading to biblical discipleship and spirituality as opposed to other forms of spirituality that have no foundation in the Bible.

What is a disciple? According to Samsara (2003), discipleship can be viewed in different ways including the process of becoming or being a disciple, the process of being educated by a teacher, or the process of becoming like a master. Samsara writes that there are three reasons for this confusion.

First, the word “disciple” (*mathetes*) and its related verbal form (*matheteuo*) are sometimes used in an educational or intellectual sense (Matt 10:24; 13:52). According to this usage “discipleship” is simply the process of being educated by a teacher. At other times, and more frequently, discipleship involves life transformation (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; cf 1:17:18), in which case discipleship is seen as the process of becoming like one’s master.

Second, at times the focus is on the beginning of the process (Matt 27:57; Acts 14:21), that is, discipleship is becoming a disciple. That is, believing in Jesus is in itself an act of becoming a disciple. At other times the focus is on being a disciple (Luke 14:26-27). That is the main emphasis in Luke 14:26-27, on discipleship as the process of becoming like one's master.

Third, there are different referents for the word “disciple.” Sometimes the word denotes those who occasionally followed Christ (Matt 8:21). Used in this context, discipleship meant a process whereby the masses learned more about Christ. Sometimes the word “disciple” is used of those select few who were being trained to be leaders of the church (Matt 17:1). In this case, discipleship is the process of selecting a specific few to become as much like Christ as possible through a concentrated, focused life.

According to Samsara, an all-inclusive meaning of discipleship is necessary to comprehend all the New Testament material on discipleship: Discipleship involves both

becoming a disciple and being a disciple. At times the focus is on the entrance into the process (evangelism), but most often the focus is on growing in the process (maturity); it includes both teaching and life transformation. It is a general call for everyone and also an intense process for a select few. Therefore it is best to think of discipleship as the process of becoming like Christ (Samsara, 2003, pp. 219-34).

Wilkins (1992) also observes that there is a general and specific usage of the word disciple in the New Testament. In general terms “a disciple is a committed follower of a great master, leader or movement.” In specific terms, a disciple of Jesus Christ is “one who has come to him as Saviour and God, and has embarked upon the life of following him” (p. 41).

### **Discipleship in the Gospels**

The word discipleship in the gospels is used for all who were following Jesus Christ and His teachings (Luke 6:13). According to Wilkins, we should call all believers disciples and only differentiate them according to their degrees of commitment to the call of Christ. Thus we may have beginners and mature disciples, faithful and those who are “less than completely faithful” (p. 46).

One of the raging theological questions concerning discipleship in the Gospels (Luke 14:25-33, also Matt 10:34-39) is whether being a disciple is a necessary condition for salvation. Must one be a disciple in order to have eternal life? This is what is known as the “Lordship/non-Lordship salvation” debate (Wilkins, 1992, p. 44). The question can also be put differently: Is every person who believes in Christ a disciple of Christ? Or, is the term disciple a synonym for Christian? Can one come to Christ for salvation and not

want to be a disciple? Is the disciple regarded as the extreme case of a Christian or the normal Christian?

According to Wilkins, when Jesus spoke of disciple He had in mind what would be the normal Christian, not the exceptional (1992, p. 46). What Jesus expected of discipleship in the Gospels is His expectation for all Christians throughout the ages. Wilkins stated: “Jesus wants a church full of disciples who dare to go out into the world to make a difference and to live life the way it was intended to be lived” (p. 47). Jesus did not envision a church where some are active and others not. The biblical model does not seem to have a division of laity and clergy; it is depicted in the Gospels as a vine with many branches. Christ is the branch and the followers are the branches. The branches are organically linked to the vine and draw life from it. The branches are not independent of each other, but collectively form the tree (John 15:1-8).

### The Call to Discipleship

Jesus prayed before He selected the apostles to follow Him, “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles” (Luke 6:12-13).

From the call of Peter, Andrew, James, and John a pattern emerges. Jesus met His disciples as they were carrying out their business of fishing or collecting taxes. He gave them a vision of their future work: “Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). They received the call, left all their businesses, and followed Jesus.

First, from the call of the disciples it may be safe to say that discipleship has a definite purpose. Its purpose is to follow the Master. Jesus called them that they might be

with Him and that they might go and do the work of proclaiming the good-news of the Kingdom, healing the sick, and casting out demons (Mark 3:13-15).

Second, the training of the disciples was practical and interactive. He called them to be with Him and learn of Him. The training involved public lessons, private lessons, and observations of the Master at work. Sometimes they asked questions for clarification and understanding. When they were defeated in casting out a demon, for example, they asked Jesus, “Why could we not drive out the demons?” (Mark 9:28-29). Other times Jesus Himself asked them questions to help them think deeper and get better understanding: “Who do you say that I am?” (Luke 9:20).

The disciples learned through observation and practice. They watched Him heal the sick, cast out demons, and feed the five thousand. They saw Him walk on the water and allow Peter to get out of the boat and walk on the water too. They watched Him pray, and He taught them how to pray. He involved them in the same work He was doing. He broke the bread and the fish, but He gave them to the disciples to give to the people. It was not a one-man show.

### **The Transformation of the Disciple**

Jesus sent out the twelve to a mission to have a hands-on experience all by themselves while He was still on earth with them (Luke 9:1-6). He sent them with a clear instruction-strategy for mission, and then He empowered them for the mission (Luke 9:1-6; 10:1-12).

The experience of being with Jesus transformed them into His servants who were willing to lay down their lives for the Master just as He had laid down His life for them. After being with the Master for three and a half years they learned their lessons enough to

be able to imitate Him after they had received the power of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. The disciples were transformed into their Master's likeness. At Antioch they were called Christians because their way of life reflected that of their Master, Jesus Christ, and they exercised the same power that Christ had to cure all manner of diseases and to cast out demons (Acts 11:26; 13:1-12).

### **The Cost of Discipleship**

Jesus taught that being His disciple involved the carrying of the cross and being willing to be crucified on it (Luke 9:23), that is, discipleship comes with a cost.

Bonhoeffer in his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, said, "If Christ calls a man He bids him come and die" (1937, p. 7). The life and work of the disciple is characterized by selfless service or servant leadership (Matt 20:25-28). Jesus did not only teach it but He also demonstrated it (John 13:12-17). He washed the feet of the disciples, including Judas. After washing their feet He continued to humble Himself to the death of the cross, the ultimate act of sacrificial service to those He loved and for the glory of God (Phil 2:5-11).

By His example Jesus demonstrated that servant-leadership is the normal everyday life of the disciple. Did the disciples follow Him? They did and lived and died as martyrs for Jesus.

### **The Life of the Disciple**

A true disciple is one who lives an authentic life both before God and humanity. Jesus' style of discipleship demonstrated what it truly means to be open and vulnerable. When He was happy He leaped with joy and worshipped (Luke 10:21). When He was grieved He wept (John 11:35). Christ was authentic. Some of the vulnerable moments in

the life of Christ are very revealing of the heart of God. He was not afraid to express His emotions before the disciples. He wept over Jerusalem in disappointment (Matt 23:37); He wept at the tomb of Lazarus; He confessed that the flesh was weak (Mark 14:38); He said that He was troubled at heart (John 12:27, Mark 14:34); He invited the disciples to pray with Him and watch with Him (Matt 26:38-41); He expressed His disappointment that Philip had not discerned the Father in His life (John 14:8-9); He experienced and expressed need for community (John 17:20-24); and He openly loved His disciples and commanded His disciples to love one another (John 13:34-35; 13:1). From the example of Jesus it is clear that the life of a disciple is an authentic life of love and devotion, lived out in community, and solely for the glory of God. It is also a life of self-sacrifice as demonstrated in the life of Jesus.

As the Prophet Isaiah had proclaimed before His birth, Jesus was indeed “a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3). His disciples are invited to suffer with Him, but also to be glorified with Him at the *parousia*, that is, at the second coming of Christ (Rom 8:17-18). Looking at Jesus’ model of discipleship, it may be safe to say that biblical discipleship and spirituality is not always free from pain, grief, and disappointments. It is rather a life lived in the reality of the present sufferings common to all humanity, but lived by the power of God and for His glory. When Christ was sorrowful he desired the disciples to watch with Him (Matt 26:40). The community of disciples provides a safe place for experiencing spiritual growth but also for sharing life’s challenges such as grief.

### **The Great Commission**

At the end of His ministry on earth Jesus commissioned His disciples to go and



make disciples (Matt 28:19). Jesus' discipleship model shows that discipleship is a dynamic relationship between the Master and the followers that requires time for learning by observation, practice, and, finally empowering the disciples to do as the Master has done. Writing about transforming discipleship, Ogden (2003) gives four stages of Jesus' discipleship model: (a) Christ the living example, (b) the provocative teacher, (c) the supportive coach, and (d) the ultimate delegator (p. 82). He shows that discipleship centers on the person of the Master: "knowing him, loving him, believing in him, being committed to him (p. 76). This kind of authentic relationship building takes time as Christ demonstrated by living with His disciples in community and teaching them daily (Luke 22:53).

Following the example of Jesus involves a process of mentoring and modeling the very life of Christ in community. It demands being with people in communities where they can see the life of Christ lived out practically.

In their article "Communities of Grace," Thrall and McNicol say, "Communities of grace and trust help us discover and define who we are and how we shall live in trust, love, grace, humility, dignity, and justice" (as cited in Andrews, 2010, p. 61). That is, the relationships with God and one another are key in biblical spirituality. For example, Jesus wept as He stood by the tomb of Lazarus, even though He had the power to raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11:35). He shared their pain and grief in an authentic manner; His way of interacting with His disciples.

It seems clear that Jesus' relationship with Lazarus' family, as well as with the disciples, was not simply casual, and intellectual. He touched them at the emotional level as well; He identified with them in their need. Perhaps this is what the apostle Paul later

reflected on in Rom 12:15 where he gives some of the principles of life to the community of faith. Paul said to the believers, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”

Jesus cared about relationships just as much as He cared about a correct understanding of who He was as “the resurrection and the life” (John 11: 25).

Based on the passages examined above it seems reasonable to conclude that discipleship in the Gospel narratives involves both receiving teachings from the Word of God, in this case through Jesus Christ Himself, and developing relationships that connect people with God and fellow human beings in community. Cloud and Townsend observe, “People’s most basic need in life is relationship. . . . Virtually every emotional and psychological problem, from addiction to depression, has alienation or emotional isolation at its core or close to it” (2001, p. 122).

The Gospels further reveal that Jesus modeled for His disciples the following life habits:

1. A life of prayer, living in the presence of God (Luke 11:1-4; 18:1).
2. A life of total dependence on God as the Source of everything (John 5:30).
3. A mentoring relationship. He spent time one on one with Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene, and with the disciples (John 3:1-6; Matt 17:1-13; Luke 9:1-6).
4. The need for prayer retreats (Luke 9:28).
5. The need for solitude, or spending time alone with God, and meditation on Scripture (John 6:15, 31-32; Matt 14:13).
6. The need for fasting (Matt 4:2; 6:16-18; Mark 2:20).

7. The power of the word in spiritual warfare, using the word as a weapon (Matt 4:4, 7, 10).
8. The value of memorizing Scripture (Matt 4:4; 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43).
9. The study of the word of God (Luke 20:41-44).
10. A life in authentic community with His disciples (John 13:1).
11. The Sabbath rest (Mark 2:27-28; Luke 4:16).
12. The servant leadership (John 13:12-17; Luke 22:24-27).
13. The cost of discipleship and suffering for the Kingdom (Luke 9:22, 24).

### **Discipleship in the Early Church**

Discipleship in the early church can be gleaned from the book of Acts. The apostles established churches and continued teaching the members of the churches in small households where the people met in communities. The book of Acts (2:42-47; 19:11-12) gives insight to the apostle's method of training disciples (20:17-23).

The work of discipleship was led by the Holy Spirit: The presence of the supernatural power of God was manifested (Acts 19:11-12); the demonic forces were cast out from the people (19:11-12); the apostles met the practical needs of the members who were poor (20:35); the ministry was marked with humility (20:19); the work involved public and house-to-house teaching, fellowship, prayers, and breaking of bread (2:42-47); the work of the apostles was grace based (20:24, 32); the kingdom of God was the focus of the apostle's preaching (20:25; 19:8); the work took time (19:10); and the need for self-abandonment for the sake of the gospel was emphasized (20:24).

Often the apostles or the spiritual teachers stayed in one place for long periods to train others. When they were not able to remain to build up the congregation the apostles

encouraged the believers through letters. These letters were supposed to be read in the churches in their absence to provide continued encouragement and guidance. The apostles insisted on teaching the people to know the Word of God correctly and to teach it accurately (2 Tim 1:6). They also encouraged the people to minister to one another using their spiritual gifts in ministry. The apostle Paul writing to Timothy said, “Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:14-15).

The discipleship model also took the form of mentoring and spiritual guidance, as in the relationship of Paul and Timothy (2 Tim 3:10-12). Paul saw himself as the spiritual father to Timothy (1 Tim 1:2, 18; 2 Tim 2:1; Phil 2:22). He worked with Timothy like a father and a son in an apprenticeship, learning from scripture and observing the apostle’s manner of life. Timothy and the other believers were supposed to emulate Paul’s life as he modelled the Christian life for them (2 Tim 3:10-11, 14). Paul first modelled the Christian life for Timothy and then he urged Timothy to continue in the things that he had learned and been assured of through his relationship with Paul. He said to all the believers in Philippi, “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil 4:9; Eph 4:32; 5:1-2; 1 Cor 4:16-17). The apostles followed the pattern that Jesus had set and urged the believers to follow the same pattern. Discipleship in the early church therefore followed the same model that Jesus had used.

## **Authentic Community in the Early Church**

### Biblical Perspectives on Authentic Community

According to Vine (1999), community comes from the Greek word *koinonia*, the noun form of the adjective *koinos* (Latin, *communis*) which means common or belonging to several and refers to things the believers had in common as in Acts 2:42 and 4:32, which refers to “a having in common,” fellowship, or partnership. It denotes “the share which one has in anything, a participation, fellowship recognized and enjoyed” (p. 61), that is, *koinonia* refers to “the common experiences and interests of Christian men” such as sharing in the “knowledge of the son of God,” participation in the Holy Communion, and “sharing in the resurrection life possessed in Christ, and so fellowship with the Father and the Son (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 10:16; 2 Cor 13:14; Phil 3:10, 2:11; John 1:3).

Communion also refers to the “fellowship manifested in acts.” In this sense the word refers to “the practical effects of fellowship with God, wrought by the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers as the outcome of faith” (Phlm 6; Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 9:13). In this study, community of grace is used to denote Christian fellowship where the participants share in oneness the resurrection life of Christ, exchanging thoughts, emotions, and being in agreement and growing in the knowledge of the Son of God as in Acts 2:42 and 4:32-35. They can also be referred to as a “spiritual growth community” (Cloud & Townsend, 2001, p. 181).

In this context grace is not just the means of our salvation, but as Thrall and McNicol explain, grace is “the very basis for our maturing and our life together. Grace is a realm, a present-tense reality that weaves around and through every moment of even our worst day” (as cited in Andrews, 2010, p. 67). Grace is here seen as signifying a

lifestyle, an environment or a community where we learn how faith relationships work.

Healthy spiritual growth happens only in a communal context: The context of a community of grace. A community of grace is a place where you receive love and give love. According Thrall and McNicol, it is just as important to receive love, as it is to give love. They say, “A healthy community is determinative for security, trust, integrity, freedom, creativity, maturity, joy and even physical safety” (as cited in Andrews, 2010, p. 64). They try to demonstrate that love and trust are related by arguing, “The degree to which I trust you is the degree to which I am able to receive your love, no matter how much actual love you may try to give me” (p. 64). This statement made me reflect on Gal 5:6, which says that faith works by love. Our first response to God is trust. His love manifested at the cross moves us to trust Him and give ourselves to Him in a loving response of obedience. That is total commitment to Him as Lord.

#### Authentic Community in the Early Church

Ingram (2012) asks the question, “What is an authentic community anyway?” (p. 155). Ingram found the answer to his question in Jesus’ last words to the disciples and His prayer for them and for all who would follow Him through their testimony (John 13:34-35; 17:20-24). He says, “Jesus loved the disciples in such a radical, self-sacrificial manner that He was now calling them to emulate Him in their relationships with one another” (pp. 156-157). That is, the believers experience authentic community with one another when they love one another radically and live in unity just as the Father and the Son live in love and oneness. It is this radical love for one another and unity that reveals the true Christian community. This is what the early church tried to emulate in their communities.

## The Spiritual Habits of the Community of Grace

The book of Acts also gives glimpses into some of the spiritual habits of the believers who lived in the community of grace: “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:2-3). Some of their spiritual habits are seen in the texts above are: They lived a life of total surrender to Jesus as Lord and were at His service. They fasted. They met and prayed together. Prayer was such an important part of their spiritual experience that the apostles chose to delegate the work of administration to deacons so that they would devote more time to prayer and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). They listened to the voice of the Holy Spirit and obeyed Him. They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles (Acts 2:42). They ate together and shared their possessions. They sang and praised God and enjoyed the favor of all the people. Unity was a great value and practice among the early believers in the book of Acts.

It is also important to observe that they were not perfect, as far as living in community was concerned. They had some diversity issues to deal with, but they approached the situation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. They still experienced some attitudes that demanded the establishment of the diaconry to deal with administrative issues of order, distribution, and fairness in meeting the needs of the community (Acts 6:1-7).

The spirit of caring love prevailed among the believers. The apostles urged the believers to have love without hypocrisy (Rom 12:9). According to Ingram (2012), “Authentic community occurs when the real you shows up and meets real needs for the

right reason in the right way” (Ingram, 2012, p. 160). The early Christians’ practice of giving was an act of worship springing from a heart of love for Jesus. They first gave themselves to the Lord then shared their property with one another. It was a manifestation of the grace of God in their lives (2 Cor 8:6-7). They saw their activities as a participation in the grace of God (9:6-8). They were a community of grace. The Holy Spirit led their activities. They knew Him by experience (Acts 13:2; 5:1-11) (Chan & Beuving, 2012, p. 281).

### **The “In Christ” Motif and Biblical Spirituality**

The “in Christ motif” is arguably the most important and fundamental motif of biblical theology of discipleship and spirituality as seen largely in the Pauline epistles. In Eph 1 the phrase is used 11 times in the first 14 verses. The main thrust of the thought is that the Christian life is a life in union with Christ. Christ is depicted both as the substitute and representative of humanity as discussed by Sequeira (2013) in a paper presented to the gospel Study Group at Andrews University (Knight, 2005, p. 186; Lloyd-Jones, 1981, p. 104; Stott, 2003, p. 34).

According to Stott (2003), the “in Christ” idea is “a pregnant expression which denotes a new principle of human solidarity” (p. 34; see also Lloyd-Jones, 1978, p. 83). Stott explains further, “Formerly we were ‘in Adam,’ belonging to the old fallen humanity; now we are ‘in Christ,’ belonging to the new redeemed humanity” (p. 34). The phrase “in Christ” speaks to what God has done for humanity in time and in eternity (Eph 1:3-4). Pauline thought in 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45, 47 suggests that there is a concept of corporate responsibility, or solidarity of humanity in Adam and in Christ. According to this concept it seems that Adam and Christ represent the entire human race in the sense



that what happens in one affects all humanity. Davidson (2010) and Baldwin (2008) call this principle of corporate solidarity “you were there motif.” Applying this corporate solidarity principle to Christ, Davidson says, “When He died and rose again, we were there. His death was our death, His resurrection ours! That is the meaning of 2 Cor 5:14, 15: when Christ died, we all died; we were there!”

The Christian’s union with Christ is viewed as an organic union, indissoluble save by the decision of the believer. The Christian has no existence outside of Christ, and can do nothing apart from Christ (John 15:4-5). The Christian is united with Christ in birth, life, death, burial, resurrection, and is seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:1-6, Rom 6:3-11). The Christian life and experience should be the manifestation of the power of the indwelling Christ through the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:1-2, 8). This experience of following Christ, or living in union with Christ, in all aspects of life is what true discipleship is all about in the Pauline context.

The same principle of living in union with Christ, or abiding in Christ, is found in the teaching of Christ on how disciples multiply and produce fruit:

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. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. <sup>8</sup>By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples. (John 15:5-8)

In this passage Jesus directly links the goal of discipleship to the “in Christ motif.” He says, “He who abides in Me, and I in Him. . . . If you abide in Me and My words abide in you . . .” (John 15:5, 7). The analogy of the vine and the branches paints a picture of an organic union between Christ and the believer. The life of the vine becomes

the life of the branch. The task of the branch is to abide in the vine. Fruitfulness is the result of remaining in Christ.

Abiding implies choice and intentionality. It is the will of the disciple cooperating with God (White, 2012, p. 57). It is in this context that the disciple produces fruit. The fruit itself is love, the character of Christ. Love is Christlikeness. In John 15:16, Christ makes it clear that He is the one who chose the disciples and He did it with a purpose. That purpose is to bear fruit. He commands them to love each other.

The life of the disciple begins with a predetermined end in mind. That end is a transformation of the character into Christlikeness and reflecting the same in all relationships. Jesus spoke of discipleship in the context of community bound together by love (John 13:34-35). Love within the community is the identifying mark of the disciples of Christ. The fruit of discipleship is something that is manifest in the community of faith. We thus experience community that is Christian when we are connected with each other through a connection with Christ.

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul follows the same “in Christ” motif in explaining the central teaching of the gospel, the message of righteousness by faith. The believer is justified freely “by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24). In Rom 5:18 the result of Adam’s sin is contrasted with the result of Christ’s act of righteousness. It is written, “Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.”

So the believer’s righteousness is not in himself but in Christ. The believer is “baptized into Christ Jesus,” baptized “into His death” (Rom 6:2, 3). He is also alive unto

God “in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:11). He has received eternal life as a free “gift of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (v. 23). The freedom from condemnation is because of the believer’s union with Christ (Rom 8:1). The power for living the in Christ life is derived from the Spirit of life “in Christ Jesus” (v. 2). Not only is there no condemnation but also, positively the believers are “more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (v. 37).

The disciple must be equipped with this information of what he or she is in Christ, and positively respond to the appeal of Christ from a grateful heart before beginning the journey. It is a journey of obedience from the heart, motivated by the love of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore, it is the love of God in Christ that motivates the disciple to follow Christ in loving obedience.

The ‘in Christ’ motif reveals the purpose of discipleship, that is, conformity to “the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29-30, 12:1-3). This conformity to the image of His Son is according to the purpose of His will, that is, that the disciple “should be to the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:9-12). In other words, the Christian, or the disciple’s goal is give glory to God by reflecting the image of Christ Jesus.

Furthermore, the biblical concept of community, which is very fundamental to discipleship, is also based on the fact that the believers are one body in Christ. “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another” (Rom 12:4-5). The believers participate in one Spirit (Eph 4:3-6).

What God has accomplished in Christ is the starting point of discipleship. This is grace. The disciple’s journey is therefore one of experiencing what is granted in union with Christ. It is like a branch to the vine (John 15:1-5). Eph 1:4 suggests that the

position of a disciple is that of assurance and confidence because God already chose the believer in Christ from the foundation of the world.

Thus discipleship and the spiritual life habits that are so important for transformation into the image of Christ must not be viewed as salvation by works because all of it is but a response to salvation accomplished in Christ and is given as a free gift to all who will receive Christ (Eph 2:8). In Christ the believer is blessed, chosen, redeemed, adopted, and accepted (Eph 1:3-7). Accepted in the Beloved is the starting point of discipleship and biblical spirituality. As Tozer puts it, and I paraphrase, we seek the one who has already found us (2006, p. 15).

Discipleship is therefore the pursuit of a God who has found and blessed us. It is learning to choose the God who has chosen us in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world. It is learning to love and imitate the one who loved us and gave Himself for us as written in Eph 5:1-2. A call to discipleship in the Pauline epistles is a ‘therefore’ experience. It is a logical conclusion of God’s work of grace in Christ, “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” It is this love of God in Christ that constrains the disciple to live for Christ and Him alone (2 Cor 5:14).

In the Pauline epistles the practice of the spiritual life habits is based on the fact that the believer was raised with Christ and his or her life is hid with Christ in God, according to Col 3:1-3. Based on this truth, the disciple is called to make a personal application of it. Hence the imperatives of the Gospels are given to demonstrate the character of the new person in Christ, that is, what God has accomplished for us in Christ

is the basis for what He wants to accomplish in the believer through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Every action of the disciple is supposed to be a reflection of what God has provided in Christ Jesus, and is done for the glory of Christ alone (Col 3:12-17).

In essence, what God is saying in this passage (vv. 12-17), is that as far as life in union with Christ and character building is concerned, the disciple should be clothed with Christ. Before giving this list of what to 'put on' the apostle had spent time on verses 5-11 spelling out what to 'put off'. It is significant to note that the disciple's life is marked by intentionality. The biblical imperatives seen in these passages calls for the action of the will in cooperation with the Spirit of God dwelling within. When the apostle Paul makes reference to his own performance as an apostle of Christ he always falls back to the grace of God that was working within him (1 Cor 15:9-10).

The experience of the disciple is, therefore, an encounter with God's power working from within. The disciple is able to not only resist the devil but also to completely overcome all the forces of evil because Christ disarmed them by the cross (Col 2:15). The victory of Christ is lived out in the disciple of Christ. The victory of Christ is the spiritual heritage of the disciple. The disciple overcomes the world because of His faith in Christ (1 John 5:4-5). The believer is empowered by Christ to overcome all the powers of the enemy (Luke 10:19-20).

### **Discipleship in Revelation 1:4-5; 14:6-7, 12**

Discipleship in the book of Revelation is a response to the biblical call to fear God and give Him the glory (14:6-7). The book of Revelation begins by declaring what God has done for the believer in Christ (1:4-6). John introduces this book with a salutation of grace and peace from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is

involved in sending grace and peace to the community of faith in Christ Jesus. Christ Himself is introduced as Him who “loved us” and “washed us from our sins in His own blood.” The entire event is rooted in what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. Christ loved us. This is God’s unconditional love. He washed us. Then He made us kings and priests to serve His God and Father. This is good news. It lays the foundation for discipleship through tough times as presented in the book of Revelation.

The book opens both with our history in Christ and our future in Christ. It is clear from this introduction that the greatest motivation for discipleship in Revelation is the perfect work of God in Christ Jesus. What God has accomplished in Christ on the cross is the basis of the ongoing intercessory ministry of Christ and the judgment hour message of the heavenly sanctuary service. That which the believers are going to be in Him in the end, kings and priests, they already are in Him, in principle, from the beginning of the gospel. The call to fear God and give Him glory is but a reminder of the appropriate response to this everlasting gospel (14: 6-7). Based on what God has accomplished for the believer in Christ, the proper response to the call to fear God in Rev 14:6-7 is: “Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name?” (15:4).

The disciples are therefore those who keep His commandment because of the faith of Jesus and remain faithful to Jesus because they love Him, and not in order that God may love them. For, He already loved them and washed them in His own blood. Only the ones who know they are loved can love Him in return. That is the theology of discipleship that seems clear in this book. Because they know that the Lamb loves them they choose to follow Him wherever He goes (Rev 14:4-5), that is, discipleship calls for unquestioning loyalty to Jesus Christ, the Lamb. It is loyalty motivated by the love of

Christ in His redemptive work. It is loyalty and love demonstrated through obedience to all the commandments of God even in the midst of persecution and death.

The book of Revelation puts the disciples in direct conflict with the dragon, the enemy of the Lamb. The dragon is angry with them, accuses them, and seeks to destroy them in many different ways; but they are victorious over him. In the book of Revelation the anger of the dragon against Christ is turned directly against the disciples. In Rev 16:13-14, the dragon engages spirits of demons and spiritualism to fight the community of faith. This is particularly important in my ministry context because one of the greatest influences working against the community of faith is the influence of spiritualism. Spirits of demons masquerading as angels of light conduct healing miracles through the traditional healers known as *sangomas*. The battle between Christ and the dragon turns directly to the disciples (Rev 12:17). The good news in Revelation is that the disciples are victorious through the blood of the Lamb, the word of their testimony, and their selfless love for God (v. 11).

The ministry context of my project makes it necessary to emphasize this aspect of the disciple's relationship to the "principalities and powers." Fear of the control by demons is rampant. People tend to seek churches where not only the word is preached, but also demons can be cast out from them. The disciple is empowered and authorized by Christ to live free from demonic possessions because the indwelling Holy Spirit (Luke 10:19).

The question of true worship, practicing the presence of God and self-abandonment and obedience prompted by love therefore becomes central in the experience of the disciples in the last day before Christ comes.

## **Discipleship in the Writings of Ellen G. White**

In the book *Steps to Christ*, White has dedicated a whole chapter to the question of discipleship and growing up into Christ. The subject of discipleship and spiritual transformation actually runs through most of her writings. Her thoughts run in sync with the biblical perspectives on discipleship and can only be summarized, not treated in full in a paper of this size.

According to White, discipleship demands first of all that a person be “in Christ” and have experienced new creation (1908, p. 57). The “in Christ” motif, or the believer’s union with Christ, is fundamental to her understanding of discipleship. She sees the union with Christ as something that started from the incarnation. “When Christ took human nature upon Him, He bound humanity to Himself by a tie of love that can never be broken by any power save the choice of man himself” (p. 72).

However, it is when an individual is united to Christ through faith that life transformation begins. The character change takes place as one continues to abide in Christ. It is the experience of the new creation in Christ that leads to a change in the character, habits, and pursuits of life. She says, “The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts” (pp. 57, 58). In other words, there must be intentionality in developing the Christian life habits and character. Submission of affections and thoughts to Christ is essential in discipleship. She also emphasizes obedience, not as works based but as “the service of love.” She says, “Obedience—the service and allegiance of love—is the true sign of discipleship” (p. 60).

While emphasizing obedience, White also makes it clear that salvation is not



earned by the believer's obedience, but by faith in the gift of God. "We do not earn salvation by our obedience; for salvation is the gift of God, to be received by faith. But obedience is the fruit of faith" (White, 1908, p. 61).

Her insight in discipleship is that one needs to have the assurance of salvation so that the attention is not focused on self. "We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved. All this turns the soul away from the Source of our strength" (pp. 71, 72). It is the power of Christ's love abiding in the heart through the Holy Spirit that leads to the transformation of character (p. 73).

According to White, the disciple is living in the atmosphere of grace, "In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ" (p. 68). It seems clear therefore that White's view on discipleship is not different from that already expounded on in the Bible both by Christ Himself and by the apostles.

Discipleship is life in union with Christ, motivated by love

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Following Christ is a heart response to the grace of God manifested in Christ Jesus. It is a life that begins from faith and is only sustained by faith in Christ (Rom 1:17). It requires total dependence on Christ as the source and sustainer of the relationship. The disciple needs to constantly and deliberately continue to abide in Christ. The life transforming power of the Holy Spirit is the change agent in the entire discipleship experience. The change in the character of the believer takes place as the

Holy Spirit renews the mind. The goal of this transformation is Christlikeness of character manifested in a loving relationship with both God and people.

Discipleship and biblical spirituality is breathing the life-giving “atmosphere of grace” and being transformed by it into the likeness of Christ. It is a life of total dependence on God and cooperation with the Holy Spirit (John 15:5). It is lived by the power of God and for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). It is a life of “the service of love.” It is not lived in isolation but in a community of grace where Christ is exalted as the risen Savior and coming King of kings and Prince of peace. It therefore involves developing the kingdom mindset that views Christianity, not just as a religion among religions, but as the establishment of God’s reign on earth in the Kingdom of grace as we look forward to the Kingdom of glory. The power of the reign of God is already a reality in the life of the disciple because the forces that used to control him or her before Christ are now broken. The disciple has authority to resist the devil and he will flee away (Jas 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9). The believers joy, however, is not in the fact that satanic forces have been subdued but in their destiny in union with Christ (Luke 10:20). The believer’s walk with God, or life in Christ, is not an end in itself but a life-changing journey of faith soon to be completed when Christ returns.

The final victory in Christ will be realized when He comes again and the corruptible puts on incorruption. The first chapter of the book of Revelation states that Jesus is coming and the last chapter also emphasizes to the believer that Jesus is coming (1:7; 22:16-21). The disciple’s life is therefore constrained by the urgency of His soon coming. Until Christ comes again the believer’s growth in Christ is an experience of transformation, “from glory to glory,” as the Holy Spirit constantly renews the life

(2 Cor 3:18). It is a life of radical, passionate love for the Master. It is unquestioning loyalty to the Lamb that calls for sacrificial living, including death for the master if needs be. At the same time, it is also a life of joy and hope in the final triumph of Christ at the second coming (Rev 3:21). It is this loyalty and love for the risen Savior that is demonstrated in love and joy in the authentic community of grace.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE CONTRIBUTING TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF BIBLICAL COMMUNITY, DISCIPLESHIP, AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The literature review includes material on various aspects of community, discipleship, and spirituality. Biblical perspectives on authentic community as well as a brief theoretical understanding of community in the secular society have been analyzed. Literature on biblical understanding of discipleship and spiritual development, and a description of the challenges of *Sangoma* (traditional healers) dynamics in Johannesburg context has been included. Adventist perspectives on discipleship and spirituality, including the concept of Sabbath as an experience of spirituality, and some Ellen G. White insights into the subject have been highlighted.

#### **Theoretical Understanding of Community in the Secular Society**

In *Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus* (1999), the word secular means without religion, or, “relating to worldly as opposed to sacred things.” From this definition, it is to be questioned whether there are secular people in the African setting. According to Collins, community means “the people living in one locality,” “the locality in which they live,” “a group of people having cultural, religious, or other characteristics in common.” Community in the non-religious setting is promoted in social gatherings or clubs for mutual support and “formation of social networks” (Beaty, 2011). However, in

Africa, religion permeates all community activities, as the stories by Moon (2012) reveal. Community development in the secular world is a community building, or organizing efforts that aims at empowering “individuals and groups of people by providing them with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities” (“Community Development,” n.d.).

According to Peck (1987), the community building or organizing process has four stages: The first stage is “pseudocommunity,” the initial coming together where people wear masks and do not reveal who they truly are and the issues that concern them. The second stage is the “chaos” stage where people begin to remove their masks “and feel safe enough to present their ‘shadow’ self.” The third stage has been referred to as “emptiness.” During this stage nobody attempts to fix anything. People simply acknowledge “their own woundedness and brokenness,” common to all human beings. The fourth stage has been called “true community.” It is “the process of deep respect and true listening for the needs of the other people in this community” with compassion and understanding (Peck, 1987, pp. 83-85). Some of these community development concepts are also applicable in building a discipleship community where authenticity is essential (Earley, 2006, chap. 7).

### **Biblical Perspectives on Authentic Community**

#### **Authenticity and Stages of Christian Growth**

According to T. Rainer and S. Rainer (2008) the lack of “authentic spiritual community” (pp. 45-67) is a key factor in driving people away from church. Stanley (2012) calls this community a church for “the unchurched people,” a place where people can experience “a growing relationship with Jesus” (pp. 92-93, 105). Fortosis (1992)

describes authenticity as a stage of “deep consistent intimacy with God,” “unwavering faith,” and no “duplicity between public and private self” (Fortosis, 1992, p. 284). He claims that motive, not behavior, is the true measure of spiritual growth. But he also concedes that motives and attitudes are difficult to judge and behavior is not conclusive evidence of one’s stage in spiritual growth because behavior may not necessarily be reflecting what is happening in “the mind and emotions” (p. 283).

Authenticity therefore demands that a Christian functions from pure motives rather than from motives generated by self-seeking (p. 295). On the rate and quality of Christian growth, Fortosis observes that Christian development cannot be forced. He argues, “Christians can be encouraged, challenged, and even reproached regarding their growth process; but, in the end, they must be allowed to grow at the rate and with the quality they allow” (p. 295).

In his study of small groups, Kennedy (1996) sees God as living in community. Beginning with the idea of the Trinity, Kennedy traces the idea of community through the creation of Adam and Eve to the dealings of God with Israel, as well as the institution of the church in the book of Acts. God, he claims, is “the Perfecter of community” (p. 176). Littell (1961) on a similar observation views the church as “a community of disciples” (p. 111). God is the one who creates boundaries, identity, membership, and the future of the community. According to this concept, people are not creating community but simply recognizing what already exists in the creation of God. Kennedy attempts to justify the need for a small group’s existence from the larger body of believers using the idea of the theology of election deduced from Gen 12:3 and 1 Pet 2:9 (1996, p. 178).

While one may not fully agree with Kennedy’s theological arguments for small

groups, it does shed some unintended light on what Adventists have always believed in: Its remnant theology as the called out ones to extend God's invitation to the entire world and the churches to get ready for the soon coming of Christ. "Groups seem to be called out of a larger community in order to empower God's community to move into a new time" (Kennedy, 1996, p. 181).

However, based on his arguments on the calling and prophetic role of small groups, Kennedy fails to see the need for the entire church to be formed into small groups. He claims that to engage the entire church in such small group programs would, in effect, cheapen "the sacredness of the call and the effectiveness of God's work within the church" (p. 183). Others argue that organizing the church into small groups or community is for the purpose of effective discipleship and outreach to fulfill the Great commission. Allen (1985) agrees with Kennedy on the idea of God existing in community as depicted by the Trinity, but differs with him, however, on the need and place for community today. He remarks, "Community is the forum where Christian people live and practice faith" (p. 305). Hauerwas (1991; see also Criscoe, 1993) supports Allen's view on community.

One of the strengths of the small group's community of grace would be as centers for encouraging authenticity and forgiveness. Research by Stratton, Dean, Nonneman, Bode, and Worthington (2008) has shown that there is a relationship between forgiveness and spiritual development. The results of their research on forgiveness interventions as spiritual development strategy "encourage consideration of forgiveness education as a promising spiritual development strategy for higher education" (p. 355).

Maddox (2003) argues that an authentic community of grace would encourage

works of compassion that are deemed “much more effective in nurturing disciples” (p. 122). Maddox says, “Authentic compassion can only take form through open encounter with those in need” (2003, p. 122). Biblical communities in early Christianity, as found in the book of Acts, were taking care of the social needs as well as the spiritual needs. Spiritual life governed all the other aspects of life in the community of believers (Acts 4:32-35). In his discussion on Christianity and capitalism in the context of communal living, Camp (2008) promotes the need for disciples to own wealth for the purpose of meeting needs rather than self-gratification (pp. 191-198).

Arguing in defense of John Wesley’s intentionality in the practice of “formative spiritual disciplines” for Christian communities, Maddox argues, and I concur, that it takes the Spirit and discipline to make a Christian (2003, p. 121). It is the challenge of Christian leaders to nurture people “who appreciate and foster such supportive communities” (p. 124). This concurs with my ministry context need to begin communities of grace in my church.

#### Experiences With Small Groups and Transformation

Branson (2003) cites a case study in the period 1986-1996 where a United Methodist Church located in urban Oakland, California, was revived through a discipleship process (p. 153). The small group, some were strangers others were acquaintances, began by meeting in the homes. They shared their spiritual autobiographies and learned to appreciate both their uniqueness and commonalities. As they studied the Bible and shared their stories they began to be a community. Their approach into the study of the Word was to “enter into the texts, experience them, listen to them and imagine them, so that we might know the Spirit’s continuing life among us”



(Branson, 2003, p. 159). They were intentional in ensuring that the leadership role in study was shared. They kept touch with community around them and tried to contextualize their programs to meet the felt needs in the larger community around them. The significance of this study is that community was formed in an interdenominational setting that included Catholics and Protestants (p. 158). This is something I would like to try in the planned community of grace at Amazing Grace Church.

However, Branson does not tell whether the non-Methodists eventually became Methodists, but the church did grow dramatically for the setting where it was planted. Much of what Branson experienced with small groups in the 1986-1996 period has been duplicated in so many other different settings. The most well-known is perhaps the work of Cho (1981) in Korea. Others include Terry (1993), Handerson (1997), Barna (2001), Comiskey (2001), Hull (2006), Kidder (2011), just to mention a few.

Contrary to what many say about small groups, Barna's research shows that small groups often do not lead to spiritual transformation (2001, p. 54). This is because the leaders are not competent, claims Barna, and cannot provide "comprehensive spiritual nurture" because often the small groups are led by those who lack depth in biblical understanding and spirituality (pp. 94, 108). Barna observes further that the churches also tend to focus on providing programs rather than nurturing relationships. Barna's research indicates that "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" (p. 122).

Barna's finding on the core barrier to effective discipleship is rather shocking. He says, "The chief barrier to effective discipleship is not that people do not have the ability

to become spiritually mature, but lack of the passion, perspective, priorities, and perseverance to develop their personal lives” (p. 54). Hull (2006) concurs (p. 34). “Compassion drives needs” (p. 178).

Hull’s summary of Jesus’ way of training disciples seems to cover the views presented by others. The summary is given in eight words: Selection, association, consecration, impartation, demonstration, delegation, supervision, and reproduction (pp. 166-167). This is what Ogden (2003) refers to as Jesus’ “empowerment model of servant leadership and training” which involves “internalization and multiplication” (p. 75). Ogden argues that internalization, by which he means the process of Jesus transplanting His “heart and mission into the lives of his key followers,” happens best in an “interpersonal environment” (p. 75). Without internalization of the mission of Christ, Ogden contends that true multiplication or reproduction could not take place effectively because the disciples would not be thoroughly “motivated to pass it on to others” (p. 75). Could this be the reason why it seems that the many programs that the Seventh-day Adventist Church initiates to produce effective nurture and growth meet with such an uphill task in some parts of the world?

The Adventist Church is one of the fastest growing churches today (Sahlin, 2002; Bull & Lockhart, 2007), but the task of reaching the world is staggering. Could it be that there is a “discipleship gap” (Ogden, 2003, p. 21) within the Adventist system? Could it be that we need to rethink discipleship and find a new model that captures the heart of Jesus?

Ogden recommends making disciples a few at a time. He calls it “transforming discipleship” (2003, pp. 59-74). Sperry (2003) and Ingram (2012) concur. Ingram builds

his discipleship model on Rom 12 (pp. 74-75).

## **Biblical Understanding of Discipleship**

### Discipleship in the Synoptic Gospels

Biblical understanding of discipleship is based mostly on material from the Synoptic Gospels and the epistles in the New Testament (Hull, 2006, 2007; Jaffee, 1997; Malphurs, 2009). Hull (2006) explains the difference between discipleship and disciple-making. Disciple-making (from *matheusate*, to make disciples as in Matt 28:19) is the work of the disciple to win a soul for Christ and involves “deliverance,” “development” and “deployment.” A disciple is simply “a reborn follower of Christ.” Discipleship is an ongoing process of transformation into the image of Christ (pp. 34-39). Webb (2014, p. 11) concurs with Hull and says, “Jesus called men to be His disciples and equipped them to be disciple makers by teaching them both practically and spiritually.”

Biblical discipleship begins with the call to follow Jesus and leads to a life of total dependence on Christ. The understanding of discipleship is drawn not only from the way Jesus related to the twelve apostles but also from the minor characters in the gospel narratives such as in the book of Mark. Williams (1996) did a study on discipleship and minor characters in Mark’s gospel in which he observed that Jesus’ interactions with minor characters reveal that following Jesus or discipleship is “open to all.” According to Williams, “Discipleship is not simply for those like the disciples, who receive a specific call to follow (1:16-20; 3:13-19) and a unique commission to preach and have authority (3:13-19; 6:7-13)” (p. 342). Vaage (2009) concurs with Williams, giving examples of minor followers such as blind Bartemeus, the mad man of Gadarenes, Mary Magdalene, the woman who had an issue of blood, and the Syrophenician (pp. 749-50).

Kowalski (2000) gives another dimension to discipleship from the book of Mark. The narrative of the book of Mark “emphasizes how much discipleship costs with its demands to leave behind family and financial security. It tells how the disciples left behind a thriving and secure business to follow Jesus” (pp. 121-122.). The call to discipleship, according to Kowalski, has always requires a radical and unconditional timely compliance from those called (Matt 8:21-22). Kowalski contends, and Williams (1996), Selvidge (1983), VandenBerg (2009), Littell (1961), Martin (1976), Penner (1995), Bailey (1985), and Carter (1997) concur that the call to discipleship requires an entire change of one’s life-direction and attitude towards life. It is a significant achievement that transforms one’s life (p. 124). Selvidge makes a strong case for women disciples as having been active followers of Christ. He shows that according to Mark, service is a vital part of following Jesus, as in Mark 10:45.

Other scholars Magesa (1994), Lovin (2005), and Hughson (2001) view discipleship more in the social context (Hughson, p. 559). Hughson seems to concur with the Seventh-day Adventist position of loyalty to worldly governments as long as they do not demand disloyalty to the law of Christ. That is the thin line of discipleship and citizenship, I would say, of being in the world and not of the world. That is, citizenship is subordinated to discipleship, or “the political order to the Kingdom of God” (p. 575). The challenge would be in how far a disciple can get involved in citizenship of the earth’s affairs without compromising the Kingdom’s affairs. What Hughson and Magesa must confront is the fact that the spirit of the world is contrary to the Holy Spirit or Kingdom lifestyle and governance.

Suggit (1991), writing in the context of apartheid in South Africa, says

discipleship “means interpreting the events of the day in the light not of our self-interest but of the Christian gospel” (pp. 62-63). Whether that means siding with the oppressor or with the oppressed is to be questioned since neutrality in such a situation is an ethical impossibility.

### Discipleship in the Epistles

Luter’s (1980) study on discipleship and the Church shows that discipleship, though not mentioned in the epistles as in the gospels and Acts, was nevertheless central to the focus of the local church described in the epistles (p. 268). Luter’s insight is seen in the reference to Jesus’ usage of the verb “to learn” in Matt 11:29 where he invites the disciples to learn from Him. Luter shows that the epistles employ this concept of teaching and learning often as presented in the following verses: (1 Tim 4:12; 1 Pet 5:3; 1 Cor 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6; Eph 4:11-16; Col 3:16; Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 14:19; Gal 6:6; 1 John 2:27; Heb 10:25). By this Luter argues that the New Testament churches in the epistles were founded on discipleship principles given in the Great Commission (p. 271).

Some of the conclusions Luter derives, and Barna concurs, include the use of in-depth training to equip the foundational leaders of the new Testament church, use of discipling to produce capable teachers, and discipleship as “the means to the end of planting and developing local churches” (Eph 2:20, 2 Tim 2:2, & Acts 14:21-23) (p. 271). Luter concludes, and Strohl (2008) agrees:

Since the Epistles focus on the church rather than on individual believers, the absence of the word disciple should be expected. However, while the word disciple is absent, the concept of discipleship does fit quite naturally into the extensive practical emphasis the Epistles give to the responsibilities of individual believers. (Luter, 1980, p. 269)

## **Description of the Challenges of *Sangoma* in the Johannesburg Context**

It is impossible to discuss the *Sangoma* issue in Southern Africa except as it appears in the context of African Traditional Religion (ATR). The understanding of ATR sheds light on the practices of the *Sangoma* and how they interact with Christianity in Southern Africa. Several ATR scholars (Jafta, 1992; Aguilar, 1993; Ubruhe, 1996; Berends, 1993) agree on this subject. According to Ishola (2002), ATR religions “are intrinsically woven into the cultures of the people,” and are “concerned with a harmonious and beneficent dispersal of force within a cosmos which is conceived anthropocentrically” (p. 46). Traditional African rituals find their value and significance in promotion of the wellbeing and harmony in the family and in society at large. The rituals involve prayers offered to the supreme God through the ancestors (Nolte-Schamm, 2006, p. 91).

One of the strong beliefs of the ATR worldview is that one cannot make important decisions without consultation with ancestral spirits. Failure to do so is seen as undermining the place of ancestors and may result in angering them and bringing misfortune on the living (Maimela, 1991, p. 7). Ishola concurs and observes that “traditional religions are essentially utilitarian” (2006, p. 54). The implications of this reality is significant in understanding the relationship between the role the *Sangoma* play in society and the need to contextualize the discipleship experience in Africa.

Ishola further observes, “Because traditional folks of Africa do not make a distinction between religion and the realities of life, the criterion for validating any religious tradition is its ability to help in the attainment of the human aspiration for abundant life” (p. 57). It is the role of the traditional healers (*Sangoma*) to perform the

rituals that are needed in meeting the identified felt needs of the community and the individual. One of the great challenges facing the church in discipleship in the African context is that in ATR God is not a matter of talk but experience. Jafta (1992) writes, “The most interesting feature of the traditional religion of the Zulus is that it is experienced, i.e., the concept of the Deity as the One, the Other, the Divine, the Many, is not speculated upon, but experienced” (p. 80).

What Hiebert (as cited in Dybdahl, 2008, p. 102) calls the “Excluded Middle” is actually the controlling reality in the African worldview and has persistently survived the onslaught of Western views. What are the implications of this to the Adventist message and discipleship? This suggests that for the church to penetrate this mindset a serious paradigm shift is needed for biblical discipleship to be experienced in such traditional settings. This shift demands a return to the biblical model in the book of Acts where God was experienced and the church grew as people experienced God in their practical daily needs (Acts 5:12-16). Dybdahl calls this returning “to a Christian theistic worldview.” Incidentally, what Bull and Lockhart (2007) refer to as “Adventist radicalism” was heavily characterized by religious experiences similar to what is observed in some of the Pentecostal churches in Africa (pp. 22, 27, 104-105). However, it is noted that similar experience does not necessarily imply a same source for Satan is capable of counterfeiting spiritual experiences. White (1882, 1943) recorded experiences that demonstrated the presence and power of God in a visible way.

One of the challenges of the *Sangoma* is that they also serve as the traditional healers and claim to be able to heal even conditions that modern medical professionals may not be able to handle. Some even claim “the healing practices recorded in the Old

and New Testaments have more in common with African traditional practices than with modern medicine” (Berends, 1993, p. 275). This poses a challenge for the African Christian community and should force them to re-evaluate their stand on the traditional healing practices, claims Berends (p. 275). The challenge is real when one considers the duality of the African life rooted in both traditional and Christian values. This is what Desmond Tutu (cited in Berends, 1993) calls “a split in the African soul” (p. 275).

The continued use of African traditional healing practices constantly brings the Christian into contact with traditional healers. The practices also come with the consultation of spirits in acts of divination, which are in conflict with the biblical commands that God’s people should not consult spiritualists and diviners (Lev 19:31; 20:27; Deut 18:10-12). One of the challenges to evangelism and discipleship from an Adventist perspective rises from the practices in some of the largest African Christian churches such as the Zionists in South Africa that accommodate traditional beliefs that are contrary to the Bible. The Zionists Church, for example, uses “salt, and ashes, the traditional Zulu agents for the transmission of healing powers” (Berends, 1993, p. 276).

Greater challenge is seen in the fact that major Christian churches like the Roman Catholic Church are advocating for the recognition of “ancestral veneration” as practiced in the African traditional churches (Jebadu, 2007, p. 246). Jebadu observes,

Veneration to ancestors—exactly like veneration of the angels and saints in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches—is also a kind of religious devotional practice. Ancestors or the holy living dead are never worshipped as God but venerated, honoured, remembered and loved because of their closeness with God in heaven. (p. 247)

There seems to be a need for a radical and distinct approach to discipleship in the Adventist Church in order to be effective in the regions where various forms of



incarnational missiological model have taken root, such as in South Africa. Kirby (1992) observes that there is a growing acceptance of “cultural pluriformity rather than monolithic” stance, among such forms of missiological models (p. 324). According to Kirby these trends will continue to effect great changes in the Church’s structure (p. 324).

The functions that these traditional healers and healing have are vast. According to John Mbiti (as cited in Berends, 1993, p. 277), and Schumacher and Hadnes (2012) concur, there are at least eight different functions that can be attributed to these healing practices. The functions include: treatment, prevention, retribution, purification, exorcism, protection, ensuring success, and eradication of witchcraft (p. 277). Berends summarizes these functions of African traditional medicine listed by Mbiti to four: (a) diagnostic, (b) curative, (c), preventive, and (d) causative (p. 278). The challenge to the Adventist Church is that diagnostics done by African traditional healers always involve divination with the desire to know not only what causes the condition but also who causes it. It brings to mind the experience in Luke 13:10-16 where Jesus, in healing a woman bound for 18 years, also mentioned who caused the disease.

Incidentally, I have observed that most of the miracles of “healing” that are viewed on Christian TV involve divination and elaborate revelation of what is happening to the individual and who is causing it. The churches or ministries engaging in this kind of work in Southern Africa are growing tremendously in attendance. Parallels have been drawn between the biblical healings and the ATR ones. Examples from the biblical healings are taken from Gen 20:17, Num 21:6-9, 2 Kgs 5:1-19, and 2 Kgs 20:1-7. Relevance is also drawn from the Psalms “where the cause of sickness and misfortune is

frequently ascribed to the evil scheming and the curses of one's enemies (Psalms 6:1-7; 38:1-8; 17:1-12; 31:9-13; 66:22-29; cf. Numbers 22-23; Job 19:13-22)" (Berends, 1993, p. 281). What these observations seem to suggest is not for the Christians to work in a syncretic manner, going to church but also visiting the *Sangoma*, but "to make their healing ministry relevant to the healing practices of the community served" (Yamauchi, as cited in Berends, 1993, p. 282).

### **Adventist Perspectives on Discipleship**

Discipleship and biblical spirituality is one of the central focuses of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Biblical spirituality as defined in *Ministry* is "the process of the divine restoration and healing of the broken relationship between the Triune God and humanity" (Morris, 2012, p. 12). A statement on biblical spirituality in *Ministry* issued by Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Seminary says: "Biblical spirituality, at its core, refers to a life of discipleship intentionally lived in personal relationship with God through Christ by the Spirit" (p. 15). A disciple has been defined as one "who has accepted Jesus Christ as Savior, committed himself, or herself to a growing relationship with God, and by the Holy Spirit is integrating the Lordship of Jesus into every area of daily life" (Goldstein, 2008, p. 2).

The essence of discipleship according to this Adventist view is "a call to a life of community and fellowship" (Morris, 2012, p. 14). Key to discipleship in its historical setting in the Synoptic Gospels is the transformation that occurs when the individual encounters Christ in a faith relationship. The resultant life was a radical transformation reflected in service characterized by the manifestation of the power of Christ as in Mark 16:20. On the dynamics of biblical spirituality, Adventists believe that "community is the

context for spiritual growth, nurture, accountability, expressing our spiritual gifts, service, and learning tolerance and unity” (Morris, 2012, p. 15).

Dybdahl (2008) calls for putting community and fellowship into practice. He says “to recapture the life changing, discipline-involving power of the spirit-filled early church, a renewal of community must take place” (p. 82). According to Dybdahl, limiting religion to a mental experience without a corresponding heart experience is what creates ‘hunger’. Cognitive truth about God without a corresponding heart experience of the divine does not touch the affections of the heart and does not satisfy the hunger for God. That is, it must be a “spiritual life” rather than a mere “intellectual belief.” An informative Adventist congregation’s spirituality and church growth analysis by Sahlin (2002) indicated that “congregations that place an emphasis on teaching spiritual disciplines are more likely to be growing churches” (p. 16).

The disciples gave heart obedience to Christ (White, 1898, p. 668). Christlikeness is the goal of true discipleship. I found this statement quite striking: “And if we consent, he will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses”(White, 1898, p. 688). Such a “refined and sanctified” will is what total transformation is all about.

This internal transformation is reflected on how the individual relates both to the church and the world (Goldstein, 2008, p. 6). Christian discipleship is viewed as about following Jesus, even imitating him. Beagles (2012) research on ‘growing disciples in community’ recommends “strengthening the discipleship walk of adults at church so that they are able to create a warm, welcoming, and inclusive atmosphere for everyone,

including young people” (p. 157). How can this be incorporated in building discipleship processes within the Seventh-day Adventist church? An attempt will be made to answer this question in the project.

### **Early Christian Discipleship and Spirituality**

There are various understandings and usages of the word spirituality which are not biblical in nature (Frederick 2008; Tirri, Tallent-Runnels, & Nikelainen, 2005). Eade (2004), for example, argues that spirituality in his understanding answers the questions of identity, meaning, and purpose. The answers to spirituality lie in the realm of culture and traditions since, he further argues, these are the basis of an individual’s formation (p. 54). Such views are refuted when one considers biblical spirituality in the context of the early Christians.

The early Christians were keenly aware that there was a fundamental difference between their life in union with Christ and their former way of life. According to Eph 4:22-24, they were completely a new creation that needed to learn afresh how to live the new life. They had to learn Christ just like a new language, a new culture, and a new practice. It was a new understanding of the world with new practices and a totally new way of life radically different from their cultures and traditions. Spirituality was not just one aspect of their total way of life but their entire life was rooted in spirituality. It was putting on the new man, Christ (Gal 3:27; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:10; Rom 13:14).

Saunders (2002) presents the early Christian spirituality as having four defining characteristics, namely, Christological, missional, communal, and eschatological. To Saunders Eph 4:22-24 reveals a form of early Christian spiritual growth (pp. 157-158). Spiritual formation here is used in the sense of spiritual maturity (Wood, 1991, p. 552;

Willard & Forster, 2005, p. 42). Saunders sees eschatology as providing the early Christians “with the means to reorient notions of both time and space, that is, the ways they might relate to God, to one another, and to the rest of creation” (p. 159).

Discipleship was not just a process of building new believers into the fellowship but the very core of becoming a new believer (Ortlund, 1981, p. 291). It involves devotion to Jesus and included devotion to His mission not only to go and make disciples, but according to Anderson (as cited in Maloney, 2007, p. 686), also to announce His “messianic mission”: that “the dominion of God has drawn near,” and God is already acting in the present time. They did not only look forward to the soon coming Christ but also lived in the presence of the Spirit or realized eschatology (p. 159).

According to Frederick (2008), discipleship is the core of Christian spirituality (p. 553). Frederick defines discipleship as “living an authentic Christian existence” (p. 556). That is, “discipleship, from a Christian perspective, is concerned with living an authentic Christian existence” (p. 559). It is “knowing who we are in God and serving our neighbor from that position” (Gallagher, 2008, p. 144; Ediger, 2005). Frederick’s approach to spirituality and discipleship is in the same light as Richard Forster’s six traditions on spirituality and discipleship (p. 559).

To Foster’s (1998) list of six great traditions of Christian faith, summarized as prayer, the word of God, spiritual gifts, the sacraments, social justice, pursuit of holiness and Christian disciplines, I would add one more tradition and call it: the Adventist biblical prophetic stream, for lack of a better phrase. Without disagreeing with Forster’s observation, I contend that the Adventist Church has made a significant contribution to the understanding of biblical spirituality by presenting the Sabbath principle, including

the day itself, in the context of the Great Controversy theme (Bull & Lockhart, 2007, pp. viii-xv).

One could argue that the Adventist perspectives on discipleship and spirituality countercheck the postmodern mindset of moral relativity. The challenge that Christian or biblical spirituality poses to the postmodern mind is that biblical spirituality is founded on “historical, biblical, and systematic theology” and therefore defies “moral relativity” that is promoted by views of postmodernism, as Hall and McMinn (2000) observe.

Gallagher wonders whether the revolutionary discipleship of “self surrender, love to God, and love to neighbor,” referred to as “Dissident Discipleship,” is obtainable outside the Anabaptist circles (p. 145). Is the Adventist perspective less rigorous than the Anabaptist? Perhaps a more radical practice of discipleship is needed today to meet the present contexts. It would seem that the Adventist understanding of the eschatological events demands a more authentic biblical discipleship since the Adventist perspective includes following Christ in His heavenly sanctuary ministry as well, not just to the cross of Calvary. While the Adventist statement on biblical spirituality, written by Andrews University, denies that spiritual practices are meritorious in terms of earning salvation, it affirms that “biblical spirituality includes conversion, justification, and sanctification (1 Cor 6:11)” (Morris, 2012, p. 13).

### **Sabbath, Communion, and Spirituality**

Several scholars from other denominations have written positively about the Sabbath in the light of communion and spirituality but do not emphasize the need to keep the Sabbath day on the seventh day according to the commandment of God (McNeal, 2000; Swenson, 2004; Anderson, 1997; among others).

Bass' (2005) essay considers "Sabbath observance as an element in forming and nurturing the faith of Christian persons and communities" (p. 26). Bass, however, does not refer to the Sabbath of the Bible, but applies Sabbath principles to Sunday keeping.

Swenson (2004) sees God as the creator of margin in life and the Sabbath as one way of restoring margin and rest in the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life. His major contention is that limits are designed by God to create balance in the human system. While the idea of balanced living may serve the purpose of his book, it however, clouds the true significance of the Sabbath as one of the Ten Commandments by downplaying the literalness of the day.

Anderson (1997) who has a lot of good points to make on the Sabbath and biblical spirituality sees Jesus' ministry as restoring the Sabbath principle but, like Swenson and McNeal, Anderson does not discuss the relevance of keeping the Sabbath as a 24-hour time for rest on the Seventh-day; hence, it is to be questioned whether the covenant of grace is to be pitched against the very purpose of grace, which is to restore authentic biblical spirituality that restores a loving relationship of obedience to all of God's Ten Commandments and trusting his every word.

The writer contends that the Sabbath rest as a spiritual discipline includes all the good points mentioned by the above writers and much more. It is resting in the perfect and finished work of redemption in Christ Jesus. Nothing should be added to or subtracted from the substitutionary work of Christ. Keeping the Sabbath as meritorious in salvation is just as wrong as changing the Sabbath to a different day not hallowed by God (Isa 58:13-14; Exod 31:13).

## **Christian Perspectives on Spirituality**

The existence of different forms of spiritualities, and even variations within the Christian Church, makes it necessary to highlight this phenomenon. Morris (2012), in his editorial entitled “Examine Everything Carefully,” recalls his experience with the spiritual formation movement and says, “I soon realized that not everything promoted under the umbrella of spiritual formation was Christian or in harmony with Scriptures” (p. 5). Johnson (as cited in Ediger, 2005) identifies different types of spiritualities that exist within Christianity defined according to their traditions and commitments. Johnson’s list includes evangelical, charismatic, sacramental, activist, academic, and ascetic. These are different traditions and place emphasis on different spiritual disciplines that are out of scope of this review. However, the emphasis here is that Christian spirituality must of necessity conform to the Bible.

According to McGrath (1999), spirituality is “a lived experience,” or the outworking in real life of one’s religious faith, that is, “what a person does with what they believe” (p. 1). Christian spirituality refers to the way in which the Christian life is understood and the explicitly devotional practices that have been developed to foster and sustain that relationship with Christ (pp. 2-3).

McGrath contends, and Moreland (2007) concurs, that the attempt to group together Christian spirituality with mysticism is not biblical because it removes the cognitive and intellectual aspects of spirituality (p. 6). Moreland advocates for the recovery of the Christian mind and criticizes the secularist and postmodernists attempts to marginalize the cognitive approach and objectivity as outside the scope of religion and their claim that such should be left to the sciences (pp. 70-74).



Biblical spirituality, which is true Christian spirituality, on the other hand, springs from the biblical text itself and not outside of it. For the scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21) and the words of scripture are spiritual in nature (John 6:63). Hence the biblical spiritual experience will not deviate from the biblical teaching. Thus biblical spirituality has the Word of God as its foundation and an authentic relationship with the God of the Bible, through faith in Jesus Christ, as its goal. Chan (1998) insists that spiritual life must be looked into from an evangelical perspective. Chan uses the word evangelical to mean “a life created by the Christian story and distinguished by a conscious, personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ” (p. 9). Kettenring (2008) is in agreement with Chan on the approach to sanctification as primarily a theological concept informing Christian spirituality in harmony with the Bible (pp. 2-3).

### **Ellen G. H. White and Biblical Spirituality**

Ellen White has a lot to say on biblical spirituality, or growing up into Christ, beyond the current review. This review will only cover four titles of her writings, yet it will seek to highlight her central focus on biblical spirituality. In a nutshell, White’s insight is that by beholding Christ we become changed into His likeness. White (1974), drawing from 1 Pet 2:2 and Eph 4:15, makes it clear that the purpose of growing up into Christ is so that the Christian might become mature and bear fruit for God’s Kingdom. The ultimate purpose of this process is that God may be glorified (p. 67). The fruit is identified as likeness to Christ. This is the ultimate work of the Holy Spirit in character development.

According to White (1974), spiritual life is a life that God Himself has imparted (p. 67). This implies that one cannot have an authentic spiritual life outside a relationship

with God through faith in Jesus Christ. This raises a question as to the source of all other spirituality that does not recognize the Lordship of Jesus.

According to White, spiritual growth takes place when we feed on the spiritual food, drink spiritual water, bask in spiritual sunshine, and breathe the spiritual air. Christ is all this to the believer as quoted from Isa 60:19; Ps 84:11; Hos 14:5; Ps 72:6; John 6:63. This spiritual food is the grace of Christ and the believer needs to experience it.

In the matchless gift of His Son, God has encircled the whole world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air which circulates around the globe. All who choose to breathe this life-giving atmosphere will live and grow up to the stature of men and women in Christ Jesus. (p. 68)

This growth takes place as the believer abides in Christ and Christ abides in the believer by His word through faith according to John 15:4-5.

What she emphasizes is total dependence on Christ for spiritual growth.

You are just as dependent upon Christ, in order to live a holy life, as is the branch upon the parent stock for growth and fruitfulness. Apart from Him you have no life. You have no power to resist temptation or to grow in grace and holiness. Abiding in Him, you may flourish. Drawing your life from Him, you will not wither nor be fruitless. You will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water. (pp. 67-69)

White points out that growing in Christ is a growth in grace and holiness.

According to White (1974), transformation of character is “the sure result of union with Christ” (p. 73). Christ prayer for the disciples in John 17:20, including all the believers down through the ages.

### **Conclusion**

The material analyzed demonstrates a need to return to biblical discipleship principles and to rediscover the faith and spiritual habits that made the Early Church so powerful in fulfilling the Great Commission. The challenge of ATR is real and strategies

for biblical disciples that can overcome the challenge are needed. There seems to be a need for a radical approach to discipleship if the Adventist Church in South Africa is going to be effective in the regions where forms of incarnational discipleship models, which accommodate unbiblical practices like ancestral veneration, are rooted. The incarnational theologies exalt cultural values and identities that strengthen the *Sangoma* practices. Perhaps what is needed in the Adventist community is a greater manifestation of the power of Jesus Christ as was in the early Christian witness in the book of Acts.

How would one describe Adventist spirituality? One could argue that because of the distinctive biblical perspectives that the Seventh-day Adventist Church holds dear, it is possible to talk of authentic Adventist spirituality. It seems to the writer that an authentic Adventist spirituality would incorporate biblical truths such as the Sabbath, the Sanctuary, the understanding of the state of the dead, righteousness by faith, and the entire question of law and grace. It would include a spirituality that embraces the entire life of the person—the physical, mental, social, and spiritual powers—and demonstrates the presence of God in the believer.

Finally, it was noted that there is scarcity of information on forming authentic biblical community in Africa, particularly in Johannesburg where this research is focused. Much needs to be done in this area and it is hoped that this research will contribute to this need.

## CHAPTER 4

### DEVELOPMENT OF METHODOLOGY AND IMPLEMENTATION

#### NARRATIVE FOR THE PROJECT

##### **Introduction**

The purpose of this discipleship tool is to promote the experience of biblical spirituality in the religious and cultural context of Johannesburg thereby creating an authentic discipleship community in the Amazing Grace Church plant. To achieve this task I will develop a discipleship process guide with Bible study materials emphasizing discipleship and biblical spirituality that is to be administered to the Community of Grace, or a community-building group, for a period of six months. The participants for this project will be members of Amazing Grace SDA Church in Johannesburg who have expressed an interest in participating in the discipleship process.

Biblical spirituality, growing up in Christ, is the process by which the Holy Spirit transforms one's life into the likeness of Christ through the practice of the life habits of Jesus Christ, delighting oneself in His presence, meditating in His Word, and doing His will. It produces a mature disciple of Christ.

Discipleship is a loving relationship with Christ in which the one whom He calls submits to His Lordship, and makes God's purpose and glory the sole reason for being. Discipleship is the following of Jesus in His Word, submitting oneself to Him as Lord of their will, affections, desires, and entire life. It is a process of developing love to God

with all heart, soul, and mind, and learning to love the neighbor as Christ loved all people. In essence it is about a total commitment to the Lordship of Christ, and cooperation with the Holy Spirit in His work of life transformation.

### **Theological Foundation for the Intervention**

The “in Christ” motif, or the believer’s union with Christ, is the main component of the theological foundation of this project and forms the basis for the understanding of discipleship, biblical spirituality, and the formation of authentic Christian community as in Acts 2:42-47. The community of faith described in the passage in Acts depicts a Kingdom of God, where Christ reigns as Lord and love is the principle of action in every heart and the basis of worship to God as in Rom 12 and Rev 14:6-7.

The “in Christ” motif describes both what God accomplished for people in Christ from the foundation of the earth and through the story of redemption, and what God is accomplishing in the believer as in Eph 1:3-7; 2 Cor 5:14-17; Col 1:13-14. It is the basis of people’s subjective Christian experience through a life-transforming faith in Christ (Rom 12:1-3). The closer the participants experience the grace of God as they follow Christ in loving devotion and practical pursuit of godliness, the more they experience oneness and love in the community of grace. The more the group learns to share their love and experience of God’s grace in Christ, the more they are likely to influence and attract others to fellowship with Christ.

### **Components of the Study Guide**

The study has two basic sections that are to be administered in a session of one hour and 30 minutes each. The groups will meet for a total period of 16 weeks.

The first section is called “Grace Moments” consisting of selected biblical stories intended for use in small groups. The participants are to act out different roles in each story to stimulate, inspire, and generate reflections on their spiritual journey. The questions will serve as guidelines for the group leader to use at the beginning of the session. After each grace moment the group will break into a prayer session based on the experience and insights shared among the group. The participants will be encouraged to journal their prayers so that they can keep track of the answers and growth in their prayer life.

The second section is an experience-based Bible study designed to lead the participants into a deeper practical walk with God and to continue building their spiritual life habits. The content of this section includes a biblical passage for deeper personal reflection, meditation, and personal reflection and application. It is to be a time for sharing, meditation, journaling, and prayer.

#### The Study Evaluation Process

After seven weeks the participants will be asked to give a written reflection on their journey, and at the end of the 16 lessons, they will fill out a questionnaire (see Appendix A) reflecting on their experience during the study. One questionnaire has open-ended questions, and the other has Likert scale-type of questions as shown in Appendix B. The questions are to be administered electronically and the results analyzed to reveal the benefits and value of the exercise to the participants based on their experience. The participants will also go for a retreat to experience some of the spiritual disciplines involved in the study, and will have a one-on-one interview with me reflecting on their experience during the 16 weeks of study and fellowship in their small group setting.

## The Practice of the Devotional Life Habits

At the beginning of the sessions various spiritual disciplines will be explained to the participants. The spiritual life habits that will be explained can be seen in Appendix D.

Devotional life habits are necessary because spirituality requires intentionality. Devotional habits are uniquely designed by God for people to receive his grace by allowing them to place themselves before God so that He can transform them. They are ways of being attentive to God. The habits formed are to help people open themselves up to God and to one another as they learn to be aware of the presence of God in their lives. These devotional habits are biblical spiritual disciplines. According to Schlaepfer, they function as the sail to the boat in the sea (2010). Setting the sail allows the wind to move the boat. Biblical devotional life habits are like setting the sail so that the wind can move the boat. The devotional life habits are like the sail in the life of the disciple.

When Christians practice these life habits of Christ they learn to align their will to the will of God as Disciples of Christ. The goal is that each life should be transformed and conformed to the image of Christ through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. In practicing the spiritual life habits people can learn from Jesus how to arrange their lives around activities that allows them to spend ‘attentive’ time in the presence of God. These devotional life habits that were encouraged for the growth of the Community of Grace included devotional Bible reading, journaling, scripture memorization, meditation on Scripture, prayer, alone time with God, and practicing the presence of God.

## Ground Rules for Community Building Group

This study will follow a relational model, that is, while content is important, the

group facilitator should also be sensitive to other factors existing between the group members. The content is to be lived out in a relational model. In this model, I will advocate that for a small group to develop, become, and remain a community so it needs to be a closed group. The group will be closed after the second meetings. Rationale for a closed group is that community is built around openness and honesty.

Openness and honesty is necessary for spiritual growth to occur. Openness and honesty only occurs when trust has been developed, and to achieve it usually takes several weeks. If new members were introduced during this time, trust levels would regress and would have to be rebuilt. If this would continue to occur, the group would remain superficial and content driven. Once the community-building group is formed it is important to observe the following ground rules:

1. The Bible will be used to enrich relationship with God (vertical and horizontal) and community, rather than merely gain information.
2. The focus will be on building a community of grace.
3. The exercise of building a community of grace will be done through “social learning,” that is, experiential- or activity-based learning.
4. The whole group shares and learns together.
5. Reciprocal trust and openness will occur.
6. Questions will be as important as answers.
7. Issues of faith can be wrestled with, not extinguished.
8. Spiritual growth will not only be fostered, but have high priority.
9. Devotional habits will be taught and explored together.
10. Life can be shared in the environment of trust.



11. Confidentiality and accountability are essential and will be mandatory. The participants will sign a confidentiality form.

12. The group will provide care, safety, and God's love for each person in the group.

These ground-rule guidelines helped to facilitate the process to ensure maximum benefit for all participants.

### **I. Grace Moments Session**

**Week 1.** The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32): Who are you in the story? How have you experienced God's grace in your life's journey of faith? Share with the group your experience of God's grace in your life. How do you define grace? Write it down.

**Week 2.** Hidden sins. The woman caught in adultery (John 8: 7-12): Who are you in the story? Reflect on the crowd, the woman, and Jesus. Imagine that Jesus was writing on the ground the hidden sins of the people who brought the woman to Him. If you are in the crowd with a stone in your hand, what did Jesus write on the ground concerning you? Think about any sin in your life and confess it silently to God.

**Week 3.** The problem of pain (Ruth 1:20; 3:3-5; 4:17) Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz. What possible trauma did they experience on the journey? "Don't call me Naomi"! What is going on in your mind if you are Naomi? Ruth, your mother in law is telling you to go and lie at the feet of Boaz. What is going on your mind as you take this journey? How does Naomi's pain compare to her gain in the story? What do you hear God speaking to you about the problem of pain?

**Week 4.** Grace in forgiveness (Genesis 41:39-44): Choose one of the roles; Joseph, Potiphar's wife, Joseph's brothers, the jailor, and Potiphar: How has your role

impacted Joseph's journey? How do you ask Joseph for forgiveness, if you need it? What is your personal experience with forgiveness? What is your own reaction to being forgiven? Where is grace in this story? How does this story speak to you in your life experience?

**Week 5.** Rejection of grace (Matthew 26:25; John 13; 26; Luke 22:23): Judas—Christ washed his feet but he went ahead and betrayed him. Let two different participants role play the part of Judas. What does it feel like to reject grace? How can one reject grace today? Reflect on this question: Is there an area in your life where you might be rejecting God's grace?

**Week 6.** Transformed by grace: Paul the apostle, from legalistic righteousness (Philippians 3:1-10): What is your experience with regards to this passage? List some of the values in your culture that are hard to give up? How has your attitude changed towards these identified values since you received the grace of God in Christ? What is the Holy Spirit talking to you about that you may need to give up, or change in your walk with Christ?

**Week 7.** Transformed by grace: Peter from fear and self-preservation (Matthew 26:69-74): Describe your own experience with self-preservation.

**Week 8.** Transformed by grace: Stephen is transformed into His likeness (Acts 7:57-60): How does this story speak to you in your journey of faith?

**Week 9.** The power of grace: woman at the well (John 4:26-30: Share your conversion experience with a member of the group.

**Week 10.** The question of Surrender: Radical trust in God (Genesis 22:2, 5, 7, 8, 12): What is the significance of God's response to Abraham, Abraham's response to

Isaac, the servants, God: Choose a character in the story and share your experience in this encounter. Did God experience something on the Mountain with Abraham?

**Week 11.** Dealing with doubt: Thomas (John 20:24-29): Share an experience where you failed to trust God because of doubt or unbelief. What is the danger of unbelief?

**Week 12.** Radical faith in God (Esther 4:13-16): Role-play one of the following characters: Mordecai, Esther, Haman, King Ahasuerus. How did Esther's faith affect you in the story? Share an experience where you trusted God against all odds.

**Week 13.** The cross of Christ (Matthew 27:11-13, 17, 22, 24): Pilate, the Chief Priest, Barnabas, the thief on the right hand, the soldiers! Choose your role. Tell the team what went through your mind in your encounter with Christ on the cross? How does the hope of the resurrection help in dealing with some disappointments in life?

**Week 14.** The gift of grace: The upper room after the resurrection before the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-4): What has been your personal experience with the baptism with the Holy Spirit?

**Week 15.** The return of the seventy disciples (Luke 10:17-21): Imagine you were one of the seventy disciples. Describe your experience. Why could you not cast out the demon in Matthew 17:14-21 after such an awesome experience? What is the command in this passage (Ephesians 5:16-19)? How have you responded to this command in your life?

**Week 16.** The second coming of Christ (Revelation 1; 7; 20:6): Christ has come and you made it to heaven by His grace; reflect on your feelings about being among the Redeemed. Journal a prayer and commitment stating how you want to live in response to

the grace of God by which you have received eternal life as a free gift (1 John 5:9-12; 1 John 3:1-3).

## **II. Experience His Grace Bible Reading Material**

Each lesson is divided into seven to eight questions and activities. The opening questions attempt to bring out biblical understanding of scripture passages that have been suggested for the study. The next questions are designed to lead the participant to participate in personal reflection and personal application. The last closing activities are designed to motivate the participant to act on the experience of the study. Journaling and scripture memorization will be encouraged throughout the study. The leader will choose a passage for scripture memorization from the shared passages. The participants will be encouraged to meditate on the scripture each week.

The practical sections will encourage the participant to share their experience on a weekly basis so that at the end of the study they will have not only developed the habit of practicing spiritual life habits but also learned to share their faith with others.

The questions in the sessions are guidelines and do not have to be fully covered in each session. The participants may be allowed to have the weekly questions in advance when there is a need for deeper study and reflection as discerned by the leader. There will be three groups of community of Grace based on preference of days for the sessions and the location where the sessions will take place.

### **Lesson 1: The Invitation: Read Matthew 11:28-29**

A. What does God invite us to experience? Matthew 28:28-29. Have you responded to the invitation? Share your experience of what happened and how it

happened when you responded to the invitation.

B. What do you think God is really asking of you when He makes the invitation?

C. Reflect on this question: Why is it so hard to totally surrender to God?

D. When you think of total surrender what does that mean to you?

E. Activity: Be authentic with God: That is, let God see and hear your heart

without masking so that He may see you as you really are at the core of your being. He already knows all about you but by telling Him you are being honest with Him. Tell Him your anxieties, struggles, and ask him to teach you what real surrender is all about.

F. Journal your thoughts on question number (E) above.

God is inviting His redeemed children to know the Father (Abba) better and more intimately, have a relationship with Him that is authentic, and to experience a vibrant life in His Kingdom as citizens and members of the household of God.

#### Lesson 2: Total Commitment: Read Matthew 13:44-46

A. What does it take to give total commitment?

B. Does Jesus demand total commitment from everyone?

C. Reflect on your journey with God and meditate on the following verses

(Romans 8:32 and Psalms 37:4).

D. Ask yourself the following questions: Am I convinced that God is offering me a truly abundant life now and in the future? What do I stand to lose if I give Him total commitment now? How will my life change? Am I afraid to surrender all to Jesus? Why? Tell God about it in prayer.

E. Take a few minutes and reflect on what God is teaching you in today's lesson.

Are you satisfied with your level of commitment to Him right now?

F. Journal what you believe the Holy Spirit is telling you concerning today's lesson. What do you want to do in response to the invitation?

G. Copy this passage and choose a verse that appeals to you and commit it to memory: Romans 8:31-39. Call a friend you would like to invite to church and share the verse of your choice from Romans 8:31-39.

Note: A life of total commitment begins with the transfer of control of your entire life from yourself to God through trust in Jesus Christ and His Lordship.

Lesson 3: The Surrendered Life: Is it Gain or Pain?  
Read Philippians 3:1-11

A. The sacrifice and the joy of surrender, which one is greater? Romans 8:17-18.

B. Is it a call to joy unspeakable and great gain or just to pain and suffering?

Compare your thoughts with Philippians 3:1-11 and 1 Peter 1:7-9.

C. Reflect on Jeremiah 31:3 and 29:11. Do you believe God has your best interest in mind?

D. How does knowing and believing the truth of God's love and grace help you with the question of surrender?

E. Write in your journal your thoughts and impressions on Jeremiah 31:3 and 29:11. How can the view of God in these two verses and in the Bible help you with the question of total commitment?

F. List and compare in your journal the pain versus the gain of total commitment. Meditate on these positive aspects on your list and thank God for it.

G. Share your discovery with someone in your prayer list. Call two friends and share with them the promises given in Jeremiah 31:3 and Jeremiah 29:11

Lesson 4: The Secret to Surrender: Read Romans 12:1-3

A. The secret to surrender is in knowing the character of God as revealed in Christ according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God (1 Timothy 1:11). It is what leads you to trust God with your life and future. Romans 12:1 is a response of gratitude to the grace of God discussed in previous chapters of the book of Romans. Take a look at a brief overview of the gospel as captured below in Romans 1-8.

B. Think of the lost state of man under sin in union with Adam, Romans 3:9-12, 5:12. What is the key message in these chapters?

C. Reflect on God's solution to the sin problem by providing salvation through faith in Christ our substitute and representative, Romans 4-5. What is the key message in these two chapters?

D. Reflect on the freedoms and the empowerment that are ours in union with Christ: Freedom from death: Freedom from sin, freedom from keeping the law as a means of salvation, freedom from condemnation (Romans 6-8). Reckon that these freedoms and provisions are yours in union with Christ now.

E. Now reflect on Romans 12:1. How does it relate to Romans chapters 1-11? What do you hear from God in this verse: A command? An invitation? What is the motivation for presenting the body as a living sacrifice? What is the purpose for this kind of commitment? Why does the kind of worship described here in Romans 12:1 make sense?

F. In your journal describe an authentic follower of Christ using the thoughts found in Romans 12:1 and your responses in number (E) above. What are the implications of presenting yourself completely to God as described in Romans 12:1?

G. Describe in a journal your journey from a cultural Christian to an authentic follower of Christ. If you have not committed yourself to be an authentic follower of Christ this is a good point to make the decision. Write your commitment and pray it to God. Share your story with a friend outside your study group.

Lesson 5: A Profile of the Surrendered Life:  
Read Genesis 22, John 12:24

Are there clear indicators that a life has been totally surrendered to Christ as Lord? What does it look like in practical living?

A. Knowing as used in Genesis 22:12 is an intimate encounter that is deeper than a mere understanding or cognition of facts. Do you have this intimate relationship with God that you can testify about? Describe it.

B. What or who is in your life that you might be holding onto to the extent that it has become an idol?

C. What is it in your personal journey that might be making it hard for you to completely trust God and release your “Isaac” to the altar of sacrifice?

D. Present to God in a prayer the thoughts that have come to your mind as you reflect on Abraham’s experience with God in Genesis.

E. Write this prayer out in a journal and reflect on it throughout the week. The response to the Kingdom of God as Christ taught it is a radical self-abandonment to the Lordship of Christ and Kingdom life, John 12:24. This is what leads to Kingdom life of fruitfulness, “experiencing the power and presence of Jesus, in a supernatural transformational manner” (Ingram, 2012).

F. Call two friends this week and share your experience today and the commitment



you have made with reference to living an authentic life.

G. Memory text for meditation: John 12:24. Read it every day and each day right down the thought that comes to you as you meditate on it.

Lesson 6: The Joy of the Surrendered Life:  
Read Psalms 84:11, Psalms 16:8, 11

A. To be a living sacrifice according to Romans 12:1 is an invitation to live in the presence of God 24/7. What are the privileges of this radical living, according to Psalms 16:11?

B. How does the meaning of the combination of God's name, "the LORD God" in Psalms 84:11 speak to you in your life today?

C. What is the significance of a "sun and shield" to you?

D. What is God's dream for your life as revealed in this text?

E. What do you hear God speaking to you in this text, Psalms 84:11? Journal your thoughts on this verse as you commune with God.

F. Copy Psalms 84:11 and Psalms 16:11 in your notebook and commit them to memory.

G. Call three people and explain to them the joy of the surrendered life as found in Psalms 16:11. Pray with each one of them and write down their responses.

Lesson 7: The Fear of the Lord: Read Genesis 22:12

A. What does it mean to fear God? Why should we fear God? Compare the points in Deuteronomy 6:10-13 and Deuteronomy 10:10-14. Write the points down.

B. What is the evidence that one fears God? Genesis 22:12.

- C. How does Revelation 14:6-7 relate the good news to obedience and the fear of God?
- D. What happens to the Law of God in the disciple's experience? Hebrews 10:16; James 2:10.
- E. What do these phrases mean in James 1:21-23: "the implanted word," "doers of the word," and "hearers of the word?"
- F. What do you learn from this passage, James 1:21-23? How can you apply this passage in your practical life today?
- G. Journal your thoughts on how to live a life that shows that you fear God today. Share Revelation 14:6-7 with a friend.

Lesson 8: Celebration and Recreation: Read Mark 2:27-28

- A. What is the value of having boundaries in life? What areas of your life and relationships do you need to have some boundaries?
- B. Meditate on this statement: "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath," Mark 2:27-28.
- C. According to Christ, who made the Sabbath for man and why?
- D. What does it mean that the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath? What else is He Lord of?
- E. List some benefits of having a day of rest from daily work, spending money, phone calls, cooking food, watching TV, and the rest of the activities that we engage in normally. List some appropriate Sabbath activities that serve to recreate the whole person and reconnect you with the Creator, family, and God's household of faith and the environment.

F. What is the significance of the Sabbath in God's kingdom of grace? Exodus 31:13-17; Hebrews 3:19-4:1, 9-10.

G. Copy Isaiah 58:13-14 in a notebook. How can you celebrate the Sabbath to make it meaningful and delightful in your experience? How does the Sabbath relate to these areas? Share your thoughts on the blessing of Sabbath with a friend.

Lesson 9: Knowing God's Will for you:  
Read 1 John 2:15-16; Romans 12:2

A. What is the pattern of this world and who is the ruler of this world? 1 John 2:15-16, 14:30; 1 John 5:19

B. What is the danger of becoming a friend of the world by conforming to its mold? James 4:4; 1 John 2:17

C. What have been some of your thoughts on doing or knowing the will of God? Do you fear praying, "Thy will be done?"

D. How do you get to know what is good, acceptable, desirable, pleasing, and perfect in God's sight for you? Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 2:12, 16; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

E. How and where have you found yourself squeezed into this world's mold? What habits of life inherited and cultivated are blocking your way from a vibrant relationship with Christ?

F. Pray and ask God for grace to focus on the exalted Christ and to renew your mind so that you may delight in His perfect will for your life. Discover from these scriptures the five things that will help you renew your mind: Romans 10:17; Revelation 1:3; 2 Timothy 2:15; Psalms 119:9, 11; Joshua 1:8.

G. Journal your thoughts and reflections in your heart as you meditate on Romans

12:2. Encourage someone with what you have learned from this lesson.

Lesson 10: The Battle of the Mind: Read Romans 12:1-3

A. List five significant things that happened when you repented and were born again (John 1; 12-13; Acts 2:38; Romans 3:22, 28; Colossians 1:13-14; Ephesians 1:6-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17, 2:19; Galatians 4:5-7).

B. List five things that now describe what you now possess as a result of your union with Christ through faith in Him (Romans 5:1-2; Ephesians 2:19; Philippians 3:20; Romans 8:15-17; Ephesians 1:13-14; Revelation 1:5-6; Romans 6:11, 14).

C. Do you still find yourself struggling with sin and walking in failure rather than victory? Why is this so? (Romans 7:19-24)

D. What solution or means has Christ provided for overcoming this tendency to fall back to your inherited tendencies to sin and the cultivated habits of sin that controlled your life before you received Christ? (Romans 8:4-9; Galatians 5:16-17)

E. How does the command in Romans 12:2 show us God's way of deliverance from the dominion of sin?

F. Write down the commands in Romans 12:2. The commands tell you what to stop doing and what to start doing. How do these commands help you to understand the role of your will in this process of receiving God's best for your life?

G. Copy the entire Romans 12:2 from the amplified Bible. Meditate on the purpose of these commands given in the text. Do you believe that this is true about you? Share with a friend who does not go to church the joy you find in knowing your position and possessions in Christ.

Lesson 11: Barriers to Experiencing the Real you:  
Read Genesis 3:3-13

- A. How have you faced the challenge of image management in your relationships?
- B. What makes it difficult for you to reveal your true self?
- C. How does Genesis 3:3-13 shed light on the difficulty in answering the important question of identity, purpose and significance?
- D. How have you seen fear, hiding (masking), and blame affect your relationships?
- E. Why is experiencing life in union with Christ and knowing where you belong so important in breaking the barriers to healthy relationships due to fear, hiding and blame that are inherent due to our union with Adam? (Colossians 1:13-14, Romans 12:3-5).
- F. Meditate on Colossians 1:12-14 by focusing on these words: qualified, partaker, delivered, conveyed or transferred, redemption, and forgiveness. Journal how these words helps you understand life in “the Kingdom of the Son of His love.”
- G. Take off your mask with one trusted friend and tell how fear, hiding, and blame manifest themselves in your life and relationships. Share with your friend how you have found your identity and security in your relationship with Christ. Pray to God to lead you to encourage two friends to trust Jesus with the issue of identity and security.

Lesson 12: Discover the Real you in Christ:  
Read Ephesians 1:3-12

- A. What are some of the blessings that are now yours as a believer according to the riches of God’s grace in Christ?
- B. How does knowing that God has made you “accepted in the Beloved” transform your self-image and help you with the question of image management?
- C. What do these two verses (Ephesians 1:5; Romans 8:29) have in common that

help you understand your identity and destiny?

D. What does it mean to you to live to the praise of God's glory?

E. How does the important question of significance relate to knowing God's purpose for your life?

F. Share with two people how God's grace has abounded to you in your practical walk with Christ in your relationships, or in the work place.

G. According to the counsel of God's will, those who are in Christ should "be to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:6, 12). Discuss with a friend how important it is to put "being" before "doing."

H. Journal your reflections on how knowing this truth of your identity in union with Christ does help with dealing with insecurities that lead to a life focused on appearance, performance and possessions.'

Lesson 13: Accepting Your Acceptance in Christ:  
Read Romans 12:3, Ephesians 1:3-6

A. What opinion do you hold about yourself? How do you feel about it? Is it accurate according to what the Bible says about you?

B. What is the objective standard or truth whereby you may rate your ability with sober judgment?

C. Find out what the Bible says is now true about you in your union with Christ according to Romans 5:1-2, 9-10; 6:6; 6:11,14; 7:4, 6; 8:1, 4, 9, 14-17; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 17.

D. Why is it important to think of yourself as God thinks about you?

E. Ask God for grace to think of yourself and see yourself as He sees you in Christ.

Journal and reflect on what you have discovered in the texts you read in number (C) above.

F. Call three people and share with each one of them what you have discovered about the value of thinking accurately about who you are in union with Christ.

G. Choose a passage from the following each day and discover and reflect on how they shape your understanding of who you are in terms of personal appearance (Psalms 139:13-17), sense of belonging (Romans 8:31-32), worthiness (2 Corinthians 5:17), security (Romans 8:38-39), and competence (Philippians 2:13; 4:13; Ephesians 2:10). Write down your thoughts on each one the texts.

Lesson 14: Belonging to Authentic Community:  
Read Colossians 1:13-14

Knowing your true identity should lead you to discover where you genuinely belong.

A. Why is it important to know where you belong? Read Colossians 1:13 and Philippians, and discover where you belong?

B. What does the kingdom of God comprise of in practical living? Romans 14:17; Romans 6:18.

C. Identify whose you are according to 1 Corinthians 6:15, 17, 19.

D. What does it mean to be individually members of the body of Christ?

E. How does knowing that you belong to one another affect your self-concept and the way you relate to others in the community of believers? Romans 12:5.

F. How does knowing who you are and where you belong help you discover your purpose in life in the community? Romans 12:6-8?

G. Take a spiritual gifts test and discover your purpose according to divine ordering.

Lesson 15: Living in Authentic Community:  
Read Acts 2:42-47

A. What do relationships look like in the kingdom of God? Matthew 5:43-48; Romans 12:9-14.

B. How does this passage, Romans 13:8-10, explain the life style in the authentic community of faith?

C. List the Commandments quoted by the apostle Paul in Romans 13:8-10 in the order in which they appear in the Ten Commandments as given in Exodus 20:1-17.

D. What does this reference to the Ten Commandment in Romans 13:8-10 reveal to you about the place of the law under the kingdom life of grace in the authentic community?

E. What does this passage in Romans 13:8-10 imply about your relationship to the portions of the Ten Commandments that the apostle Paul did not directly mention?

F. In the next seven days meditate on one verse from Acts 2:41-47. At the end of the week ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify three people in the church community with whom you can experience the joy of sharing your belongings in a sacrificial way.

G. Journal how the first Christians experienced authentic community. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify a small group within the larger church congregation where you can experience authentic community and continue to grow in Christ on a weekly basis



Lesson 16: Having a Kingdom Mindset in an Authentic  
Community: Read Revelation 1:5-6, 1 Peter 2:9

- A. What does Revelation 1:5-6 and 1 Peter 2:9 say about whose you are? And where you belong?
- B. You have been called to show forth the praises of God. How do you make this a part of your daily experience in personal worship and in relation with others?
- C. How does knowing your union with Christ help you to develop a kingdom mindset?
- D. How does kingdom thinking relate to the pursuit of excellence? Philippians 4:8.
- E. Your thought life determines your activities and influences your behavior thereby transforming your character. What practices does the apostle Peter suggest as excellent things that help build your character in community? 2 Peter 1:5-8.
- F. Meditate on Philippians 4:8 and journal your thoughts on excellent things that reflect the kingdom mindset that you want to pursue in the next six months.
- G. List three people you want to share the kingdom mindset with and call them within the next seven days. Invite them to be a part of your small group to experience authentic community with you.

**Summary and Conclusion**

The purpose of the discipleship process in this study is to lead participants to a life of total commitment to Christ, setting them on a journey of devotion to Christ as a disciple. A life of total commitment begins with the transfer of control of a person's entire life from themselves to God through trust in Jesus Christ and His Lordship. It is the entry point to Kingdom life and involves faith in the righteousness of Christ. It leads to a

radical change of values and attitudes towards God, people, self, sin, and the world. It affects and transforms all relationships. It produces the vibrant life in the citizens of His Kingdom (John 10:10).

The study will be closely guided by the sound theological foundations that will guard against the participants not falling into the errors of legalism or mysticism in their pursuit biblical spirituality. The established ground rules encourage openness and honesty to ensure that the objectives of the study are achieved. Growth in personal devotional activities such as quality time spent in personal prayer, Bible study, and meditation, as well as improvement in important relationships such as family will be noted as possible indicators.

After the project small group leaders will be trained and mentored to participate in leadership of more small groups at Amazing Grace Church.

It is hoped that the Christ-centred lessons that have been prepared will encourage the participants in a life-changing transformation by the Holy Spirit as they learn to practice the spiritual-life habits as found in the study. The Community of Grace participants are encouraged to continue growing in Christ through forming new community building groups that meet together to read the Bible, pray, and seek to experience and implement its teachings in practical living as outlined in this study. It is hoped that the success of this study may provide a discipleship model for meeting the needs within the designated ministry context.

## CHAPTER 5

### OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION OF THE COMMUNITY OF GRACE DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM

#### **Introduction**

The task of this project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a discipleship program that promotes the experience of biblical spirituality in the religious and cultural context of Johannesburg, thereby creating an authentic community in the Amazing Grace church plant. The purpose of the study was to deepen the devotional life of the participants through the practice of some of the life transforming habits of Christ as revealed in the Scripture and presented through this discipleship program. For this purpose a group of volunteer participants from Amazing Grace church were enrolled in the project. Among the participants were also some three individuals who are not yet baptized members of Amazing Grace but had shown great interest in participating in the discipleship project. The process was explained and they signed a group covenant to abide by the stipulated procedures to be followed in the study.

There were three groups that formed the Community of Grace. The meetings were always in the evenings from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. The time was not observed strictly as recommended because the participants wanted to have more time. The first group met on Tuesdays (Group 1) and the second group met on Thursdays (Group 2). The third group (Group 3) was composed mainly of graduate students at Witwatersrand University and

the meeting times were flexible depending on their class schedules. It was mostly on Sunday or Monday afternoons. All the participants were blacks

The participants were all Black Africans and one Coloured: From Burundi 1, Kenya 3, Tanzania 1, Rwanda 4, and South Africa 22. The Tuesday group (Group 1) was the most consistent in attendance and in meeting the requirements as agreed in the signed covenant with the groups. The group started with ten members and ended with the same ten members in attendance. The greatest number of sessions missed by an individual in this group was three sessions. All the absences were either due to sickness or work related or attending funerals that could not be avoided.

The Thursday group (Group 2) started with 11 people but two dropped out after the third session because of transport issues. The attendance of this group fluctuated and time keeping was a major issue. Average non-attendance was three sessions. At one time I was tempted to discontinue the group due to apparent lack of commitment but we opted to continue to the end.

The Students group (Group 3) was organized late with 9 people after the other two groups because of the student's schedules. The attendance, however, was good, except when one or two had to attend classes or travel. Because of frequent holidays the group took longer. Two people dropped out from the group.

To begin each session the participants were asked to report on their reactions to the assignments in the Discipleship Study Guides they were to do at home. The description of their engagement with the assignment served as an indicator of their own growth as well as an understanding of the subject.

This weekly personal reflection time allowed me to assess the growth pattern for

each participant, as there was no personal checklist or individual implementation guide.

The personal spiritual habits of Bible reading, praying, journaling, were explained and encouraged among the group. Fasting was already incorporated into the life of Amazing Grace church as a weekly event so no additional fasting time was required. In order to deepen the sense of community the combined groups attended a spiritual retreat together where they practiced spending time alone with God in silence, meditation, prayer, and fellowship.

A spiritual gifts test was conducted at Church involving everybody at Amazing Grace including the members of the Community of Grace.

Twice the groups shared written reports on reflecting on their journey as a part of indicators of their growth. The final assessment was an open-ended questionnaire assessing the experiences of the participants in order to determine how each one benefitted from participation in the discipleship program. Likert scale questions were also used to determine their attitude and level of satisfaction with the discipleship program. The analysis of the questionnaire reveals the experiences of the participants and the achievement and usefulness of the discipleship program.

### **Responses to the Open-Ended Questions**

The outcome narrative is a reflection of how the participants experienced the discipleship process. The answers are grouped around each question. Concise reports have been included as samples while the full text of the questionnaire and the responses of each participant who returned their questionnaire are in Appendix A, B, and C. It needs to be stated here that these responses simply show what the individuals

experienced and the samples are not large enough to make a general statement or theorize on what a scientific outcome would be.

#### Response to Question One

The participants were asked to describe their understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits practiced during the period of study. The responses were generally of the same tone. The responses from the participants show an understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits that were practiced during the study. Participant L said, “These habits help us to spend quality time with God.” Another one commented,

By reading scripture with the deep need to know God, you start learning about him like you get to know a friend, you start hearing him giving you guidance on which path to turn left or right into. From his words that are in the [Bible] he is able to speak to me and be relevant for whatever situation I am going through. Memorising some of the scriptures that have been taught in my Tuesday Community of Grace has helped with the reprogramming of my mind/subconscious of breaking down of some strongholds that I had. Participant A

My conclusion is that the spiritual life habits practiced were useful for spiritual growth for the participants.

#### Response to Question Two

The participants were asked to describe their understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G. White. The participants were encouraged to read *Steps to Christ*, particularly the chapter on “Growing in Christ.”

In reading *Steps to Christ*, especially the Chapter on Growing in Christ, John 15 is the strong theme in this chapter. If we are not connected to the vine then we will not bear fruit. He is the source of our spiritual life and daily communion with Him is necessary to sustain this life. We have to keep our eyes glued to Christ, despite the enemy’s efforts to the contrary. The more we behold Him the more like Him we become. Participant P

According to Participant Z, Ellen G. White must have practiced these spiritual disciplines judging from her deep spiritual experiences and ministry.

Without the practice of these habits Ellen White could not have had this deep and intense personal relationship with Christ. Furthermore, God would not have been in a position to use her as His vessel as He has done. Therefore, as God is not a respecter of persons, our daily practice of these habits will be in direct proportion to our availability to be His channel of grace. Participant Z

My own personal reading of Ellen White shows that she endorsed many spiritual life habits and spoke volumes about total surrender to Christ as Participant P has observed. Her devotional life shows that she practiced meditation on the Word, the study of the Word, journaling, prayer, fasting, and spending time alone with God.

### Response to Question Three

The participants were asked to describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced their walk with Jesus during the period of the research. All of them reported having practiced the life habits and found them useful for their walk with God. Some habits were easy, but others were more challenging. One participant named Participant T had this to say,

I saw God as being more personal. Before it was a matter of reading scripture but not applying it to me personally and realizing that what I read was meant for me. I think the session we would have on “where are you with God today” helped me to reflect on my walk with God and to truly realize that the word of God is meant for me.  
Participant T

Participant B had also experienced a challenge in scripture memorization and not enough time to spend with God in prayer. During the study period the participant found victory in the prayer life. Participant B says,

The spiritual habits mentioned above have indeed influenced my walk with Jesus. Although I can describe myself as ‘work in progress’, I have adopted some of the spiritual life habits as I grow in the Lord. I find that some are more entrenched than

others. God has already shown me areas of weakness that need attention like memorizing scripture more consistently. Some of the habits I have adopted are: Praying in the morning and meditating on the scripture. I pray as I begin my day and I have for the past few months increased the time I spend with God. . . . For meditation, I tend to use a passage in my devotional book. So I do not only meditate on a scripture verse but on the message of the day. Participant B  
For Participant C it was a real encounter with the person of Jesus Christ.

For the first time after a long time Yeshua is a real person to me—a kinsmen, the very essence and fabric of God. That being said having spent many hours of intentional meditation my relating to Him has become more pleasant. Even more so is the revelation that He is in all—all that I am and more—able to be High Priest in my stead and yet compassionate to my plight. Participant C

#### Response to Question Four

The participants were asked to describe any life-change experience they had as a result of the practice of the spiritual life habits during the period of the research. All of them reported life change in their spirituality that they attributed to the experience of the Community of Grace. Participant C could attest to life changes in relationships and also developed a deeper desire for God:

- a. My relationship to my wife, family and close friends both in and out of church has become more authentic;
- b. My sense of my utter need for Yahweh has become more distinct;
- c. My Spiritual battles have intensified and have left me in the wake of a need for God in ways I never thought possible. Participant C

Others had transformation in their inner struggles with life, particularly in the area of acceptance. Participant A had this to say,

I have struggled a lot with being accepted, it's as if something at the back of mind would constantly remind me that I am not good enough for some of God's blessings. Now I know I am 'UNCONDITIONALLY ACCEPTED' by Christ. I walk with pride because I know am coheir with him, he has qualified me by his blood being shared at Calvary. Participant A

Participant F, who is not yet a baptized member of the Seventh-day Adventist church found relief in understanding the judgment day and worship. The participant had battled



with negative thoughts in the life but found victory through the experience of community of Grace. The participant reflects,

Negative thoughts are powerless now. Although the attacks of Satan are more intense, I just recognise the negative thoughts as just the defeated work of a devil. The most significant life change is that I know what it means to worship now. I used not really understand the importance but I have felt so moved by knowing more of God. I am sure the more I know God, the more I will understand worship. Another life changing experience has been how I think about judgment day. I never understood when people would say they can't wait for that day, it used to terrify me. Now I wait in eager expectation of the coming of our Lord. Participant F

All the participants had something special to say about their own experiences with the community of Grace. One of the most rewarding experiences was to share this life-changing experience that Participant T described.

Christianity is real and I can experience it. God loves me unconditionally and there is absolutely nothing that can change that, He wants the best for me, that has been my "ah moment" during the period of study. I have known this but it has not been personal. Participant T

It became quite clear that as people got to know Christ better and to have a closer walk with Him they began to focus more on the heart relationship rather than on the externals. Participant M had this to say on the life change as a result of practicing the spiritual life habits,

For me is learning to be authentic about my walk with Christ. Before this, I played "Christian." I knew what was expected of me and played it accordingly. The mistake I was making is that I neglected the heart and focused on the outside. Participant M

#### Response Question Five

The participants were asked to mention some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that they might have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the study. Christian meditation was something new for some of them. But all who were engaged in it had a positive experience. Participant A discovered that the praying

and surrendering to God's will yielded better results than not waiting for God's guidance and said:

Praying and having your prayers answered, asking for God's will in situations where I would have used my own wisdom and rather letting his prevail, and ending up with a better solution than I would have come up with without God's guidance. Participant A

For participant F the practice of meditation on the Word of God had several positive results including better sleep, peace of mind, and a life of vigour. "I have better sleep, peace of mind. I can fight negative thoughts with the word of God. I can remind myself of who I am and what I have because of Christ and then nothing is impossible. It's energizing," said Participant F.

Participant K experienced a deeper understanding of scripture during meditation moments.

During my meditation time I would look at the history of the passage and see how it was relevant at the time and then bring it closer home and ask the Lord what He is saying to me through the read scripture. And this time always blew me away, it always made me feel like I was visiting the Scripture for the first time. Participant K

The responses to meditation just confirmed what the Word of God says that that by beholding we become changed. "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18). Meditation is beholding the Word of God and opening the heart to receive it. The result is transformation just as these participants have experienced.

#### Response to Question Six

The participants were asked to describe how the spiritual life habits practiced benefitted them most. Once again the answers pointed out different spiritual benefits

from different people but all had something greatly valued from the study. Participant M learned to be more disciplined in several areas of the spiritual life.

Discipline in managing my time with God; discipline in memorizing scripture; discipline in reflecting regularly in my journal; and discipline of praying for each other and our prayer partners. Because we got a chance to recite and share lessons, it encouraged me never to fall behind. Participant M

For Participant K the biggest lesson was learning to be intentional about the relationship with Jesus. The participant said, “The biggest lesson for me was about being intentional about my relationship with the Lord.”

During the study intentionality was emphasized and it is rewarding to see that it is working well for those who have internalized the principle of being intentional about one’s walk with God. For some it was the discovery of their identity in Christ that was the big blessing. Lesson 12 had focused on discovering the real you in Christ, drawing from Eph 1:3-12. Among other thoughts the participants reflected on the value of knowing that one is accepted in the Beloved. Participant F said, “Knowing who I am based on the Bible, and what I have in Christ. Knowing what God says about me was a big blessing.”

Participant Z concurred with participant F, saying, “They have resulted in better discipline in terms of my daily spiritual practices. One of the most outstanding benefits has been coming to terms and internalizing who I am in Christ - my identity in Christ.” The issue of identity is extremely important in discipleship and in forming community. I observed that the participants tended to open up more to the group once they were confident of their relationship with Christ.

## Response to Question Seven

The participants were asked to reflect on how they felt about the small group, the Community of Grace, in which they participated. It was a closed group and some found that to be very meaningful for the purpose of the study as far as learning to be authentic goes. Participant B observed, “The group has grown together and we shared some deep moments but I think there is room for continued growth. . . . I saw the importance of a closed group because you know that your issues are contained in a smaller group.” The bonding had actually taken place on a deeper level in some of the groups than in others.

I grew closer to the group and shared more intimately than with other groups. Furthermore we were to a large extent able to remove our masks and be more authentic with each other. One remarkable and visible development was witnessing the personal spiritual growth of each member of the group. In a sense it was very fulfilling. Participant Z

If what Participant K has to say in the following comment is accurate, then the results of this project will be a great blessing to the church as a whole.

It was amazing family! People from different walks of life, with different experiences and yet when we came together we were perfect match made in heaven. I have learnt so much from each of them and it was through this group that one could clearly see that truly unity in diversity is possible. We respected each other, missed one another, prayed for each other, had fun together and were always happy to see each other. In this group one could be authentic without feeling judged, we could be emotional and vulnerable for we knew that we were a family. I loved my group and will miss them a lot, but the work of the Lord has to continue. Participant K

Another participant felt that the group was chosen by the guidance of the Holy Spirit because of the benefits that were experienced. One participant said,

I think it was a group picked directly by Jesus. We were an interesting mix of personalities; age group and career background, which created a beautiful, mix of life experiences. We became a family and started doing things together even outside the group meetings. Participant M

This feeling is shared by yet another, Participant D, in the same group who said, “I love the group, I feel that it was by design that we came together. I feel like a vital part of my spiritual life has somewhat been taken away with the group having to break up.”

However, there were others in the group who only felt they bonded with those with whom they had been paired for prayer and discussion. There were groups of two for close prayers and groups of four for small reflections on thoughts that presented themselves for deeper discussion. Participant Q bonded closely with the smaller group and with the prayer partner, but did not seem to benefit much from the entire group.

Lastly, I think because between myself and Claudene and Judge and Val, but especially me and Judge, have been going through many similar things this course has been able to draw us closer together. A deeper understanding, a deeper profound love and respect for each other and its been great. But I must admit I don't feel the same way about anyone else in the group. I just know more about them. Participant Q  
Participant Q was not in the same group with K but in the group where most members were not consistent in attendance and doing the assignments. In fact, I considered disbanding the group because of the lack of commitment.

#### Response to Question Eight

The participants were given opportunity to describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that they might have received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research. Without exception all of them stated that they did not receive any negative side effects from the study. This is what I expected because these spiritual life habits are the life habits of Christ and can only produce positive effects on those who practice them as disciples of Christ. Christ calls His disciples to a life of total devotion to Him (Luke 14:26-27, 33). For six months the groups met once every week and the participants still attended their jobs and Sabbath worships

without complaining. The participants' level of enthusiasm was high and wished we did not have to stop. The journey that began through the Community of Grace is not an end in itself. It is but the beginning as most of the participants came to realize.

#### Response to Question Nine

The participants were asked to describe those factors in their own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group they were studying with during the period of the research. The samples below are quoted to give the feel of their experience:

Authentic sharing especially of areas of struggle. Non-judgemental atmosphere that allowed people to speak genuinely from the heart. The 'WhatsApp' group which enabled us to keep in touch outside of the meeting days and times. Participant L

“Sincere testimonies, sharing of life experiences, honesty, excitement of growing in Christ with my wife who was also part of the groups” Participant M.

The environment of authenticity where people could be open, honest, vulnerable and still feel like you are appreciated and respected afterwards. The love, empathy and support showed by the group. My husband was also part of the group and it's always my prayer that the Lord helps us to grow together and share Him together. Participant K

“Sharing our most intimate stories within the group made us connect more, and praying together and wrestling with the word of GOD together” Participant G.

“Sharing our lives and journeys. Like when some members attended my granny's funeral, attending the baptism of fellow community members, sharing personal stories, praying for each other” Participant F.

When you analyse the above comments what comes out is that authenticity is a key factor in creating community of this kind. The environment or the atmosphere created by the group and their leader is important for achieving the goal of creating an

authentic community. Furthermore, as members in the groups experienced crises in their lives the others offered support. An example is how Participant F's group offered support when a family member died. Experiences like these increase the level of commitment and the community grows in grace.

The group shared their areas of struggles without fear of rejection or being judged. This indicates that fear of rejection and the fear of being judged by others can be a hindrance to fellowship and growth in the church. Some of the participants are Adventists of considerable experience in the Church. They are in leadership positions and are considered mature by others, but it took the Community of Grace for them to experience authenticity and true Christian fellowship without fear of rejection and judgment. One cannot help but wonder how many people are in the same predicament outside there with hearts yearning for something more. On the other hand it is possible that because people do not know what they are missing they may be living in self-deception that all is well with their spiritual experience. I find such to have been the case for some of the participants including participant M who had this to say in the initial feedback after the community had been half way through with the program:

At first I did not want to join. I thought as a seasoned Adventist, what purpose would these community meetings serve? I was well versed with the fundamental beliefs of my church. I have been involved in a number of study groups ranging from prophecy to understanding the nature of Christ and end time events. My wife was immediately drawn to the meetings and she asked me to attend once and decide if I really want to join. I thought, why not? It is just one meeting after all!

Wow! The first meeting I attended was on Total commitment and for me the lesson served as a mirror of where I stood with my God. We understood what is meant by value to understand the extent in which Jesus cares for our lives and us. . . . I realised as an Adventist that I knew a lot about our beliefs and customs and had mistakenly interpreted that as a total commitment to God. Participant M

Substituting doctrines for an experience with Christ was a constant running comment in the fellowship. But as the participants experienced a higher level of intimacy with Christ in their own personal journeys they also tended to enjoy the teachings of the Word of God. It seems that the experience with Christ made the doctrines come alive as they experienced the love of Christ in the Community of Grace.

#### Response to Question Ten

The participants were asked to describe those factors in their own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community. One group was very consistent and as a result the members did not experience too many setbacks except when they had to be at work or travel for business as captured by Participant B:

The absence of certain members from sessions (this involves all of us at different times). Although my absence had valid reasons like being out of time on work assignment etc., it tended to disturb my flow and when I had to do catch up it would be the shortened version of the real thing.

Some of the members of the group that was not very consistent had this to say concerning the factors that reduced the effectiveness of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community:

“Lack of commitment, lack of accountability and absenteeism – as all the above have a significant way of impacting negatively on the individual members in relation to each other” Participant C.

“The biggest factor that reduced effectiveness was travelling a lot and missing out on certain days. It was like a bridge that was being destroyed. Continuity is crucial in the group meetings as lessons build on each other” Participant M.



The need for discipline in the Community of Grace groups was reflected by Participant E who found “lack of time, worldly entertainment, and worldly social structures” to have hindered effectiveness of their spiritual growth.

#### Response to Question Eleven

The participants were asked to describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits. The responses below suggest that the spiritual disciplines aid in making communion with Christ a lifestyle as confirmed by the experiences of the participants in this study.

Participant K summarized the spiritual benefit and the intention of the whole exercise of Community of Grace by saying,

There are only benefits when it comes to intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits. I have found it to be the only way that helps one to have a sustainable, meaningful Christian Lifestyle. As one intentionally practices these, they become part of who you are. Participant K

The benefits mentioned by Participant L include reflective reading of Scripture and meditation.

Participant B concurred with Participant L on the question of meditation, but also found great benefit in prayer as a discipline.

One cannot be a disciple without learning discipline. I saw how I needed to avail myself for God to work in me. . . . I will continue to practice what is described in 1 Timothy 4:7, “...discipline yourself for the purpose of Godliness.” Participant B

The benefit of discipline was further captured by Participant M who found great value in learning to be intentional in the walk with Christ. “If I had negative thoughts, I intentionally chose to erase them which aided me to be more disciplined as I started to intentionally choose Christ and not be swayed by brief moments of worldly pleasure.”

## Response to Question Twelve

The participants were asked to describe, from their own personal experience, the entire discipleship program that they had gone through during the period of the study in terms of its suitability for creating community.

The program has been absolutely amazing. It avails Christians an opportunity to go beyond belief and allows them to experience God and know who He is for themselves. He ceases to become the God they have read about or heard being preached about, He becomes your God, your Daddy. If you are new in the Christian faith, it teaches you the steps you need to take to make your faith stronger. If you have been in the faith for a while, it teaches you how to take your relationship with the Lord to another level. Together as a community it teaches us how to love one another like Jesus did, free of judgment and hypocrisy. Participant K

Some said that the size of the group was suitable and the lessons covered were relevant.

The frequency of the meetings was also found to be appropriate.

The size of the groups is small enough to create intimacy and conversation. The frequency of the meetings is such that the group members do not lose touch with one another. The lessons covered led us to discover the core of what it means to be a disciple and a follower and lead to real introspection on my walk with the Lord. Participant L

Some felt the duration of the program should be longer to establish community.

Participant P wrote that “it needs to be longer to really establish community, but in the short time it achieved a lot in breaking down barriers between people and creating genuine fellowship. It’s a place that people can call home away from home.” One individual, however, found the program to be overloaded with information and wished it had less material.

Overall, I had higher expectations of what would happen to me on the inside of my soul after this was over, but I haven’t really seen it. I’ve only seen [maybe] more understanding or the beginning of a journey I still need to explore and maybe, hopefully that’s what God wanted me to get. Truly it has been a unique approach to bible study. In the meditational and personal sharing part but I still believe it didn’t make its target. My view might not be that objective or it might only be me. It still feels there was the usual Adventist information overload per lesson. Participant Q

Another participant from a different group said,

This is an excellent way to create communities: Communities that are united in Christ, and bound by His love; Communities that know and understand each other's struggles, and challenges; Communities that sing and pray for each other; Communities where one can be open and authentic about their walk without the fear of being judged. Participant M

Others liked the idea that it had a structure that they could follow and had assignments that allowed them to continue focused along the week when they were not in study.

I believe it is suitable in that the community goes through a roadmap of guided material. The homework that is required forces one to be focused and not just see it as a study for the sake of knowledge. The application aspect of it is commendable. I like the fact that we had files and followed a certain order while learning to walk with Jesus. This was distinctly different from other studies I participated in where there is no material for reference during the week. Participant B

Participant B had previously led a cell group in another denomination prior to becoming an Adventist. The comments made shows that Community of Grace is an idea worth introducing to the entire congregation at Amazing Grace Church.

#### Response to Question Thirteen

The participants were asked if they would recommend this program to another person. They were also required to explain their reasons why they would, or would not recommend it. The responses were like, "O Definitely!!! My reason is simple, because I know [its] Life Changing," Participant K. "Most certainly! . . . It is a feeling that I cannot [describe] to be that much close to GOD," Participant G. According to Participant G it is the experience he had in the Community of Grace that makes the program worth recommending to others. Participant G said,

This was something I have never experienced before and it makes being Christian that much real because in my own understanding one cannot claim to be a Christian without being a disciple which requires intentional moves towards deepening one's

relationship with GOD and at the same [time] sharing that with everyone they encounter.

Participant L said, “I would definitely recommend the program to another person. The program opened my eyes to what authentic fellowship is and what it means to be a part in the body of Christ. I also learnt important lessons on the discipline of memorizing scripture and reflecting on the word of God”

#### Response to Question Fourteen

The participants were asked what they would want to continue doing from their experience gathered through participating in this program. They all felt that they wanted to continue with the program and to practice the spiritual life habits as part of their Christian daily walk. This they have started doing already. After the Community of Grace study period was over they were divided into smaller groups and requested to look for others to make their numbers at least 10 to 12 and to start the process again.

#### Response to Question Fifteen

The participants were asked to give suggestions how the program could be improved. Some suggestions were given including reducing the content to a third of the material present. Others commented on the duration and wished for a longer period to be allocated for the study. Some felt that each session needed more time than the allocated one hour 30 minutes that we allocated for it. Others felt holding the meetings on a Friday or a Sabbath would make it more effective. Others still mentioned the need to get the group to do something together in the form of Christian witness during the period of the study.

## Response to Question Sixteen

The participants were asked about the results of their spiritual gift assessment. It was shown that many different gifts exist among the participants including prophecy, teaching, evangelism, discernment, prophecy, wisdom, teaching, leadership, administration, exhortation, healing, discernment, miracles, and more. A few had not taken their spiritual gift assessment and plan to do it in future.

### **Summary and Analysis of the Likert Scale Survey**

There were ten questions on the Likert scale survey developed by using SurveyMonkey templates to determine some spiritual scale indicators. The questionnaire was administered online to 25 people and all of them responded. The rating average is the sum of the scores of each respondent. The rating scale score was above 4.0 indicating that most of the participants not only benefitted from the Community of Grace fellowship, but also had significant spiritual growth and were very happy with the discipleship process they went through. The Likert scale is results on the spiritual growth indicators are shown in Figure 2.

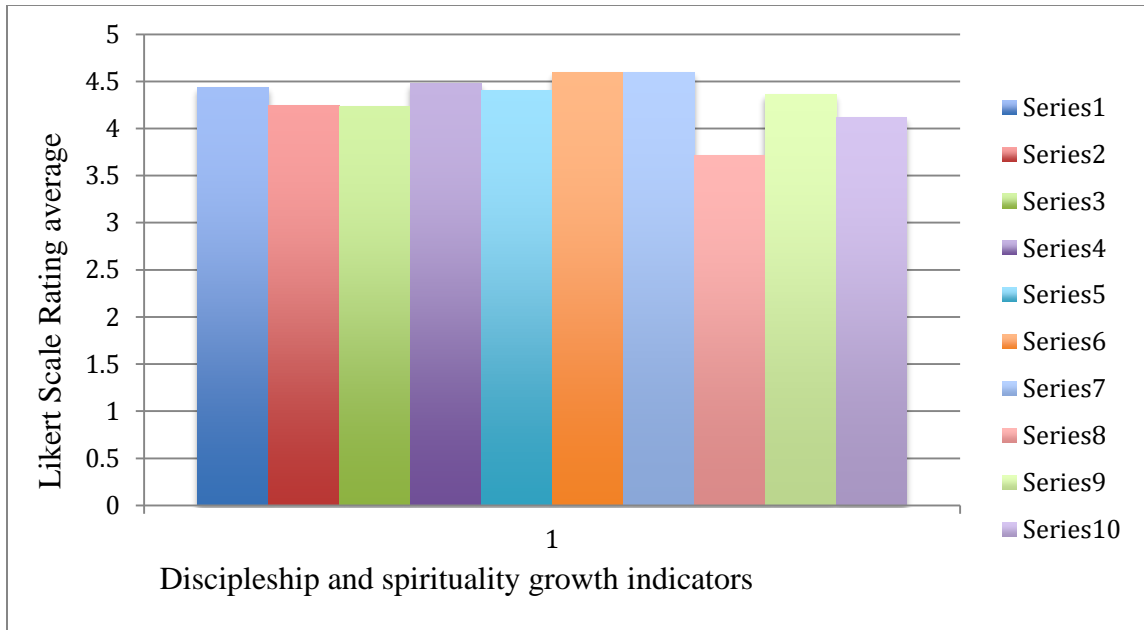


Figure 2. Analysis of the Community of Grace spiritual growth indicators.

#### Details of the Legend

Series 1: Effectiveness of the program

Series 2: How strong the sense of community formed in the community of Grace

Series 3: Satisfaction with the study content

Series 4: Satisfaction with the small group

Series 5: Impact of the practice spiritual life habit

Series 6: Satisfaction with the experience gained in the community of Grace

Series 7: Usefulness of some specific life habits

Series 8: How challenging were the discipleship sessions

Series 9: How well did the community of Grace meet your expectations?

Series 10: Improvement of other relationships such as family and friends

## Analysis of the Community of Grace Spiritual Growth Indicators

Question 1 measured how effective was the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community among the group. Fourteen people said it was quite effective while 11 people said it was very effective. The rating average was 4.44 on the Likert scale.

Question 2 was on how strong was the sense of community formed during the Community of Grace fellowship. The rating average was 4.24 indicating that it was between quite strong and extremely strong.

Question 3 measured the level of satisfaction with the course content. Nineteen participants (76.0%) said they were extremely satisfied with the course content. Two people (8%) said they were moderately satisfied. One person (4%) was moderately satisfied, while three people (12%) were extremely dissatisfied with the course content.

Question 4 wanted to establish the attitude of the participants with their small groups. Fourteen people indicated they were extremely happy while 11 people said they were quite happy. One person was slightly happy and no one was not at all happy. The rating average was 4.48 on the Likert scale.

Questions 5 asked about the impact the practice of the spiritual life habits had on their walk with Jesus, 13 people said it had a lot of impact while 11 people indicated that it had a great deal of impact. One person experienced a moderate amount of impact. The rating average was 4.40 on the Likert scale.

In responding to question 6 on the satisfaction level with the experience gained at the Community of Grace discipleship fellowship, ten participants said they were quite

satisfied while 15 said they were extremely satisfied. The rating average was 4.60 on the Likert scale.

Question 7 asked how useful were the spiritual life habits such as reflective Bible study, scripture memorization, and meditation practices. Ten of the participants indicated that they were quite useful, while 15 said they were extremely useful. The rating average was 4.60 on the Likert scale.

Question 8 wanted to establish how challenging the discipleship sessions were. Fifteen participants found them very challenging while two people said they were extremely challenging. Six people found them moderately challenging while one person indicated they were not at all challenging. One person skipped the question. The rating average was 3.71

Question 9 was on how well the Community of Grace met the expectations of the participants. Twelve said quite well, while 11 people indicated that it met their expectations extremely well. For two participants it was moderately well. The rating average was 4.12 on the Likert scale.

Finally, question 10 asked how well the participants felt that their relationships with family and friends had improved as a result of their spiritual growth the Community of Grace. Thirteen participants said their relationships had improved quite well while eight said their relationships had improved extremely well. Three people said the relationships had improved fairly well, while for one person the improvement was mildly well. The rating average was 4.12 on the Likert scale.

This study shows that the majority of the participants found the Community of Grace useful in building their spirituality and were very satisfied with the whole process.



It also shows that as they improved on their spiritual life their relationships with family and friends also improved.

### **Evaluation of the Outcome**

The open-ended questionnaire and the Likert scale questions were prepared to assess the experiences of the participants in the Community of Grace Discipleship Program. The purpose was to determine how each individual had benefitted from the participation in the discipleship program.

The responses show that the participants had a good grasp of the biblical spiritual habits and had a strong desire to practice them. For example, when asked to share what they would like to continue doing after the close of the sessions Participant G said, “Practicing all the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting.” Many of them indicated the same desire to continue with the practice of the spiritual habits and also to continue with the community of grace.

What was greatly appreciated by all is the fact that the Community of Grace groups were closed to newcomers after the initial enrolment and were facilitated in a manner that encouraged authenticity and openness. Thus the participants were able to develop a sense of trust within the group.

The group that demonstrated discipline in time keeping and attendance also experienced a deeper bonding and authenticity among themselves than those who struggled with time keeping and attendance. It was felt that for people to receive maximum benefit there must be a higher level of commitment in attendance and in doing the assignments. The members appreciated the fact that the assignments were practical

and helpful in spiritual growth. All of them indicated that they felt they had grown spiritually.

One specific area where spiritual growth did take place was in understanding and embracing the reality of the believers union with Christ that gives the believer the new identity in Christ. They felt empowered to live a vibrant life of confidence, hope, and power to even confront with negative thoughts as Participant F observed. This was quite liberating as the participants shared openly their previous fears and doubts in their Christian experiences, particularly in dealing with questions of acceptance and rejection. One participant openly shared with the group that her father was a *sangoma* (a traditional diviner and healer) and narrated the challenges of growing up from such a background. This individual experienced the power of forgiveness towards her father and shared it with the group.

For the researcher, one of the most valuable experiences is that this process activated a sense of deeper hunger for more of Christ in the life of the participants. This hunger was expressed in different ways but Participant F's statement summarises it all: "I am still growing in the knowledge of these things; however, I feel a constant yearning for more. I have also experienced God and the Holy Spirit more intensely in my journey as a result of spending time in the word." This yearning for more is an expression that true biblical discipleship is indeed a journey that does not end this side of heaven; however, that settled, peaceful assurance of acceptance with God through faith in Christ and His righteousness alone is the fuel that makes the journey possible and worthwhile. It is a life-transforming journey as captured by Participant P. "The more we behold Him the more like Him we become." Writing about biblical sanctification, White (2012) also

observes, “It is by beholding that we become changed” (p. 361). Thus it is my conclusion that this discipleship journey has given the right experience to the participants in line with what is written in 2 Cor 3:18.

My personal expectations is that this project will inspire other congregations to get involved and become more intentional in forming such communities of grace, leading participants to become authentic followers of Christ. In this way the project will impact the church beyond Amazing Grace congregation. Personally I would like to see more people trained all over Africa who can train others to become authentic followers of Christ through the Community of Grace discipleship process.

As the researcher, I have experienced a deeper growth in my spiritual journey. I have grown in my understanding of discipleship and biblical spirituality and have learnt to abide in Christ and in His word. I practice Scripture memorization and meditation on the word of God more than before, my prayer life has improved, and I am more intentional about my devotional life than before. I have a deeper hunger for Christ, and the transformation that the Holy Spirit works in my life as I submit to Him daily. As a result I find that I am more aware of God’s presence in my life, and I consult Him almost in everything I do and in the decisions that I make in my personal life and also in the ministry to others. My wife and I participated in the Community of Grace together, and that experience has strengthened our relationship. We have learnt to be more authentic with each other and see ourselves as partners in ministry more and more. I have also been more courageous in confronting demonic spirits whenever I am called upon to pray for people with demonic challenges.

My personal hope is that this project will inspire other congregations to become

intentional about forming communities of grace, leading participants to become authentic followers of Christ. In this way the project will impact the church beyond Amazing Grace congregation. Personally, I would like to see more pastors and church leaders trained all over Africa who will then prepare others to become authentic followers of Christ through the Community of Grace discipleship process.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Transformation Into an Authentic Community**

This project was an attempt to discover a model that one could use to develop an authentic community in the ministry context of the researcher. The discipleship program that was developed has initiated a discipleship process for creating authentic community at Amazing Grace SDA Church in Johannesburg. The interview responses have indicated a notable spiritual growth among the participants. The average rating of the whole experience showed that most of the participants were very happy with the discipleship process and had spiritual growth during the exercise. The participants actually felt that they had been transformed into an authentic community with a deeper and growing spiritual life than before they engaged in the discipleship journey. This expectation has been largely met, as shown by what participants scored on their expectations from the Community of Grace experience (87.2% rating average), and the measurement on the effectiveness of the program in developing community among the group (88% average rating).

To summarize the experience that this study has generated, the researcher refers to Chan and Beuving's (2012) definition of the church that says, "The church is a group of redeemed people that live and serve together in such a way that their lives and communities are transformed" (p. 53). According to Chan and Beuving, what matters is

the way we interact with those whom God has placed in our life. They say, “If you are not connected with other Christians, serving and being served, challenging and being challenged, then you are not living as He desires, and the church is not functioning as He intended” (Chan & Beuving, 2012, p. 53). That is, the church is a place, a community for transformation and spiritual development. It is a community where the Holy Spirit conforms our ways to His will (Platt, 2013, p. 144). In this project, the Community of Grace discipleship fellowships have proved the church is a place to be for the participants.

During the study, spiritual development occurred in intrapersonal, interpersonal as well as in community. Intrapersonal challenges facing development of the individual have to do with the disposition of the individual to display personal honesty and integrity within the individual and being authentic in the personal level and with God. The biblical concept of discipleship and spirituality gets beneath the surface and deals with the root of the problem, transforming the heart and renewing the mind so that the will of Christ becomes the disciple’s agenda (Rom 12:1-2). This has been demonstrated in the lives of those who participated in the program as indicated by the results of the survey overall rating average.

The intrapersonal communication, including the person’s self talk, should reflect a correct understanding of one’s true identity as defined by the gospel. The biblical faith recognizes the existence of the self but calls on the would-be follower of Christ to deny it and become disciples of Christ (Luke 9:23-24). Hence self-identity becomes an important issue in the practice of discipleship and in forming authentic community. Most of the participants (84%) indicated that through this study they have become aware of their true

identity in Christ and experienced a strong sense of community during Community of Grace fellowship.

### **Hunger for More of Christ in the Life**

The experiences of the participants and their awakened yearning for more of Christ in them have shown that biblical discipleship and spirituality is a process, not a program. The transformation takes place by the power of the Holy Spirit as one willingly beholds Christ and communes with Him. One hundred percent of the participants expressed satisfaction with the experience gained at the Community of Grace discipleship fellowship.

There are other discipleship programs being used in evangelism but this research has indicated a need for a discipleship process that promotes the experience of biblical spirituality in the religious and cultural contexts of the church in Johannesburg, thereby creating an authentic discipleship community in the local churches. As Kidder (2011), in talking about training leaders in the local church, says, “Emphasize spirituality, and people will do ministry because of their love and devotion for God” (p. 64). Those who have been involved in the Community of Grace discipleship process are now actively engaged in personal evangelism. This claim is justified by the fact that the members, with no Adventist background, who were baptized at Amazing Grace Church during the period of the study, were those who were influenced by the participants in the Community of Grace.

Being a disciple should precede making disciples. Sometimes those who engage in making disciples for Christ have not themselves experienced authentic discipleship, as the project revealed. The more the participants experienced the love of Christ through the

Community of Grace, the closer they drew to one another and learned to be authentic with one another. This indicates that an effective spiritual development process can lead to total commitment, authenticity, peace, harmony, and a sense of mission and purpose within the individual and the congregation.

In this project two participants were graduate medical students. Two were doctoral students in the field of education and one was graduating as a medical doctor. They are eagerly asking for the program to continue because they were experiencing transformation through the process. By the time the groups were about to end their study, one last-year medical student requested to join the group. The new student joined as a result of the influence of one of the medical students. This is an indication of the kind of positive influence participants can have on their peers when they are fully committed followers of Christ. Perhaps some research may need to be done on what the effect of having Community of Grace as transformational centers could have among professionals in Johannesburg.

In conclusion, this study has first shown that genuine, loving relationships can occur among people who meet together to intentionally seek God and practice principles of biblical discipleship in a community of grace regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Eighty-eight percent of the participants said they were quite happy, or extremely happy, with the small groups in which they participated. Moreover, the relationships improved quite well (rating average 4.12), not only within the groups, but also with family and friends outside the fellowship group.

Each group has become much closer and authentic with one another within the group, and they attributed it to the exercise they went through in the Community of



Grace. Communities where genuine agape love prevails are essential for meaningful and sustainable spiritual development. Spiritual development is at the core of real development of other faculties of humanity and community.

Second, unless love is demonstrated in the community through authentic relationships and attitudes of the disciples the Christian witness to the world remains unfulfilled. It is through their love that the disciples of Christ reveal Him to the world (John 13:34-35). According to the apostle Paul, we must pursue love because it is the greatest of all gifts from which all other gifts find their validation (1 Cor 13:1-3; 14:1). The apostle's contention is that we can give sacrificially and yet still be without love. He says love must be sincere and without hypocrisy (Rom 12:9).

Authentic discipleship communities of grace provide an environment where participants experience love and, in turn, learn to love without hypocrisy. The researcher observed that as people learned to accept one another and started removing the masks, they became more loving and experienced true love from the members of the community. This was because it is impossible to love that which you do not know.

### **Freedom From Fear of Demonic Powers**

The third point revealed by the study is that discovering one's authentic identity in Christ and a life of devotion to Christ, frees one from the fear of demonic spirits associated with such practices by *Sangoma* and other traditional ancestral worship systems in the society, as demonstrated by the participant whose father was a *Sangoma*. Watching the way the groups related convinced me that the more the people become free to share authentically the more comfortable and loving they became towards each other.

This was expected because when people wear masks to church, it is impossible to

love them since you do not know them. They do not know you either so they cannot genuinely love you. Consequently, the relationships that exist tend to be hypocritical and unreal. Some of the masks did come off and people were free to share deeply without fear of being rejected or betrayed. One participant whose father was a *Sangoma* (traditional prophet, healers, and diviners) shared freely with the group, and demonstrated the new found power to deal with the situation.

Fourth, this study demonstrated a need for the entire Amazing Grace Church to go through the discipleship process because those who did not participate are now constantly asking when new Communities of Grace will be organized so that they too can join and have the experience. The experience is also good for evangelism, for example, two of the non-Adventists participants have since been baptized. Some of them can quote long passages of scripture from memory and also demonstrate not only intellectual knowledge of the scriptures but also a true desire to organize their life around it. Sharing personal testimony seems very easy for those who participated in the study. To counteract this apparent discrepancy Amazing Grace leadership plans to enroll everybody into a Community of Grace discipleship process.

Fifth, the research project demonstrated that God can still add believers to the church if we follow the biblical discipleship process as was demonstrated by the Community of Grace. The researcher believes that for the Adventist Church to effectively minister, by the grace of God, to the impending influx of new converts from the world, as well as from other churches, we ourselves as Adventists need to have a deeper and more authentic experience with Christ. By the impending influx of new converts the researcher speaks of the possibilities of hundreds, of thousands of people joining the Adventist

movement as we begin to clearly proclaim the message of Christ our righteousness and demonstrate the power of the gospel in our relationships within authentic communities of grace. However, we must first be the disciples we seek to make.

Five non-Adventists participated in the Community of Grace. Two have been baptized. One is in the baptismal class and another one has asked for prayers that her husband may believe so that they can join together. The fifth one was healed of a problem that had lasted for a long time and the healing was attributed to the prayers of the group. That is 100% success in winning souls to Christ by simply engaging with people who are authentically reflecting the love of Christ.

The appreciation of the believer's union with Christ was the main component of the theological foundation of this discipleship process and formed the basis for the formation of the authentic Christian community as the participants were encouraged to meditate on the implications of their union with Christ. Such a community manifests the mind-set of the Kingdom of God, where Christ reigns as Lord and love is the principle of action in every heart and the basis of worship to God based on love and obedience as in Acts 2:42-47. The disciple's union with Christ describes both what God accomplished for humanity in Christ from the foundation of the earth and through the story of redemption, which is the basis of our subjective Christian experience through life transforming faith in Christ (Rom 12:1-21).

The disciple's oneness with Christ is already a reality in Christ that needs to be experienced through faith. The church itself is not trying to be the body of Christ, but is already the body of Christ. And yet without personal commitment to Christ in a relationship of discipleship the experience of it remains a challenge. The Community of

Grace provided a context where the participants could listen, meditate, and pray about the demands of discipleship in the light of the Lordship of Christ.

The book of Romans chapter 12 was key to this process as it describes the relationships that exist in the Community of Grace: It examines how the disciple relates to God, the world, self-identity, the Christian community, the hostile world of unbelievers, and enemies, as Ingram (2012) described. Rom 12 states what Nygren (1983) described as the ethics of grace. The researcher calls it living with the kingdom mind-set. Understanding the relationships that exist under the Kingdom of grace and following the ethics of grace is important because it frees the members of the community from the mindset of ownership to that of stewards, once the Lordship of Christ has taken center stage in their thinking.

To confess Jesus as Lord is to relinquish all thought of ownership even of oneself. We do not own ourselves. We are bought with a price and we must present ourselves to him as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1-2). That is where it begins. It is in line with the call to discipleship in Luke 14:25-27; 9:23-24.

When self is presented to Christ and submitted to His authority, nothing is left behind. All is His, and He is in us all (Eph 4:4). The relationship that a believer has with Christ, as far as things and resources are concerned, is that of stewardship. A disciple is a steward of Christ's possessions, and co-worker together with Him in running His business. Disciples are not only co-workers with Him but also sons of God through Him, and joint-heirs with Him because of their union with Him (Rom 8:15-17, Gal 3:28; 4:5-7). It is this radical understanding of the disciple's identity and purpose that might revolutionize the Church's entire ministry and bring real change and spiritual

development at Amazing Grace Church and in Southern Africa at large.

But it starts with the transformation of the individual through this kind of discipleship process.

It was also observed that the closer the individuals in the community building group experienced the grace of God as they followed Christ in loving devotion and practical pursuit of godliness, the more they experienced oneness and love in the Community of Grace. The more the group learned to share their love and experience God's grace in Christ, the more they influenced and attracted others to fellowship with Christ. Even while these closed groups were still meeting many of their friends were asking to come in and be included in the next session.

Such communities can become great centers of spiritual development that will touch every area of life. That is how great movements of old such as John Wesley's Methodism transformed their world. They formed community where people experienced "true, intimate fellowship." As Dybdahl (2008) observes, "Love and care were manifested as members looked out for both the spiritual and practical needs of others in the group," and also become accountable "in their spiritual life" (pp. 80-81). Dybdahl believes, and the researcher has also experienced it through the communities of grace, that only in such community where honest discipleship and love are emphasized can "full spiritual development occur."

It is therefore the researcher's humble submission that the formation of such communities of grace for discipleship and where spiritual life habits are intentionally practiced is essential for proper spiritual development at Amazing Grace, and possibly, in other congregations where the Church must give witness to Christ.

This concept of Community of Grace as seen in Acts 2:42-46; 4:32-35, and as we attempted to practice, goes deeper than the popular practice of cell groups that already exist in various churches, including Amazing Grace Church prior to formation of the Community of Grace.

How do we achieve this? It begins with individual members who desire and have a willingness to follow Christ as a disciple, and to experience God and His Word at a deeper level, and to be radically transformed into His likeness.

All the participants in the study were volunteers. To produce authentic discipleship communities in the church, the individual believers must be trained or mentored to be authentic in their personal relationship with God. Being authentic with God demands absolute honesty to Him in every area of our life and relationships.

What can you tell God if He already knows everything? Some may say nothing. But when you think of it, seriously, it is precisely because God already knows everything that you should tell Him everything, for in so doing you express your authenticity. As was quoted from Ellen White, prayer does not bring God down to us, nor inform God about something He does not already know about us, but lifts us up to Him. God knows everything about us, and He still loves us. Freedom to be our authentic self comes when we learn to be free with God and tell Him everything. As Issler (2001) says, “Intimacy with friends involves honest and loving self-disclosure” (pp.16, 64).

The responses of the participants in the study show that authenticity is a key factor in creating community of this kind. The environment or the atmosphere created by the group and their leader is important for achieving the goal of creating an authentic community. Honesty before God and before people is important for personal growth and

in developing community. The level of authenticity revealed in this study confirms that real transformation is a possibility when people commit themselves to Christ in discipleship. Authentic people form authentic relationships as was witnessed in this study; authentic relationships are what make up authentic communities. It became clear to the researcher that when people learn to see themselves as God sees them that they learn to be who they really are in His Presence.

The study also showed that knowing one's true identity in Christ makes it possible for one to remove the masks used to shield one's brokenness from the disapproval of people. The researcher's ministry context has convinced him that often the Adventist community suffers from deep brokenness that is difficult to bring to the surface for healing to take place. This participant sums up the whole experience of discipleship in the Community of Grace.

Being a part of the Community of Grace has taught me that there is more to people than meets the eye and that we all have scars. I have learnt to look at people beyond the obvious and appreciate people that I would have otherwise not taken the time to get to know beyond a greeting and goodbye at church. Participant L

### **Recommendations for the Community of Grace Discipleship Program**

1. Having consulted deeply with the participants, it seems that the program could be improved by shorter modules, better formatting, and by having more meetings. The program should take six months. This recommendation lends itself to the idea of having spiritual retreats for deeper growth among the participants.

2. The program needs to be administered to the entire congregation at Amazing Grace Church to encourage devotion to Christ and evangelism.

3. The actual meetings during Community of Grace sessions should be two hours to allow deeper engagements with the community in learning to practice the spiritual life habits.

4. The Community of Grace material should be revised and tried on other congregations in Johannesburg to see what effects it would have on them as well.

5. It is recommended that the Northern Conference consider adopting this Community of Grace discipleship process as a possible model for other pastors to follow in promoting spiritual development and discipleship within the Conference in South Africa and other areas with similar needs.

6. It is recommended to the Southern African Union Conference to encourage the Conferences to have their pastors go through the Community of Grace experience to better prepare them to lead their members into a deeper devotion to Christ. The pastors may also use this discipleship tool to build community among their congregations.

Finally, the experience the researcher had with the Community of Grace discipleship process has been deeply enriching and has shown that the congregation can experience an authentic relationship with Christ if members are trained to be genuine disciples first before being sent out to make disciples. The members must experience “being” before “doing.” This was Jesus’ method. He called them to be with Him first before sending them out to preach, heal, and cast out demons (Mark 3:13-15). The participants feel more emotionally healthy and empowered by the Holy Spirit to love God, others, and have a right attitude about themselves.



## APPENDIX A

### REFLECTIONS ON THE COMMUNITY OF GRACE DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS

Dear member of the Amazing Grace Community of Grace I want to thank you for your participation in the community of grace discipleship process that you attended. Remember it is a process and is not over yet.

I have specific questions that I need answered for my research project for Andrews University. Please take some time and fill in for me the following questions as much as you can remember. It will help with assessing the usefulness of the program and also in making it better if it is to be administered to others. For question number two, I recommend that you read *Steps to Christ* by Ellen G. White and reflect on chapter on Growing in Christ so that you may know what she thinks about spiritual growth for your own personal enrichment. I need your response by December 16.

#### **Questions:**

**Write your responses on the questionnaire immediately after the question you are answering:**

1. Please describe your understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting?
2. Please describe your understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G White.
3. Please describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced your walk with Jesus during the period of the research?
4. Please describe any life change experience you have had as a result of the practice of the spiritual life habits during the period of the research.
5. What are some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the research?
6. Please describe how the spiritual life habit/s that you practiced during the period of the research tended to benefit you the most?
7. Please describe how you feel about the small group with which you participated during the research?

8. Please describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that you received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research?
9. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group you were with during the research.
10. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community?
11. How would you describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits?
12. From your own personal experience how would you describe the entire discipleship program that you have gone through during the period of the research in terms of its suitability for creating community?
13. Would you recommend this program to another person? Explain your reason why you would, or would not recommend it?
14. What would you want to continue doing from your experience gathered through participating in this program?
15. In your opinion how can this program be made better?
16. If you have taken your spiritual gift test or assessment before, what is your spiritual gift?

Were you satisfied with the course content, neither satisfied or dissatisfied with it, or dissatisfied with it?

## Participant A

### Reflections on the Community of Grace discipleship Process:

Dear member of the Amazing Grace Community of Grace I want to thank you for your participation in the community of grace discipleship process that you attended. Remember it is a process and is not over yet.

I have specific questions that I need answered for my research project for Andrews University. Please take some time and fill in for me the following questions as much as you can remember. It will help with assessing the usefulness of the program and also in making it better if it is to be administered to others. For question number two, I recommend that you read *Steps to Christ* by Ellen G. White and reflect on chapter on Growing in Christ so that you may know what she thinks about spiritual growth for your own personal enrichment. I need your response by December 16.

### Questions:

Write your responses on the questionnaire immediately after the question you are answering:

1. Please describe your understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting?

-By reading scripture with the deep need to know God, you start learning about him like you get to know a friend, you start hearing him giving you guidance on which path to turn left or right into. From his words that are in the bible he is able to speak to me and be relevant for whatever situation I am going through. Memorising some of the scriptures that have been taught in my Tuesday Community of Grace has helped with the reprogramming of my mind/subconscious of breaking down of some strongholds that I had.

During this time I have seen what the power of prayer can do in one's life, that God still works in our lives. The Community of Grace has also given me the opportunity to witness other people's answered prayers, which in turn has strengthened my faith.

I take worship more seriously before it might have been at times about who is looking at me, but now it's about my communion with God. Just me being with my father sitting at his feet.

I believe fasting clears up the mind, I am able to think clearer when I do it with purpose and meaning. A cleared mind is more receptive to God's will, is more efficient in daily tasks it is the space that God wants us to be in.

2. Please describe your understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G White.
3. Please describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced your walk with Jesus during the period of the research?
  - The spiritual life habits as read and studied from our sessions have assisted me in taking little faith steps in changing some of my habits and life paradigms. The lessons have taught me to worry about the step I am taking today, not about tomorrow, that if I conquer my challenges today then I have done my part. By faith as I take each step the spirit will lead me in the right direction.
4. Please describe any life change experience you have had as a result of the practice of the spiritual life habits during the period of the research.
  - I have struggled a lot with being accepted, its as if something at the back of mind would constantly remind me that I am not good enough for some of God's blessings. Now I know I am 'UNCONDITIONALLY ACCEPTED' by Christ. I walk with pride because I know am coheir with him, he has qualified me by his blood being shared at Calvary.
5. What are some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the research?
  - Praying and having you prayers answered, asking for God's will in situations where I would have used my own wisdom and rather letting his prevail, and ending up with a better solution than I would have come up with without God's guidance.
6. Please describe how the spiritual life habit/s that you practiced during the period of the research tended to benefit you the most?
  - I have benefited materially, emotionally I am more grounded, spiritually I am a little bit more mature than I was and more tolerant of other's challenges. Less anxious about life.
7. Please describe how you feel about the small group with which you participated during the research?
  - The intimacy of a small group has given us a comfortable space to be open to each other about our challenges and to encourage each and also to know that I/we are not alone in this walk.

8. Please describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that you received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research?
  - There was not harm done as a result of applying the spiritual life habits during the period of having the research.
  
9. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group you were with during the research.
  - Trust: people were able to open up about deep issues, embarrassing issues and beautiful testimonies and private victories that they would not ordinarily share in a an ordinary setting
  - A sense of being a family, the keen interest shown by the individuals in each other's growth and interests.
  - Celebrating each other's victories having positive reinforcement for overcoming one's challenges
  
10. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community?
  - None I can think of at the moment
  - Outside of our group I say, things that could reduce the effectiveness of the spiritual life habits of developing community of Grace are: non-attendance/lack of commitment, not valuing other's trust, late coming without notification, do not doing the exercises that one is given.
  
11. How would you describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits?
  - It means I need to default to God's intercession for my life's decisions, it means giving up my control of my life and entrusting that control to God to work out his will in my life.
  
12. From your own personal experience how would you describe the entire discipleship program that you have gone through during the period of the research in terms of its suitability for creating community?
  - In church there are too many people and too little to deeply connect with people on a one on one basis. Communities of Grace give that platform, it acts

as an oasis for church members. A space during the week where they can replenish fully their spiritual lives.

13. Would you recommend this program to another person? Explain your reason why you would, or would not recommend it?

- Yes I would definitely recommend the program to another person. I have grown through this process, through self introspection and through other people's shared experiences.

14. What would you want to continue doing from your experience gathered through participating in this program?

- I would personally like to see the current Community of Grace meeting at least once a month, the current members forming other Communities of Grace that they can attend 3 times a month to make others disciples of Christ.

15. In your opinion how can this program be made better?

- It would be better if the group rotated to all the group member's houses so that we know each other

16. If you have taken your spiritual gift test or assessment before, what is your spiritual gift?

- It was wisdom

## Participant B

### Reflections on the Community of Grace discipleship Process:

Dear member of the Amazing Grace Community of Grace I want to thank you for your participation in the community of grace discipleship process that you attended. Remember it is a process and is not over yet.

I have specific questions that I need answered for my research project for Andrews University. Please take some time and fill in for me the following questions as much as you can remember. It will help with assessing the usefulness of the program and also in

making it better if it is to be administered to others. For question number two, I recommend that you read *Steps to Christ* by Ellen G. White and reflect on chapter on Growing in Christ so that you may know what she thinks about spiritual growth for your own personal enrichment. I need your response by December 16.

#### Questions:

Write your responses on the questionnaire immediately after the question you are answering:

1. Please describe your understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting?

#### INTRODUCTION

My understanding of biblical spiritual habits listed above begins with one important and overarching principle: Investment of time. Any of those listed requires time to be set aside which requires INTENTIONALITY. To be like Jesus, we must learn obedience through developing disciple habits. Paul says in 1 Cor 9:25 that just as an athlete gives priority to habits that will develop him as a champion, a disciple gives priority to habits that develop Christ-like character.

- a. **READING SCRIPTURE:** Reading scripture is not like reading a novel, neither is it only about evaluating and examining text but also about forming a synthesis of what one has read and engaging in reasoning giving attention to language symbols and context. There is no way one can synthesize text or material without being intimately involved in the content of what is being synthesized. Without the reading of scripture, in the manner describes above, we will not HEAR God. My understanding of Romans 10:17 “So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God” bears relevance to this topic. We certainly cannot ‘hear’ unless we read and study with understanding. Being rushed and not having a proper plan for one’s bible study will therefore not lead to understanding. Reading the bible without taking time to do cross referencing and forming a biblical context will not result in my spiritual growth. In fact it is more likely to produce a Christian who is luke-warm and adopts a ‘slogan – type’ Christian life where scripture is spoken without the required context and could even be misleading.

A daily plan for bible reading is important and needs to be followed consistently for it to produce the desired results. Strengthening of my faith in God and relating authentically with Him is the greatest of these desired outcomes for me.

- b. **MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE:**The term ‘ memorize’ seem to go against the grain of adult learning, yet with scripture, there are great benefits. We should memorize scripture if for no other reason than the Lord commanded us to learn His word (See Proverbs 7:1-13). Since the bible is filled with life changing principles and truths, by memorizing Scripture we make sure that ‘truth’ is always available to us, regardless of where we are or what challenges we are facing. Since there are several methods for memorizing scripture, the one that works for me is to read the whole passage and make overall meaning of it and then start line-by line and pray to God to commit it to my memory. As stated earlier, unless I practice daily until it’s cemented in memory it will all evaporate. This spiritual benefit is tangible when faced with a situation where you need to counsel or comfort someone and you do not have your bible with you. I have also noticed how the Holy Spirit uses verses to teach me new things or highlight certain things in my life that need changing. This habit of memorizing scripture allows us to ‘hide God’s truth in our hearts’-what a wonderful experience!
- c. **MEDITATING ON SCRIPTURE:** Many Christians have misunderstood the concept of meditation because it has been associated with Eastern religions. There is a clear distinction between this and biblical meditation. The former focuses on emptying one’s mind and focusing on some object in the universe. The truth however, is that the bible is very clear on the practice of meditation. Joshua 1:8 “... you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.” This calls on us to listen, hear and do. The ‘doing’ involves things that one might need to stop doing, confess and or pray about. Meditation is pondering over scripture verses or passages in such a way that the Written Word of God becomes the Living Word of God applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. One of the very first scripture verses I memorized and meditated upon when I became a Christian is Hebrews 4:12. Indeed the word of God is “living and active...” Our greatest weapon against the devil is knowing and speaking the word of God at him and his attacks. When the devil approached Him in the wilderness, Jesus did not throw His hands screaming wildly at the devil. Instead, He just said “it is written...” Emulating Jesus is my desire and having the scriptures handy is surely one way of doing that. In Psalms 119:11 David prayed “your word have I hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” Meditation is about focusing my mind and heart on God and His Word. It’s a form of deep reflection on the scripture I have read. The meditative reflection is mainly



around God's character- such as His unfailing love (Ps 48:9), God's works (Ps 77:12) and God's precepts and ways (Ps 119:15).

- d. **PRAYER, WORSHIP & BEING ALONE WITH GOD:** Whilst these three concepts or practices are not the same, they can be easily grouped together. The purpose of prayer is not to get things from God but to be in a relationship with Him. I am aware that I cannot be in a meaningful relationship with God unless I spend time alone with Him. Since prayer is communion with God, that intimate engagement can only take place in a quiet place where I talk to God and listen to what He says to me. It is important to have a place dedicated to spending time with God. Prayer aligns us to the will of God (1 Col 1:9) and constant prayer transforms us (Rom 12:2). It is also helpful to follow a certain format (without being rigid and dogmatic) when praying. I have adopted the ACTS steps of prayer.

A= Adoration. Whenever we enter into God's presence we must enter with praise. So I give Him praise and honour.

C= Confession. This is where I confess my sins and ask for forgiveness.

T= Thanksgiving. Giving thanks to God for His daily mercies and for loving me first.

S= Supplication. Now I can begin with my list of requests to God.

Praying for me, , my family and whoever is on my prayer list.

During prayer, it is important to ask for Grace to do what the scriptures say and thank God already for answered prayer even before any evidence.

- e. **FASTING:** Abstaining from something that I like or something that preoccupies me in one way or the other. This abstinence is to ensure that I can direct my hunger towards God. Fasting demonstrates a profound need for God's help and guidance through complete dependence on him. Fasting is deepening our relationship with God, not 'twisting His arm'. There are different types of fasting and one must choose whichever they prefer because the focus is not on the type or duration of the Fast but on the connection that one makes with God with clarity of mind and purpose.

2. Please describe your understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G White.
3. Please describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced your walk with Jesus during the period of the research?

The spiritual habits mentioned above have indeed influenced my walk with Jesus. Although I can describe myself as ‘work in progress’, I have adopted some of the spiritual life habits as I grow in the Lord. I find that some are more entrenched than others. God has already shown me areas of weakness that need attention like memorizing scripture more consistently. Some of the habits I have adopted are:

- a. Praying in the morning and meditating on the scripture. I pray as I begin my day and I have for the past few months increased the time I spend with God. I have often asked for prayer request to move more closer to God in prayer. God revealed to me that it is no use asking for prayer request to have more faith and improve my prayer life. He communicated this very clearly to me and said ‘just have faith that your faith prayer has been answered.’ It was amazing indeed because after that, I just prayed, regardless of how I was feeling, I just persisted until I felt the connection I desired. For meditation, I tend to use a passage in my devotional book. So I do not only meditate on a scripture verse but on the message of the day. I still have to achieve the goal of praying in the same room or place everyday .I have started praying in my study and I find that this is the most appropriate place but at times I do pray in my bedroom but my prayer is to make my study my prayer room.
- b. Memorizing scripture; I find that I have memorized only the scriptures that immediately talk to my situation or those that touch me in a special way. Once I have memorized a verse or passage, I ensure that I include it (in context) in most of my messages to friends and colleagues. The more I repeat it (by writing it down on sms or email), the more I am able to master it. My prayer is to memorize one scripture per week. A resource is available to me in the form of my Sabbath lesson study, but I find that I read the study without spending time on the memory verse. My new goal which is becoming clearer as I complete this questionnaire is to do that by the grace of God.
- c. Fasting: For the past year, I have not fasted monthly as I would have wished to, but whenever I know I am facing a difficult fight with the devil, I enter into a fast and indeed some breakthroughs have come about as a result. A new realization that was always there in the scriptures (Isaiah 58) is how to be when fasting. In my case, the practice of giving to the needy in recognition that the food I am fasting from can be given to those who have less than I do. During my fast, I deliberately give to the people standing in the streets and pray for them as I do so.
- d. Worship: This is an area of focus for 2014 as I have realized that praise and worship can elevate one’s prayer experience. I do give God adoration

and honour and would use particular and various names to exalt His name. I however realize that adding song in praise is my area of improvement.

4. Please describe any life change experience you have had as a result of the practice of the spiritual life habits during the period of the research.

I find that the practice of meditation has influenced me greatly. Taking my thoughts captive has been the greatest revelation of the power of meditating on God's word. Realising that my thoughts lead to words, my words lead to action, my action to behavior and character formation was a big WOW!!! I know it seems obvious, but once I replace my thoughts with scripture, I found great value. Real time, visible shift. A case in point: I had a high profile assignment which lasted about a year with the office of former President Thabo Mbeki. Whilst I knew my subject and work assignment I was meant to tackle, I was overwhelmed by his persona and the fact that there were two major problems in his Foundation (he is the Patron)<sup>1</sup>. The Chairman of his board and the CEO were in serious conflict with one another.<sup>2</sup> His board of directors was too big and needed to be split and drop some members. He has close relationships with both chairman and CEO but I gathered during interviews that the CEO was much closer to him than the two. Given the problems in the office, one obvious resolution after my investigations was to remove or shift the CEO out of his position. The CEO himself being a high powered person and former SA Ambassador to the UN and highly respected in the UN for the work he did for us there. The fact remained though that he did not have the requisite skills as a CEO. I had to face the President and tell him that and I had to look the CEO in the face and deliver my final report on my findings to him (by the way the CEO was the one who signed my contract of appointment as a consultant) I remember the morning I had to interview the former President and give him a synopsis of my findings and I prayed and remembered when God commanded Joshua to be courageous. I realized that courage is not the absence of fear but rather going on despite the fear. I also realized that God will stretch you in your calling but He will also equip you though you may fear rejection or inadequacy. I meditated on Joshua 1:1-18. The most impact came with verse 9 where God asked "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go".

Wow, what happened thereafter was amazing. It was like I am hearing God's voice loud in my bedroom, clear and I could touch Him with my hand. Well needless to say, my presentation was received so well and the President asked me to give the presentation to the whole board (yes, the same one that I believe is too big). God was in control. It was a tough message, but when he stood up and

shook my hand after I finished, I said. Lord, indeed You are not man that you should lie, or son of man that you should repent.9 Numbers 23:19).

A slight embarrassment on my part was to think that God is a respecter of the so called high powered people. He is LORD!!! A great lesson it was for the power of the Word in my life.

5. What are some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the research? Deep reflection that leads to being in a position to listen to God. Meditation forces you to be in a quiet place as opposed to always giving God a shopping list. I found that being calm grounds me and noise is blocked out of my mind. As I meditate in the morning, I can even see myself surrendering all to God.
6. Please describe how the spiritual life habit/s that you practiced during the period of the research tended to benefit you the most?

I would like to talk about both prayer and meditation. These benefitted me greatly in that when I have come before the almighty before I face my day, I say to God, this day is yours Lord, whatever happens or transpires is allowed by you.

Although I send my requests, the peace that I have knowing that He is in the driving seat is indescribable. Its like driving a car where you have to be alert all the time and be so focused on where and where you turn, the speed with which you drive, looking out for careless drivers next to you etc., and on the other hand being in an airplane where you don't even know how to fly but you can sleep peacefully knowing that those who know will take you to you destination. That is the feeling of surrendering to God all the days of your life. This has benefited me tremendously in the sense that I have realized that anxiety is a waste of my precious time.

7. Please describe how you feel about the small group with which you participated during the research?

The group has grown together and we shared some deep moments but I think there is room for continued growth. I like the fact that we were at different stages of our Christian walk and how I particularly learnt from those who were newer than me like Lebohang's dedication in memorizing scripture. Wow, it was bordering on envy but I realized that God rewards obedience not how long you have been a Christian. A great experience indeed. I saw the importance of a closed group because you know that your issues are contained in a smaller group.

8. Please describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that you received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research?

NONE

9. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group you were with during the research.

Having to struggle together in our journey but in particular, listening to people's challenges and realizing that they are not better off than you. The humour, the tricks we tried to play when we did not do our homework but also the deep sense of care for one another. The prayer requests and rallying behind each other when required.

10. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community?

The absence of certain members from sessions (this involves all of us at different times). Although my absence had valid reasons like being out of time on work assignment, etc., it tended to disturb my flow and when I had to do catch up it would be the shortened version of the real thing.

11. How would you describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits?

One cannot be a disciple without learning discipline. I saw how I need to avail myself for God to work in me. I have benefited especially from prayer and meditation. I seem to mention these often because my prayer life had deteriorated to the level of casual conversation with God. I can see the benefit of this discipline in many areas of my life. I will continue to practice what is described in 1 Tim 4:7 "...discipline yourself for the purpose of Godliness"  
I do not see any risk associated with this practice except the risk of going against the grain of popular behavior. Going through life as if one is responsible for his own life and there is no God.

12. From your own personal experience how would you describe the entire discipleship program that you have gone through during the period of the research in terms of its suitability for creating community?

I believe it is suitable in that the community goes through a roadmap of guided material. The homework that is required forces one to be focused and not just see

it as a study for the sake of knowledge. The application aspect of it is commendable. I like the fact that we had files and followed a certain order while learning to walk with Jesus. This was distinctly different from other studies I participated in where there is no material for reference during the week.

13. Would you recommend this program to another person? Explain your reason why you would, or would not recommend it?

Yes I would.

14. What would you want to continue doing from your experience gathered through participating in this program?

Teach, apply, teach!! One of the best ways to test whether the learning has sunk in is to teach others.

15. In your opinion how can this program be made better?

1. It would be an added advantage if at the beginning of a section there is a brief story/testimony of how someone was impacted by a particular aspect of study. For example, what meditation, fasting, worship, etc has done to other people. Life changing stories of the practice of this discipline.

2. Build into the program an outing to a community and experience facilitating a section of the program that has been completed. Or if not in the community, to go as a group and run a whole Sabbath school on a particular subject and form a panel of discussion.

3. Since this is run under the auspices of the SDA Church, I would like to recommend that the program contain an appendix of ADDITIONAL READING material where subjects like Praying in tongues is addressed (and relevant scripture references given), keeping the Sabbath, etc. (with scripture references). This will provide the non-Adventists in the that particular community with good material to read and refer to on their own. Sometimes when these topics come up and we do not have adequate time, we may scheme over them yet they are important. I do not mean that we should deviate from the topic but we need to have references for them to learn more.

4. This can be done in the form of frequently asked questions because we already know what those questions tend to focus on.

5. I am not sure if my suggestion is a totally different program or a Part 2 from this one, but I think it would be good to have some form of 'Market segmentation' and develop or package a program for:

- Discipling new believers

- Discipling back slidden Christians etc. Some ‘how to steps’ for equipping those from our community who are ready to take on the task.

6. One minor improvement ... the formatting of the material can be improved. For example, there could be more pictures, to make it more visually attractive.

16. If you have taken your spiritual gift test or assessment before, what is your spiritual gift?

Yes I took the test but I was not there when the results were given but I was told its Miracles which I found very strange. It did not resonate with me at all. Maybe I will take another one at some stage.

#### Participant C

#### Reflections on the Community of Grace discipleship Process:

Dear member of the Amazing Grace Community of Grace I want to thank you for your participation in the community of grace discipleship process that you attended. Remember it is a process and is not over yet.

I have specific questions that I need answered for my research project for Andrews University. Please take some time and fill in for me the following questions as much as you can remember. It will help with assessing the usefulness of the program and also in making it better if it is to be administered to others. For question number two, I recommend that you read Steps to Christ by Ellen G. White and reflect on chapter on Growing in Christ so that you may know what she thinks about spiritual growth for your own personal enrichment. I need your response by December 16.

#### Questions:

Write your responses on the questionnaire immediately after the question you are answering:

1. Please describe your understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting?

A: One scripture denotes the answer to this question found in the book of Deutoronomy beginning at

6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!

Deut 6:5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength (NKJV) and ending at verse 25....

– the beginning of what is noted as the Shema in Israel and a standing oracle of a heart devoted to and a life journey walking with God. The spiritual habit which bears life which brings about change and transformation in one's life—the above scripture and the questions pertaining to “biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting” all point to one thing—intimacy with The Father, His Son Yeshua through His Holy Spirit into all practical matters of life including but not limited to family life, work life, relationships, etc.

2. Please describe your understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G White:

A: I will be honest in stating that I am not too well versed in her writings except for a few of her writings except for a few Patriarchs and Prophets, Desire of Ages, Steps to Christ—a step I have deliberately undertaken. So will not comment on this question;

3. Please describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced your walk with Jesus during the period of the research?

A: For the first time after a long time Yeshua is a real person to me—a kinsmen, the very essence and fabric of God. That being said having spent many hours of intentional meditation my relating to Him has become more pleasant. Even more so is the revelation that He is in all—all that I am and more—able to be High Priest in my stead and yet compassionate to my plight.

4. Please describe any life change experience you have had as a result of the practice of the spiritual life habits during the period of the research.

A: Life changes that I can attest to are:

- a. My relationship to my wife, family and close friends both in and out of church have become more authentic;
- b. My sense of my utter need for Yahweh has become more distinct;
- c. My Spiritual battles have intensified and have left me in the wake of a need for God in ways I never thought possible;

5. What are some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the research?



A: I can sense God more acutely and even more intimately (even in my battles);

6. Please describe how the spiritual life habit/s that you practiced during the period of the research tended to benefit you the most?

A: For one I have become more acquainted with reading the bible more slowly and intentionally—instead of the rush that tended to accompany me in the past. Meaning I spend many hours meditating on the Word read earlier and later during the day. This has meant I am more susceptible to hearing The Holy Spirit quicker as He explains certain things to me—even when I am being stubborn. I speak less and listen more something my wife pointed out as of late...

7. Please describe how you feel about the small group with which you participated during the research?

A: As with all group dynamics—I have mixed feelings about the experience but on the whole and over time have become more understanding of each and every one's stand point—as we all come from different backgrounds and represent certain ideals. I love the company I found myself in and were honoured to have the caliber people who were in the group with me over the time.

8. Please describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that you received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research?

A: The Spiritual harm/side-effects is that after applying all I have learnt my life has never been the same. Whilst I would like to share my burdens—this intellectual forum is not suitable to do so—however in a short spell the spiritual battles have intensified and have affected several aspects of my life including but not limited my home life, financial life, my relationships...

9. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group you were with during the research.

A: Honesty and authenticity are the only two factors that tended to create a more easily absorbable atmosphere as people yielded their pride and spoke from a more open spirit.

10. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community?

A: Lack of commitment, lack of accountability and absenteeism – as all the above have a significant way of impacting negatively on the individual members in relation to each other.

11. How would you describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits?

A: The greatest benefit was knowing that some of my more committed brethren are standing in prayer with me and I with them. There is no greater joy than knowing you're not alone even in The Presence of God...

12. From your own personal experience how would you describe the entire discipleship program that you have gone through during the period of the research in terms of its suitability for creating community?

A: In more colloquial terms—'it's just what the doctor ordered.' In western worship a sense of community tends to be greatly absent as seen in European countries such as France, Britain etc and is true of certain developing nations like South Africa who tend to emulate their more developed counterparts. That being stated, programs such as this very one have become a necessary good for the growth of the church in our times—especially our need to pray for one another.

13. Would you recommend this program to another person? Explain your reason why you would, or would not recommend it?

A: Yes and no—and let me state my reasons why. Whilst the amount of spiritual growth attested in my own personal life during the course of being in an atmosphere a program of this nature has given me. It also in the contrary can be a challenge in terms of all the perspective change that a disciple may have to go through in their walk with God and their growth as a person—and as witnessed through the program some may end up walking even further away from God as they feel themselves become more vulnerable in the presence of their brethren and of God and as a result feel distant. So whilst I can recommend it to many I know, I also would - like the warnings we see on many product packs today - make it clear to the incoming disciple - like Yeshua did in the book of [Luke 14:28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it—'] NKJV...

14. What would you want to continue doing from your experience gathered through participating in this program?

A: All attributes described in question 1—but most of all would be to continue worship in a sense of community—where one is allowed to be honest and vulnerable and be met with compassion especially an atmosphere of prayer.

15. In your opinion how can this program be made better?

A: More time needs to be spent on each session – as this program raised very spirited debate at times with many issues not being properly addressed or attended to.

16. If you have taken your spiritual gift test or assessment before, what is your spiritual gift?

A: Several gifts in fact amongst them are the gift of discernment, prophecy, wisdom (although I could do with more), teaching, worship, leadership and love - being the greatest gift whom I learn from everyday and grow more within. (Thus my angst as the time of The LORD draws near and I feel I haven't done anything with them like the servant in the parable of the talents—Matthew 25:25 And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, there you have what is yours.' NKJV). May God have mercy on me (and many of my brethren) and not only that grant by His Spirit that I do what He sent me/us to do...

#### Participant D

##### Reflections on the Community of Grace discipleship Process:

Dear member of the Amazing Grace Community of Grace I want to thank you for your participation in the community of grace discipleship process that you attended. Remember it is a process and is not over yet.

I have specific questions that I need answered for my research project for Andrews University. Please take some time and fill in for me the following questions as much as you can remember. It will help with assessing the usefulness of the program and also in making it better if it is to be administered to others. For question number two, I recommend that you read Steps to Christ by Ellen G. White and reflect on chapter on

Growing in Christ so that you may know what she thinks about spiritual growth for your own personal enrichment. I need your response by December 16.

Questions:

Write your responses on the questionnaire immediately after the question you are answering:

1. Please describe your understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting?

My understanding of the above is this is the only way I can get to know who God is and how I can build a wholesome relationship with Him.

2. Please describe your understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G. White.

Living as Jesus and the disciples after Him did.

3. Please describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced your walk with Jesus during the period of the research?

The influence was great, I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit. Even though I struggled with memorization; I was learning more scriptures and got a better understanding of what lay behind the “stories.

4. Please describe any life change experience you have had as a result of the practice of the spiritual life habits during the period of the research.

I am slowly learning to release and let go of the burden of what I saw as “my responsibilities” even though I know I am not fully there yet.

5. What are some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the research?

When I do spend time with God in meditation I experienced such calming peace and joy that does not make sense when looking at the “realities” of my life.

6. Please describe how the spiritual life habit/s that you practiced during the period of the research tended to benefit you the most?

I got to discover who God is. His likes and dislikes but most importantly His love for me. I learnt about His grace, that I am dependent on every day of my life.

7. Please describe how you feel about the small group with which you participated during the research?

I love the group, I feel that it was by design that we came together. I feel like a vital part of my spiritual life has somewhat been taken away with the group having to break up.

8. Please describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that you received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research?

I cannot say that there was any harm I suffered as a result of this research, maybe dependency on the group is the only side effect.

9. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group you were with during the research.

Praying for one another, the sense of trust and genuine care that enabled me to share myself with the group.

10. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community?

11. How would you describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits?

A closer walk with God.

12. From your own personal experience how would you describe the entire discipleship program that you have gone through during the period of the research in terms of its suitability for creating community?

The program gave me a sense of belonging, I felt embraced and it brought God closer and made Christianity real and genuine.

13. Would you recommend this program to another person? Explain your reason why you would, or would not recommend it?

I would definitely recommend it, for the reasons mentioned above.

14. What would you want to continue doing from your experience gathered through participating in this program?

I would love to continue with the community of grace group, I can already picture the multiplication of these groups and the impact they would have if the integrity of the program can be sustained, and I know it takes me to own it and make it such.

15. In your opinion how can this program be made better?

I think the program needs more time than it currently allows. I would give the group a year together for maximum benefit.

16. If you have taken your spiritual gift test or assessment before, what is your spiritual gift?

My spiritual gifts are discernment and teaching.

#### Participant E

##### Reflections on the Community of Grace discipleship Process:

Dear member of the Amazing Grace Community of Grace I want to thank you for your participation in the community of grace discipleship process that you attended. Remember it is a process and is not over yet.

I have specific questions that I need answered for my research project for Andrews University. Please take some time and fill in for me the following questions as much as you can remember. It will help with assessing the usefulness of the program and also in making it better if it is to be administered to others. For question number two, I recommend that you read Steps to Christ by Ellen G. White and reflect on chapter on Growing in Christ so that you may know what she thinks about spiritual growth for your own personal enrichment. I need your response by December 16.

##### Questions:

Write your responses on the questionnaire immediately after the question you are answering:

1. Please describe your understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting?

I understand that principle based on what the bible has said about it. As a Christian, I must live a Christ like lifestyle. Jesus Fasted and Prayed. Before he started his ministry of healing and miracles, he had to go and commune with God, by giving up of self, and filling himself with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gave him strength. When the devil tempted him by promising him things of the world Jesus went back to scripture, as his defense and reasoning. The devil cannot move what God has put in place.

2. Please describe your understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G White.

“By faith you became Christ's, and by faith you are to grow up in Him—by giving and taking. You are to give all,—your heart, your will, your service,—give yourself to Him to obey all His requirements; and you must take all,—Christ, the fullness of all blessing, to abide in your heart, to be your strength, your righteousness, your everlasting helper,—to give you power to obey.”

The above quote for me says it all, I must abide in Christ, through meditation of the scriptures, and by Faith. Not depending on my own strength, but that of Christ. When that is done I will be able to produce fruits. I may draw (take) my strength and everything from Jesus Christ, and (Give), through self. Romans 12.1 I must give my body as a living sacrifice, pleasing to God. Through evangelism and always abiding in his word. Jesus has made me righteous, and I must BELIEVE and have faith that I CAN live the rest of my life with his presence. Apart from Him I am and can do nothing.

3. Please describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced your walk with Jesus during the period of the research?

The classes exposed that I had a very weak spiritual life, even though I went to church and served. It made me realize that I'm in serious need of a Holy Spirit influenced lifestyle. The only way I can attain that is by dwelling in the scriptures, prayer, fasting

4. Please describe any life change experience you have had as a result of the practice of the spiritual life habits during the period of the research.

That I cannot depend on SELF, at all. But only GOD, through Jesus Christ, who is Love. My whole understanding of the purpose of Jesus was magnified through the study of Love and Law.

5. What are some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the research?

Knowledge of who Christ is. His purpose in my life, and how I can effectively live my life through Christ. I am now intentional about practicing my faith. I've even learnt a lot about discipleship and what it means. Building, Prayer, fasting, Scripture, Loving, being faithful.

6. Please describe how the spiritual life habit/s that you practiced during the period of the research tended to benefit you the most?

Read the Bible more.

I have a more effective prayer life.

My social conversation has changed.

I'm more intentional about what I engage in (Is this God or NOT)

7. Please describe how you feel about the small group with which you participated during the research?

We have now formed a beautiful community, where we can share, and testify. A new Christ family. It was intimate and we shared knowledge and could be naked as it was small

8. Please describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that you received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research?

It only exposed my shortfall.

9. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group you were with during the research.

- Prayer life was edified.
- Knowledge was transferred
- Motivation to live a more spiritually purposed life
- Testimonies.

10. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community?

- Lack of time
- Worldly entertainment, i.e., TV
- Worldly social structures



11. How would you describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits?
12. From your own personal experience how would you describe the entire discipleship program that you have gone through during the period of the research in terms of its suitability for creating community?

The approach is good because it teaches us candidates to also be able to teach and share the gospel. We can use a Each one teach one approach. This has especially placed me in a higher place because it has forced me to be able to seek non conventional ways of bringing people to Christ.

13. Would you recommend this program to another person? Explain your reason why you would, or would not recommend it?

Definitely  
It is very informative  
Socially builds you  
You form a new family  
It enhances your spiritual life  
You have a more effective prayer life  
You have a more effective devotional life

14. What would you want to continue doing from your experience gathered through participating in this program?

We want to form an evangelistic forum which is not in a formal setting, managed by Seventh day Adventist, but where non Christians intentionally participate. We will use some of the material gathered in our previous classes. This will occur once a month, as a social small event.

15. In your opinion how can this program be made better?

I think before the program begins, all participants should go through a serious period of prayer and fasting just to invite God and strengthen them throughout the program.  
Finding easier ways of studying the bible through memory, i.e., be consistent in memorizing scriptures in class too. Being able to measure our individual progress.

16. If you have taken your spiritual gift test or assessment before, what is your spiritual gift?

I have not yet taken my spiritual gift test.

## Participant F

### Reflections on the Community of Grace discipleship Process:

Dear member of the Amazing Grace Community of Grace I want to thank you for your participation in the community of grace discipleship process that you attended. Remember it is a process and is not over yet.

I have specific questions that I need answered for my research project for Andrews University. Please take some time and fill in for me the following questions as much as you can remember. It will help with assessing the usefulness of the program and also in making it better if it is to be administered to others. For question number two, I recommend that you read Steps to Christ by Ellen G. White and reflect on chapter on Growing in Christ so that you may know what she thinks about spiritual growth for your own personal enrichment. I need your response by December 16.

### Questions:

Write your responses on the questionnaire immediately after the question you are answering:

1. Please describe your understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting?

I am still growing in the knowledge of these things, however I feel a constant yearning for more. I have also experienced God and the Holy Spirit more intensely in my journey as a result of spending time in the word. Memorising scripture truly is strengthening. I feel it is a weapon against satan's attacks or the challenges of this life.

I don't know about fasting. I pray God will teach me like He always has.

2. Please describe your understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G White.
3. Please describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced your walk with Jesus during the period of the research?

I found and am still finding the spiritual habit of memorizing scripture to be challenging. However I surprise myself at times when I need the words they are there. I must say that that I want to know more, read more. I want to share, so I share with my family especially my husband. I think he will also start memorizing scripture. I have also been influenced to use what I have learnt during difficult

times to help friends, family and myself. I'm grateful for how the Holy Spirit continues to minister to me.

4. Please describe any life change experience you have had as a result of the practice of the spiritual life habits during the period of the research.

Negative thoughts are powerless now. Although the attacks of Satan are more intense, I just recognise the negative thoughts as just the defeated work of a devil. The most significant life change is that I know what it means to worship now. I used not really understand the importance but I have felt so moved by knowing more of God. I am sure the more I know God, the more I will understand worship. Another life changing experience has been how I think about judgment day. I never understood when people would say they can't wait for that day, it used to terrify me. Now I wait in eager expectation of the coming of our Lord.

5. What are some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the research?

I have better sleep, peace of mind. I can fight negative thoughts with the word of God. I can remind myself of who I am and what I have because of Christ and then nothing is impossible. Its energizing.

6. Please describe how the spiritual life habit/s that you practiced during the period of the research tended to benefit you the most?  
Knowing who I am based on the Bible, and what I have in Christ.

Knowing what God says about me was a big blessing.

7. Please describe how you feel about the small group with which you participated during the research?

I love them, they are such a gift. I thank God for them always.

8. Please describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that you received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research?

I am learning not to be judgmental. I want people to be close to God too. Sometimes I am impatient with people who are "worldly."

9. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group you were with during the research.

Sharing our lives and journeys. Like when some members attended my granny's funeral, attending the baptism of fellow community members, sharing personal stories, praying for each other.

10. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community?

None

11. How would you describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits?

None

12. From your own personal experience how would you describe the entire discipleship program that you have gone through during the period of the research in terms of its suitability for creating community?

I experienced it to be effective in creating community as we had regular engagements and built personal relationships.

13. Would you recommend this program to another person? Explain your reason why you would, or would not recommend it?

I would recommend it. It's beneficial and empowering in knowing who you are in God. I don't believe a person can live successfully without this knowledge.

14. What would you want to continue doing from your experience gathered through participating in this program?

More of meeting and studying the word together.

15. In your opinion how can this program be made better?

I think it's good as it is

16. If you have taken your spiritual gift test or assessment before, what is your spiritual gift?

I haven't taken the test yet.

## Participant G

### Reflections on the Community of Grace discipleship Process:

Dear member of the Amazing Grace Community of Grace I want to thank you for your participation in the community of grace discipleship process that you attended. Remember it is a process and is not over yet.

I have specific questions that I need answered for my research project for Andrews University. Please take some time and fill in for me the following questions as much as you can remember. It will help with assessing the usefulness of the program and also in making it better if it is to be administered to others. For question number two, I recommend that you read Steps to Christ by Ellen G. White and reflect on chapter on Growing in Christ so that you may know what she thinks about spiritual growth for your own personal enrichment. I need your response by December 16.

### Questions:

Write your responses on the questionnaire immediately after the question you are answering:

1. Please describe your understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting?

The reason Christians embark on the above list of biblical life habits is to deepen their devotional lives i.e. walk hand in hand with the Almighty God and understand HIS will for their lives.

- Reading Scripture – to gain an understanding of what GOD says about HIMSELF and what he says about us as HIS children – written in “black and white” for all to know.
- Memorizing Scripture – the imprint GOD’s voice in our hearts and walk/carry him everywhere we go. There are traps and snares that the Devil has place in our paths and wants confuse the truth and if a Christian is not sure of what the Word of GOD says then they can be easily derailed from the righteous path.
- Meditating on Scripture – this is so that we get the deeper meaning of the message that GOD is trying to tell us. This allows Christians to see the message from many different perspectives.
- Prayer – this is a conversation with GOD.
- Worship – this is acknowledging GOD’s presence in our lives.
- Being alone with GOD – having communion with GOD.

- Fasting – Acknowledging that HE is Jehovah-Jireh, there is no need to worry about my own provisions because HE IS!.....YAHWEH
  -
2. Please describe your understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G White.
  3. Please describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced your walk with Jesus during the period of the research?

It has made my walk feel more real and tangible – deeper.

4. Please describe any life change experience you have had as a result of the practice of the spiritual life habits during the period of the research.

I have made what would be termed a serious decision without calculating the decision the earthly way but with total submission and reliance to GOD.

5. What are some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the research?

Patience, Love, Joy and Peace.

6. Please describe how the spiritual life habit/s that you practiced during the period of the research tended to benefit you the most?

Prayer – has been the main habit that has benefited me the most that I now know with certainty the GOD answers prayers! And HE is listening!

7. Please describe how you feel about the small group with which you participated during the research?

We are now a family, we share our struggles and help each other as we growth in faith.

8. Please describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that you received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research?

None.

9. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group you were with during the research.

Sharing our most intimate stories within the group made us connect more, and praying together and wrestling with the word of GOD together.

10. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community?

Attendance of the group members from one week to another was poor.

11. How would you describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits?

None

12. From your own personal experience how would you describe the entire discipleship program that you have gone through during the period of the research in terms of its suitability for creating community?

This was something I have never experienced before and it makes being Christian that much real because in my own understanding one cannot claim to be a Christian without being a disciple which requires intentional moves towards deepening one's relationship with GOD and at the same sharing that with everyone they encounter.

13. Would you recommend this program to another person? Explain your reason why you would, or would not recommend it?

Most certainly! Based on the reason above in point 12. It is a feeling that I cannot described to be that much close to GOD.

14. What would you want to continue doing from your experience gathered through participating in this program?

Practicing all the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, alone with God, and fasting.

15. In your opinion how can this program be made better?

I cannot think of any way to better the program.

16. If you have taken your spiritual gift test or assessment before, what is your spiritual gift?

Evangelism and prophecy

## Participant H

### Reflections on the Community of Grace discipleship Process:

Dear member of the Amazing Grace Community of Grace I want to thank you for your participation in the community of grace discipleship process that you attended. Remember it is a process and is not over yet.

I have specific questions that I need answered for my research project for Andrews University. Please take some time and fill in for me the following questions as much as you can remember. It will help with assessing the usefulness of the program and also in making it better if it is to be administered to others. For question number two, I recommend that you read Steps to Christ by Ellen G. White and reflect on chapter on Growing in Christ so that you may know what she thinks about spiritual growth for your own personal enrichment. I need your response by December 16.

### Questions:

Write your responses on the questionnaire immediately after the question you are answering:

1. Please describe your understanding of the following biblical spiritual life habits:
  - a. Reading scripture  
This is essential for spiritual growth, understanding God's will for one's life, training in righteousness and training one's senses to discern between good and evil.
  - b. Memorizing scripture  
This practice brings to life the Deut 6:6 and helps with practical application of using the word of God as a sword when the enemy attacks. In like manner that Jesus defeated the enemy when tempted in the dessert, using the word, it is impossible to use the sword of the word without knowing it or having internalized it.
  - c. Meditating on scripture  
Meditation helps with internalizing the word of God and letting God speak one personally over and above what the scripture says to the church.
  - d. Prayer  
Prayer is God's way of connecting with us and for us to allow His will to unfold in my life and allow my heart to conform to his will.
  - e. Worship  
Worship is recognizing that God is my source and that only He deserves glory, honor and worship.
  - f. Being alone with God, and



Time spent together is one sure way of building a relationship. This is no different for the relationship with God. Know God's voice (as His sheep) is linked to spending time with and listening to Him.

g. Fasting

There are some breakthroughs that require more than just prayer. Fasting is taking prayer to another level.

2. Please describe your understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G White.

3. Please describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced your walk with Jesus during the period of the research?

If it wasn't for exercising/cultivating some of the above habits I wouldn't have experienced spiritual growth as I have or developed. My view is that the above habits foster spiritual growth and builds strength of faith.

4. Please describe any life change experience you have had as a result of the practice of the spiritual life habits during the period of the research.

Believing the God and scripture more.

5. What are some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the research?

Internalising the word of God.

6. Please describe how the spiritual life habit/s that you practiced during the period of the research tended to benefit you the most?

They have strengthened my faith.

7. Please describe how you feel about the small group with which you participated during the research?

These were really authentic people that I grew really close with. I'm glad I got an opportunity to be part of that.

8. Please describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that you received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research?

I have no memory of any harm caused.

9. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group you were with during the research.

Candid sharing of personal growth experiences with no fear of being judged.

10. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community?

Heavy focus on completing the syllabus than on sharing personal growth experiences.

11. How would you describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits?

- a. Benefits – spiritual growth and stronger faith
- b. Risks – unknown at this stage.

12. From your own personal experience how would you describe the entire discipleship program that you have gone through during the period of the research in terms of its suitability for creating community?

I would highly recommend it for anyone who is serious about growing spiritually. The size of the group makes it perfect for bonding and the development of personal relationships. So, yes it is suitable for creating community.

13. Would you recommend this program to another person? Explain your reason why you would, or would not recommend it?

Yes. It is a small and intimate environment to learn spiritual disciplines and grow and share experiences without the fear of being judged by others.

14. What would you want to continue doing from your experience gathered through participating in this program?

Growing in exercising all the above spiritual disciplines.

15. In your opinion how can this program be made better?

Instead of having one year end function. The group can have at least two outings with one halfway to assess the effectiveness of the program. The outing doesn't have to be out of town or over a weekend. This can be done on a Sunday midway through the program and at the end of the program.

16. If you have taken your spiritual gift test or assessment before, what is your spiritual gift?

I don't recall having taken the test yet.

#### Participant L

#### Reflections on the Community of Grace discipleship Process:

Dear member of the Amazing Grace Community of Grace I want to thank you for your participation in the community of grace discipleship process that you attended. Remember it is a process and is not over yet.

I have specific questions that I need answered for my research project for Andrews University. Please take some time and fill in for me the following questions as much as you can remember. It will help with assessing the usefulness of the program and also in making it better if it is to be administered to others. For question number two, I recommend that you read Steps to Christ by Ellen G. White and reflect on chapter on Growing in Christ so that you may know what she thinks about spiritual growth for your own personal enrichment. I need your response by December 16.

#### Questions:

Write your responses on the questionnaire immediately after the question you are answering:

1. Please describe your understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting?

These habits all boil down to getting to know God and his character more. In the same way that earthly relationships are built by communication and communion, so is our relationship with God. These habits help us to spend quality time with God. The best definition of fasting that I have heard is one that I came across 4 years ago "fasting positions us to hear from God"- Jentzen Franklin. I believe that the discipline of fasting clears our minds and enables us not only to hear but to be prepared to receive God's answer to our situations.

2. Please describe your understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G White.
3. Please describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced your walk with Jesus during the period of the research?

The spiritual habit that most influenced my walk was the reflective reading of scripture that I learned during the period of the research. This method of bible study made the characters in the bible real human beings with real challenges. Taking time to stop and go through the emotions that they felt during the course of the story brought home the realization that there was nothing supernatural about biblical characters. They were as human as me with the same struggles but the difference being the extent to which they were willing to surrender their lives to God.

4. Please describe any life change experience you have had as a result of the practice of the spiritual life habits during the period of the research.

Studying, as opposed to reading the word of God has made it come alive. The word has become alive and all of God's words (not just His promises) have become meaningful and real.

5. What are some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the research?

Being disciplined and intentional about spending time with God for the sake of being with Him. Enjoying His presence no matter where I am.

6. Please describe how the spiritual life habit/s that you practiced during the period of the research tended to benefit you the most?

The benefit of reflective reading has helped in getting me to question whether I truly trust God. Reading about the lives of people who didn't know the end from the beginning and yet did not "stagger with unbelief" and realizing that the resources available to them in their walk with the Lord are also available to me has helped to worry less and just trust that God will work it out for good.

7. Please describe how you feel about the small group with which you participated during the research?

I have truly bonded with the group members and really miss our Thursday meetings. They became more than people that I meet at church once a week and have superficial conversations with. They have become real family and we share in each others' struggles,

triumphs just like one would with a normal family. We have agreed to have lunch together at least once a month and to continue to be each others' keepers.

8. Please describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that you received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research?

I did not experience any side effects from applying the spiritual life habits. I do however struggle with being still in the Presence of God as my mind tends to wander and that is habit I am finding most difficult to practice regularly.

9. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group you were with during the research.

Authentic sharing especially of areas of struggle.

Non-judgemental atmosphere that allowed people to speak genuinely from the heart.

The whatsapp group which enabled us to keep in touch outside of the meeting days and times.

10. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community?

Not being consistent or intentional about the practice. As long as I am not disciple about the frequency of practicing the habits, I find that they become ineffective and even burdensome. When I set time aside and engage in the practice wholeheartedly, then I get the benefit of true communion and fellowship with God.

11. How would you describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits?

I have really benefitted from reflective reading and biblical meditation. Even though I have always been consistent with reading the bible, reflective reading has led me to see beyond the stories into the lives and emotions of biblical characters. Reflecting on what they must have felt as human beings who did not know the end from the beginning, has made me so aware of the fact that the whole Bible and not just the promises of God speak into my everyday situations, emotions and experiences. My biggest benefit has been the realization has been that the heroes of faith were ordinary human beings, with no extra advantages over the human beings of doing. They just chose to surrender their situations to God, totally.

12. From your own personal experience how would you describe the entire discipleship program that you have gone through during the period of the research in terms of its suitability for creating community?

The size of the groups is small enough to create intimacy and conversation. The frequency of the meetings is such that the group members do not lose touch with one another. The lessons covered led us to discover the core of what it means to be a disciple and a follower and lead to real introspection on my walk with the Lord.

13. Would you recommend this program to another person? Explain your reason why you would, or would not recommend it?

I would definitely recommend the program to another person. The program opened my eyes to what authentic fellowship is and what it means to be a part in the body of Christ. I also learnt important lessons on the discipline of memorizing scripture and reflecting on the word of God.

The fellowship with other community members.

Learning to be silent in God's presence and absorbing the fact that He really is present.

14. In your opinion how can this program be made better?

My group really struggled to be there on time, every time throughout the period of the program. Possibly having the meetings on a Friday evening or a Sabbath may have helped in this regard.

15. If you have taken your spiritual gift test or assessment before, what is your spiritual gift?

Healing

Participant P

Reflections on the Community of Grace discipleship Process:

Dear member of the Amazing Grace Community of Grace I want to thank you for your participation in the community of grace discipleship process that you attended. Remember it is a process and is not over yet.

I have specific questions that I need answered for my research project for Andrews University. Please take some time and fill in for me the following questions as much as you can remember. It will help with assessing the usefulness of the program and also in making it better if it is to be administered to others. For question number two, I recommend that you read Steps to Christ by Ellen G. White and reflect on chapter on Growing in Christ so that you may know what she thinks about spiritual growth for your own personal enrichment. I need your response by December 16.

#### Questions:

Write your responses on the questionnaire immediately after the question you are answering:

1. Please describe your understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting?

Reading scripture: This to me refers to the habit of daily devotion where one spends time in the Word of God with the leading of the Holy Spirit. It is a direct interaction with the Bible to learn more about the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Memorizing scripture: This is the habit of focusing on a specific scripture repeatedly until it is stored in one's mind and can be recited verbatim at any given time.

Meditating on scripture: This is the practice of deeply reflecting on a portion of scripture or devotion in the aim of gaining wisdom and understanding in knowledge of God.

Prayer: is the way I communicate with God on a daily basis. I talk to him about everything and anything. He also communicates with me during this time through prayer. It is also a spiritual weapon God has given me in overcoming the enemy and challenges in life and to intercede for others in need.

Worship: Is the habit of glorifying God and give him adoration. When He is the focus of my thoughts, emotions and actions and pleasing Him is the most important desire.

Being Alone with God: Being in a relationship means spending time alone getting to know that person and it is the same with God, when I am alone with Him and it's just the 2 of us I get to know more about Him and the more I know the more I want to know.

Fasting: The habit of fasting is the denial of food and even liquids in the aim of being emptied so one can be filled with the Holy Spirit. When one fasts from food, this act of submission prompts God to respond to the faith of the asker. I fast because I realize how desolate I am without God and want Him to fill me. Before I used to think fasting was about pleasing God but I realize that fasting draws me closer to Him and exposes how truly carnal we are and in need of God's grace.

2. Please describe your understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G White.

In reading Step to Christ especially the Chapter on Growing in Christ, John 15 is the strong theme in this chapter. If we are not connected to the vine then we will not bear fruit. He is the source of our spiritual life and daily communion with Him is necessary to sustain this life. We have to keep our eyes glued to Christ, despite the enemy's efforts to the contrary. The more we behold Him the more like Him we become. It is daily surrender and it starts with consecration in the morning of oneself and plans with the outcome being that His will must be the desire of our hearts. When you are truly connected to the vine, you will have peace and stability. Growing in Him means trusting Him even when we can't see the way. It is knowing that He who has begun the good work in us shall see it to finish.

3. Please describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced your walk with Jesus during the period of the research?

Of all the habits that really challenged me and changed how I approach my spiritual life, the memorization of scripture really showed me how very little I appreciated God's Word. I have read these scriptures but when I now had to intentionally memorize and repeat them over and over, I felt like I was reading them for the first time. The homework was truly great because it forced one to truly reflect on God's Word instead of just rush through it. I am more thorough now when I read the Word and I take the time to reflect and share and not just tick a box.

4. Please describe any life change experience you have had as a result of the practice of the spiritual life habits during the period of the research.

For the first time I undertook a fast I never thought I could, the Esther fast, and I believe it is due to the spiritual growth of the past couple of months. I am also more interested in praying for others. The commitment made to the group makes you accountable to pray for them even when you are not with them.

5. What are some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the research?

As stated above, I am attention and thorough with the Word than I was before. I think I am maturing in my appreciation of God's word and now when I read something I even go further and google more data on that piece of scripture. I delve deeper, no longer just reading on the surface. I want to have better knowledge and understanding of God's word not just wisdom.



6. Please describe how the spiritual life habit/s that you practiced during the period of the research tended to benefit you the most?

As stated above the memorization of text and reflecting on God's word has made me to delve deeper and look at scripture in a new way. There is always a new meaning or understanding to be gleaned even if you have read the scripture before. Also being still and alone is important in practicing these habits as you need to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit during this time. He helps you to understand and apply that scripture to your life circumstance.

7. Please describe how you feel about the small group with which you participated during the research?

We became a family and learned to truly pray for one another. In fact towards the end the masks were starting to come off.

8. Please describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that you received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research?

None that I am aware.

9. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group you were with during the research.

Common desire to grow in Christ; desire to know who we are in Him. The sharing of each other's challenges and victories.

10. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community?

Inconsistency in my attendance and work commitments, not enough time spent reaching out to my prayer partner.

11. How would you describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits?

The risk for someone not yet ready for this kind of commitment could be they could end up feeling discouraged if they 'fail' to live up to the commitment and withdraw from the community.

12. From your own personal experience how would you describe the entire discipleship program that you have gone through during the period of the research in terms of its suitability for creating community?

It needs to be longer to really establish community, but in the short time it achieved a lot in breaking down barriers between people and creating genuine fellowship. It's a place that people can call home away from home.

13. Would you recommend this program to another person? Explain your reason why you would, or would not recommend it?

Yes most definitely as this has been truly beneficial to my spiritual growth.

14. What would you want to continue doing from your experience gathered through participating in this program?

Memorizing scripture, prayer, fasting and alone time with God

15. In your opinion how can this program be made better?

4 months is too short, it needs to be for a year as people are at different levels and therefore won't be ready at the same time for the next step.

16. If you have taken your spiritual gift test or assessment before, what is your spiritual gift?

I last did this test a long time ago but I believe my gift was motivation/exhortation. I would like to take the test again.

Participant T

Reflections on the Community of Grace discipleship Process:

Dear member of the Amazing Grace Community of Grace I want to thank you for your participation in the community of grace discipleship process that you attended. Remember it is a process and is not over yet.

I have specific questions that I need answered for my research project for Andrews University. Please take some time and fill in for me the following questions as much as you can remember. It will help with assessing the usefulness of the program and also in making it better if it is to be administered to others. For question number two, I recommend that you read Steps to Christ by Ellen G. White and reflect on chapter on Growing in Christ so that you may know what she thinks about spiritual growth for your own personal enrichment. I need your response by December 16.

#### Questions:

Write your responses on the questionnaire immediately after the question you are answering:

1. Please describe your understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting?

Without biblical spiritual life habits christian growth does not occur. As i practiced these habits i become aware of who I am in God and who God is.

2. Please describe your understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G White.
3. Please describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced your walk with Jesus during the period of the research?

I saw God as being more personal. Before it was a matter of reading scripture but not applying it to me personally and realizing that what I read was meant for me. I think the session we would have on “where are you with God today” helped me to reflect on my walk with God and to truly realize that the word of God is meant for me.

4. Please describe any life change experience you have had as a result of the practice of the spiritual life habits during the period of the research.

Christianity is real and I can experience it. God loves me unconditionally and there is absolutely nothing that can change that, He wants the best for me, that has been my “ah moment” during the period of study. I have known this but it has not been personal.

5. What are some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the research?

Meditation has made the word more real. I cannot comment much on this as I’m still learning how to apply this practice.

6. Please describe how the spiritual life habit/s that you practiced during the period of the research tended to benefit you the most?
7. Please describe how you feel about the small group with which you participated during the research?

The group was truly a blessing and made me realize that we are part of one another as a Christian community. Made me more aware that what affected one member affected the rest of us. In fact Thursday evenings became the highlight of my week, knowing that I could share where I was spiritually and not feel judged or criticized as often happens in church.

8. Please describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that you received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research?

I have not experienced any harm or side effects.

9. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group you were with during the research.

For me openness and honesty among the group created a sense of community. The masks fell off and we were able to share personal issues without feelings of condemnation and judgement as we realized we were all on a journey and none of us was perfect. There was no pretense as is often found in church.

10. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community?

I think mainly commitment and implementation of the spiritual life habits affected their effectiveness. At times I did not implement tasks the way I ought to have done and that I think had an effect has well.

11. How would you describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits?

The biggest benefit I found was the more I implemented the spiritual habits, the more God became real to me. Before joining this program I was in a spiritual slump and really more religious than spiritual. I had a lot of head knowledge but no true connection with God. The program made me realize that I could be real and honest with God and others in the faith without wearing masks still be accepted by God.

12. From your own personal experience how would you describe the entire discipleship program that you have gone through during the period of the research in terms of its suitability for creating community?

The program helps in making christianity a reality and the ripple effect of that is a true community of discipleship, realizing that we are all on journey and none is perfect but we lift another up and grow together to truly become a community as God intended we ought to be.

13. Would you recommend this program to another person? Explain your reason why you would, or would not recommend it?

I would definitely recommend it and would go as far as to say it should run for a longer period of time than what we had. I actually felt that just as were fully grasping the concepts, the program came to an end.

14. What would you want to continue doing from your experience gathered through participating in this program?

I would like to have the group continue meeting and growing together. I will continue practicing the spiritual habits I learnt from participating in the program.

15. In your opinion how can this program be made better?

I think if it ran longer than 16 weeks it would be more effective. I also feel that if families participated in it together it would be really beneficial .

16. If you have taken your spiritual gift test or assessment before, what is your spiritual gift?

My spiritual gifts are teaching and prophesy.

## PARTICIPANT Y

### Reflections on the Community of Grace discipleship Process:

Dear member of the Amazing Grace Community of Grace I want to thank you for your participation in the community of grace discipleship process that you attended. Remember it is a process and is not over yet.

I have specific questions that I need answered for my research project for Andrews University. Please take some time and fill in for me the following questions as much as you can remember. It will help with assessing the usefulness of the program and also in making it better if it is to be administered to others. For question number two, I recommend that you read *Steps to Christ* by Ellen G. White and reflect on chapter on Growing in Christ so that you may know what she thinks about spiritual growth for your own personal enrichment. I need your response by December 16.

#### Questions:

Write your responses on the questionnaire immediately after the question you are answering:

1. Please describe your understanding of the biblical spiritual life habits of reading scripture, memorizing scripture, meditating on scripture, prayer, worship, being alone with God, and fasting?

It has helped me to understanding who we are in Christ is critical to living a life that glorifies God. Knowing my true identity keeps me aware of how God views us according to what Christ has done for us. Otherwise we live our lives attempting to please God and others based on our own accomplishments and performance. We are going to fail God and others, we already have. I understand why Jesus came and died and rose from the dead, so that we could have a perfect relationship with God through Him.

I have found inner peace, I have learnt that when I am still my inner voice is calm, and I hear that which I am meant to hear, and not that which I imagine to have been told ...

2. Please describe your understanding of the practice of spiritual life habits as revealed in the writings of Ellen G. White.

I survive by the saying that goes as follows “fake it till you make it”. But some things cannot be faked, you either are honest to what you believe in, or you turn your spiritual life into hypocrisy.

"Walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called."  
(Eph. 4:1)

We must come to grips with who we really are, inside and out. For, we will do what we are. So we will need to become the kind of people who easily walk in the goodness and power of Jesus our Lord & Savior.

3. Please describe how the practice of the spiritual life habits influenced your walk with Jesus during the period of the research?

I have learned that the likeness of Christ in an inner being is not merely a human accomplishment, it is a gift of grace. Spiritual formation in Christ is not a passive process. Grace does not make us passive. Divine grace is God acting in our life to accomplish what we cannot do on our own. It informs our being and actions and makes them effective in the wisdom and power of God.

I have learnt that, grace is not opposed to effort but to earning. I have learnt that God does not require physical action to show that he has heard your cries. I have learnt to let go in prayer, if I have said it once he has heard it a million times. I have learnt that he is a God of his word, his words do not return unto him void...

"Listen! Whoever is thirsty, come to the water! Whoever has no money can come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk. You don't have to pay; its free!" Isaiah 55:1

4. What are some of the spiritual benefits, if any, that you have received as a result of applying the practice of meditation over the period of the research?

Self-actualize: to strive towards a better life and to consider personal growth and fulfillment as a central goal

Compassionate: to experience compassion towards others is one of the strongest connections with living a spiritual life

Graciousness: that expressing gratitude is associated with many positive emotions such as optimism. Being generous with time and resources, and overall vitality

5. Please describe how the spiritual life habit/s that you practiced during the period of the research tended to benefit you the most?

My benefit was to realize that I do not have to strive for more of Him, but what I need to do is to give Him more of me

6. Please describe how you feel about the small group with which you participated during the research?

Everytime I think of anyone individually “I sing praises to ‘God” ... For His plan had perfect timing...

“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” Matt. 18:20

7. Please describe the spiritual harm or any other side effects that you received as a result of applying the spiritual life habits practice during the period of the research?

None

8. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that tended to create a sense of community with the group you were with during the research.

What created a sense of community was.... “Shared Emotional Connection: the commitment and belief that we as a community had/have (and will continue to share) a history, common places, shared events, time together, similar experiences; positive experiences; relationships and bonds, completed tasks, investment (time, money, intimacy), emotional risk, honors, rewards and humiliation

9. Please describe those factors in your own personal experience that reduced the effectiveness or value of the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community?
10. How would you describe in personal terms the spiritual benefits or risks associated with the intentional practice of the biblical spiritual habits?

It's wise to explore the expected benefits of any investment you make. As with many things in life, what you gain from something is affected by how much you give, and a wholehearted investment in your soul yields real benefits to your life as a whole.

11. From your own personal experience how would you describe the entire discipleship program that you have gone through during the period of the research in terms of its suitability for creating community?

It has helped me to grow in faith and obedience. It has taught me that I have to commit time and energy to build the relationship needed to be effective as a disciple. Someday God will reign! God’s people will be comforted and reconciled to their Creator. His salvation will reach even to the ends of the earth...

12. Would you recommend this program to another person? Explain your reason why you would, or would not recommend it?



Yes I would, for them to discover their walk and purpose in Christ. To be equipped with the understanding of living like Christ...

13. What would you want to continue doing from your experience gathered through participating in this program?

That whatever I do, it is always a safe bet to start with God and scriptures.  
To meditate more, memories bible scripture and read more spiritual empowering books, and to be still

14. In your opinion how can this program be made better?

15. If you have taken your spiritual gift test or assessment before, what is your spiritual gift?

N/A

APPENDIX B

COMMUNITY OF GRACE DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY SUMMARY

1. How effective was the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community among your group?							
Answer Options	Not at all effective	Slightly effective	Moderately effective	Quite effective	Extremely effective	Rating Average	Response Count
	0	0	0	14	11	4.44	25
Answered question							25
Skipped question							0
2. How strong is the sense of community formed during the Community of Grace fellowship?							
Answer Options	Not at all strong	Slightly strong	Moderately strong	Quite strong	Extremely strong	Rating Average	Response Count
	0	1	3	10	11	4.24	25
Answered question							25
Skipped question							0
3. Were you satisfied with the course content, neither satisfied or dissatisfied with it, or dissatisfied with it?							
Answer Options						Response Percent	Response Count
Extremely satisfied						76.0%	19
Moderately satisfied						8.0%	2
Slightly satisfied						0.0%	0
Neither satisfied or dissatisfied						0.0%	0
Slightly dissatisfied						0.0%	0
Moderately dissatisfied						4.0%	1
Extremely dissatisfied						12.0%	3
Answered question							25
Skipped question							0
4. How happy are you about the small group with which you participated during the research?							
Answer Options	Not at all happy	Slightly happy	Moderately happy	Quite happy	Extremely happy	Rating Average	Response Count
	0	1	0	10	14	4.48	25
Answered question							25
Skipped question							0
5. How much of an impact do you feel the practice of the spiritual life habits had on your walk with Jesus?							
Answer Options	Not any impact at all	A little impact	A moderate amount of impact	A lot of impact	A great deal of impact	Rating Average	Response Count
	0	0	1	13	11	4.40	25
Answered question							25
Skipped question							0
6. Were you satisfied with the experience you gained at the Community of Grace fellowship, neither satisfied or dissatisfied with it, or dissatisfied with it?							
Answer Options	Extremely dissatisfied	Quite dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Quite satisfied	Extremely satisfied	Rating Average	Response Count
	0	0	0	10	15	4.60	25
Answered question							25
Skipped question							0
7. How useful were the reflective Bible study, scripture memorization, and meditation practices?							
Answer	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Quite	Extremely	Rating	Response

Options	useful	useful	useful	useful	useful	Average	Count
	0	0	0	10	15	4.60	25
Answered question							25
Skipped question							0
<b>8. Overall, how challenging were the discipleship sessions?</b>							
Answer Options	Not at all challenging	Slightly challenging	Moderately challenging	Very challenging	Extremely challenging	Rating Average	Response Count
	1	0	6	15	2	3.71	24
Answered question							24
Skipped question							1
<b>9. Overall, how well did the Community of Grace meet your expectations?</b>							
Answer Options	Not at all well	Slightly well	Moderately well	Quite well	Extremely well	Rating Average	Response Count
	0	0	2	12	11	4.36	25
Answered question							25
Skipped question							0
<b>10. How well do you feel your relationship with family and friends has improved as a result of your spiritual growth through the Community of Grace?</b>							
Answer Options	Not at all well	Mildly well	Fairly well	Quite well	Extremely well	Rating Average	Response Count
	0	1	3	13	8	4.12	25
Other (please specify)							8
Answered question							25
Skipped question							0
<b>Number</b>	<b>Response Date</b>	<b>Other (please specify)</b>			<b>Categories</b>		
1	Jan 27, 2014 8:50 AM	I was happy with the study but felt it ended too soon. I felt I still needed more lessons towards my spiritual growth.					
2	Jan 24, 2014 4:38 AM	I think the fellowship needs to be 6months to a year.					
3	Jan 23, 2014 2:50 PM	While the course content was great and the facilitator excellent, the test is in sustainable implementation. I have prayed about it and by Faith, it is done!!					
4	Jan 23, 2014 12:52 PM	The sessions challenged my spiritual walk and emptied and made me yearn for more of Jesus and to be true and live an honest life. Being authentic at all level. I honestly miss the sessions and hope we can continue and replicate them. However I would like a refresher again.					
5	Jan 23, 2014 12:31 PM	I was particularly challenged by the issue of how God sees me and what this means to my walk with Jesus. Having seen that I am a citizen of heaven and that all decisions about my life are made in heaven, I do not have to fear anything. I am still finding it challenging to apply in my daily life.					
6	Jan 23, 2014 9:40 AM	This experience was extremely useful in directing one to develop valuable spiritual habits which are the imperatives of the discipleship. It should be recommended for all Christians who desire personal spiritual growth. My personal relationship with God has improved greatly - more intimate and more authentic. Scripture memorization has helped me with my prayer life, always having the word in my heart and using the sword of the Spirit. By God's grace, I have crossed the Rubicon and have surrendered to Him.					
7	Jan 23, 2014 4:42 AM	I would recommend this experience to anyone who hasn't done it. It is life changing and allows you to go beyond with God.					
8	Jan 22, 2014 10:05 PM	I feel I am more authentic in my relationships					

## APPENDIX C

### COMMUNITY OF GRACE DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How effective was the practice of the spiritual life habits in developing community among your group?

- Not at all effective
- Slightly effective
- Moderately effective
- Quite effective
- Extremely effective

2. How strong is the sense of community formed during the Community of Grace fellowship?

- Not at all strong
- Slightly strong
- Moderately strong
- Quite strong
- Extremely strong

3. Were you satisfied with the course content, neither satisfied or dissatisfied with it, or dissatisfied with it?

- Extremely satisfied
- Moderately satisfied
- Slightly satisfied
- Neither satisfied, nor dissatisfied
- Slightly dissatisfied
- Moderately dissatisfied
- Extremely dissatisfied

4. How happy are you about the small group with which you participated during the research?

- Not at all happy
- Slightly happy
- Moderately happy
- Quite happy
- Extremely happy

5. How much of an impact do you feel the practice of the spiritual life habits had on your walk with Jesus?

- Not any impact at all
- A little impact
- A moderate amount of impact
- A lot of impact
- A great deal of impact

6. Were you satisfied with the experience you gained at the Community of Grace discipleship fellowship, neither satisfied or dissatisfied with it, or dissatisfied with it?

- Extremely dissatisfied
- Quite dissatisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Quite satisfied
- Extremely satisfied

7. How useful were the reflective Bible study, scripture memorization, and meditation practices?

- Not at all useful
- Slightly useful
- Moderately useful
- Quite useful
- Extremely useful

8. Overall, how challenging were the discipleship sessions?

- Not at all challenging
- Slightly challenging
- Moderately challenging
- Very challenging
- Extremely challenging

9. Overall, how well did the community of grace meet your expectations?

- Not at all well
- Slightly well
- Moderately well
- Quite well
- Extremely well

10. How well do you feel your relationship with family and friends has improved as a result of your spiritual growth through the Community of Grace?

- Not at all well
- Mildly well
- Fairly well
- Quite well
- Extremely well

Other (please specify)

## APPENDIX D

### THE DEVOTIONAL LIFE HABITS FOR THE COMMUNITY OF GRACE

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this discipleship tool is to promote the experience of biblical spirituality in the religious and cultural context of Johannesburg thereby creating an authentic discipleship community in the Amazing Grace Church plant. To achieve this task I have developed a discipleship process guide with Bible study materials emphasizing biblical spirituality to be administered to the Community of Grace, or community-building group, for a period of four months.

At the beginning of the sessions various spiritual disciplines, or biblical devotional life habits, will be explained to the participants. The explanations of the devotional life habits described here are adapted from various sources including lecture notes.

Biblical spirituality, growing up in Christ, is the process by which the Holy Spirit transforms one's life into the likeness of Christ through the practice of the life habits of Jesus Christ, delighting oneself in His Presence, meditating in His word, and doing His will. It produces a mature disciple of Christ.

Discipleship is a loving relationship with Christ in which the one whom He calls submits to His Lordship, and makes God's purpose and glory the sole reason for being. Discipleship is the following of Jesus in His Word, submitting oneself to Him as Lord of your will, affections, and desires, and entire life. It is a process of developing love to God

with all your heart, soul, and mind, and learning to love your neighbour as Christ has loved us.

Devotional life habits are necessary because spirituality requires intentionality. Devotional habits are uniquely designed by God for us to receive his grace by allowing us to place ourselves before God so that He can transform us. They are ways of being attentive to God. The habits are formed to help us open ourselves up to God and to one another as we learn to be aware of the presence of God in our lives. These devotional habits are biblical spiritual disciplines. They function as the sail to the boat in the sea. Setting the sail allows the wind to move the boat. Biblical devotional life habits are like setting the sail so that the wind can move the boat. The devotional habits are like the sail in the life of the disciple (René Schlaepfer, <http://www.graceimmersion.com/day13>).

When we practice these life habits of Christ we learn to align our will with the will of God as Disciples of Christ. The goal is that our lives should be transformed and conformed to the image of Christ through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Practicing spiritual life habits is learning from Jesus how to arrange our lives around activities that allow us to spend ‘attentive’ time in the presence of God. These devotional life habits that are encouraged for the growth of the Community of Grace include devotional Bible reading, journaling, scripture memorisation, meditation on Scripture, prayer, alone time with God, and practicing the presence of God. Some ground rules for the participants in Community of Grace have been formulated as:

- I. **Devotional Bible reading:** Informational reading is a Bible study approach focused on studying the Bible exegetically, seeking to learn data, details, or abstract information. It involves thinking, evaluating, synthesizing data, reasoning



and giving attention to language, symbols, and context. Devotional or relational reading seeks to know God better and aims at growing an authentic relationship with Him. Devotional reading of scripture requires an attentive attitude. Both are important and necessary for our Christian journey, but they are different and distinct from each other. This program will focus on both of them so that the participants will do devotional reading of scripture to grow in knowledge of God and deepen their relationship with Him.

II. **Journaling:** Spiritual journaling is the practice of maintaining a devotional life record. It provides one with a consistent record of reflections of the journey with God. How does journaling help us?

- a. Journaling provides systematic reflection on God and our relationship with Him. Writing down what God has done for us, and our thoughts about our journey with Him helps strengthen that journey and boosts our faith.
- b. Journaling provides us with a documented record of our experience with God in our spiritual journey. Remembering God's leading in the past strengthens faith, and gives courage and hope for the future.
- c. Journaling also provides a review of how one has been growing spiritually. It reveals how our attitudes and prayer-life have been transformed through the walk with God. We see how God has worked and we learn to give Him more praise.
- d. There is no single way to journal. One can use a computer, an Ipad, or paper and pen. My professor, Dr. Allan Walshe, often told us in class that

there is something to physically writing out our thoughts with pen and paper, or a notebook. An Ipad works easier for me.

III. **Scripture memorization:** This is the habit of reading the Scripture and committing it to memory. It happens as we meditate over a verse(s) or the portion of Scripture chosen for memorization. How do you do it? There is no one method of memorizing Scripture. Find out what works for you. One method is to read the scripture aloud once or three times. Try to think it through in your mind line by line. Say it aloud to see if you got it right. Then read the text again taking note of what you may have skipped while saying it aloud. Repeat the process. Then try to recall it along the day and keep thinking of it and saying it until it sticks in your mind. Others find it easy to sing out the verse or verses.

IV. **Meditation on Scripture:** Biblical meditation is a mental reflection on the Word of God, turning it over and over again in your thoughts, asking the Holy Spirit to help you understand it more clearly and to obey it more fully. It is regurgitating the Word of God in your heart as food for the soul. In Joshua 1:8-9 the Bible gives the object, purpose, and benefits of biblical meditation.

- a. Object: The Word of God, the Holy Bible.
- b. Purpose: That you may observe to do according to all that is written in the word.
- c. Benefits: You will make your way prosperous and you will have good success in your spiritual journey and growth. Psalms 77:6; 119:15, 97-99; 104:33-34

Meditation in the context of this study involves “focusing our minds and hearts on God by quieting our minds and using our imagination to focus on God and His Word.” It is not emptying our minds or focusing on some object in the universe. There is a significant difference between biblical meditation and non-biblical forms of meditation. Non-biblical forms of meditation require the emptying of the mind while biblical meditation requires “filling our minds with God and His Word. Meditation involves listening to God in His Word. The blessing of meditation comes when what we meditate about matures into action. That is hearing His Word and doing it. As you listen to God pay attention to what God would have you stop, start, believe, confess, pray about, thank Him for, or communicate to someone? More information on the meditation process is provided in the appendix of your study guide.

Besides meditating on specific verses or passages of scripture you may also reflect on key points from your devotional time, including “new insights from Scripture, impressions from God, or expressions of gratitude and praise to God.”

- V. **Prayer and Praise:** From the chapter on prayer by Ellen White (1892), prayer is described as communion with God, opening the heart to Him as a friend with friend (p. 93). It is an experience that lifts the one praying to the presence of God. White describes prayer as the breath of the soul and therefore, like the air that we breathe, prayer should continue all the time. It is also important to note that prayer does not inform God about us since He already knows everything about us (Psalms 139:3-4). Prayer simply prepares us to receive God (White, 1892, p. 93). While Jesus taught the disciples to ask, seek, and knock in order to receive, His personal prayer life demonstrated that the purpose of prayer is not simply to get

things from God, but mainly to be in a relationship with God. The context of prayer is the revelation of God in nature and in His word. The wonderful works of God in creation and redemption lead us to praise Him with reverent awe. The Lord Jesus Christ taught that people ought always to pray and never to give up (Luke 18:1). He also taught the disciples how to pray and modelled it in His walk with God.

How to pray effectively involves several practices:

- a. Have a place dedicated to spending time with God, somewhere in your home.
- b. Choose the time when you are most alert and fresh.
- c. Learn to be quiet as you approach your place of prayer, letting your thoughts turn towards God.
- d. Come into the presence of God with singing and praise.
- e. After singing focus and reflect on some Scripture passage in your Bible reading.
- f. Listen and discern whether God is inviting you to some promise in the Word or commanding you to do something.
- g. Open your heart to God in prayer as to a dear friend, reflecting on the Word just received from the Scripture passage or verse and submitting to His will.
- h. Ask for grace to do what the Scripture says.
- i. Journal your thoughts and insights received during communion with God.
- j. Try to remember the content of your prayer through the day and keep on

thanking God for answers even before you receive them (Mark 11:22-24).

Things to avoid in your prayer habit:

- a. Avoid being repetitive because prayer is conversation and God is not deaf.
- b. Avoid rushing through your prayer and making it mechanical.
- c. Avoid prayer postures that make you uncomfortable because your thoughts will be distracted.

**VI. Practicing the Presence of God:** God is always present with us because He is omnipresent but we are not always aware or conscious of His presence. To be constantly aware of the presence of God comes with intentionally allowing the Holy Spirit to constantly communion with us both through the Word, creation, and in the daily happenings of our life. How do we cultivate the presence of God?

- a. Make God your greatest desire in life, Psalms 73:24-27.
- b. Delight yourself in the Lord, Psalms 16:8.
- c. Meditate on His Word, Joshua 1:8-9. Think of God as you do your daily business of life.
- d. Pray without ceasing. Make prayer the breath of your life.
- e. Keep an attitude of praise as you look for God in everyday events of your life, 1Thessalonians 5:16-18.
- f. Keep the Sabbath day holy and spend it reflecting on God in creation and the plan of redemption
- g. Choose to be constantly filled with the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 5:18.

**VII. Fasting and being alone with God:** Fasting is abstaining from something of temporary benefit that we may focus on consecration and communion with God to

hear Him more clearly, and to obey Him more fully. Fasting is not twisting God's arm to do something for us. It is deepening the relationship with God through spending time alone with Him and focusing on Him as our supreme desire and delight in life. There are several ways to fast. Choose what works best for you:

- a. You may choose to abstain from food for a number of days in order to focus on prayer and meditation, spending time alone with God.
- b. You may abstain from television, newspapers, or any other thing that normally consumes your time so that you may use the extra time in prayer and meditation.

### **Narrative Meditation:**

**Narrative Meditation** is the practice of purposefully controlling your imagination and focusing on a specific story from a consistent perspective in an attempt to experience as much of what happened in that story as possible.

The following points are helpful in narrative meditation:

- a. It is crucial that we control and guide the imagination. We never want to surrender our will or thought process to the imagination.
- b. Focus on a biblical story from the perspective of an observer or one of the story characters. Choose one of the characters and try to put yourself in that person's place.
- c. Using the imagination to envision what the Bible character experienced.

**What is important** is that we get in touch with the story and it becomes real to us.

**What is not important** is that we see or experience everything in a story in the same way as someone else.

**Note:** Your experience will be unique to you because of your own background and personality.

The imagination is the primary tool in meditation. It is the most creative part of our minds. God gave us this tool to allow us to go beyond the limits of the routine of everyday life. However, the imagination needs to be informed and controlled.

Here are some key points to help us in guiding our imaginations:

- a. Use your will to focus your thoughts.
- b. Let past experience and knowledge inform your imagination.
- c. Let Scripture control or provide the boundaries for your imagination.

Following are some helpful steps to guide us in meditation:

- a. Start with prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to guide.
- b. Read the story in the Bible and any background material you have.
- c. Imagine you were present.
- d. Try to see, hear, and feel the details.
- e. Be true to the biblical facts.
- f. Give yourself adequate time.

When finished with meditating, pause to reflect on what you have experienced.

- a. What new insights did you gain?
- b. What feelings did you experience?
- c. What new insights about God did you gain?
- d. What can you apply to your life?

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