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ABSTRACT

MEN OF VALOR: A STUDY OF FOLLOWING CHRIST'S
EXAMPLE OF DISCIPLESHIP WITH FIVE KEY MEN
IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

by

Bradley D. Cassell Jr

Adviser: Michael F. Cauley

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: MEN OF VALOR: A STUDY OF FOLLOWING CHRIST'S EXAMPLE OF DISCIPLESHIP WITH FIVE KEY MEN IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

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Date completed: July 2018

Problem

The Tampa First Seventh-day Adventist Church is a diverse congregation with over 40 countries represented in its membership of nearly 600. There had been a steady increase of attendance and membership through transfers and conversion for several years. One of the biggest challenges that we faced at Tampa First was the discipleship of men. I have perceived in my 23 years of ministry that when the father is growing spiritually, the family unit had a greater tendency to grow with him, and the children were much more likely to stay connected to God and the church. It was imperative for me to find a way to break through the barriers of spiritual stagnation with the men at

Tampa First. This project has led the way to spiritual growth and an intentional disciple-making process for these men in my congregation.

Task

The task of this project was to develop and implement a process of discipleship for a small group the men of the Tampa First Church where I poured myself into five key male leaders over a twelve-month period and empowered them to be disciple-makers for other men in our local congregation and in their spheres of influence.

Results

After the twelve-month period of discipleship, three of the five key leaders remained active in the group while others moved on for various reasons. I created a spiritual growth measuring tool I called a Life Thermometer consisting of ten questions that was given to the participants at the end of the twelve months. The results of all five participants from the Life Thermometer showed overall increases ranging from 15% up to a 48% increase with an average growth among the five men of 28%.

Conclusion

There was spiritual growth among all the participants and in me as the group leader over the twelve-month period. We all grew as leaders, men of God, priests in our homes, and witnesses in our spheres of influence. The principles fleshed out in this study will have a significant impact in men's discipleship at the Tampa First Church as well as possibly impacting other churches in our region and local conference.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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EXAMPLE OF DISCIPLESHIP WITH FIVE KEY MEN IN
THE LOCAL CHURCH

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

by
Bradley D. Cassell Jr.

July 2018

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CHAPTER 1

THE NEED FOR THE DISCIPLESHIP OF MEN

The Project Context

I am lead pastor of the Tampa First Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tampa, Florida, and I have ministered there for the past seven years. The Tampa First Church is a 128-year-old congregation with over 530 members and an average Sabbath attendance of over 320 with two full time pastors. The membership of Tampa First is very multi-cultural with more than 40 countries represented from five continents. The city of Tampa is part of the Tampa Bay region that has a population of over 4.3 million and over 25 Seventh-day Adventist congregations. Tampa is very diverse with many cultures mingling together and is a temporary stop for people who want to vacation on the Florida gulf coast. The Tampa First Church birthed a daughter congregation in Wesley Chapel in 2014 and it has just gained church status with the Florida Conference. The Tampa First Church has a Pre-K - 12th grade junior academy that is supported by three other constituent churches with nearly 150 students enrolled. Tampa Adventist Academy has recently purchased a 43-acre plot of land near our newly built Florida Hospital facility in Wesley Chapel and is planning to open a 12-grade school in the fall of 2018. The ministry context of the Tampa First Church has undergone a change over the past five years as the Florida Hospital acquired four hospitals and built a new facility that opened

in 2011. Now we are projecting an increase of more than 500 new Adventist families in the next 10-15 years as the Florida Hospital begins recruiting medical professionals from around the world.

Statement of the Problem

The Tampa First Seventh-day Adventist Church is a diverse congregation with over 40 countries represented in its membership of nearly 600. There had been a steady increase of attendance and membership through transfers and conversion for several years. One of the biggest challenges that we faced at Tampa First is the discipleship of men. I have perceived in my 23 years of ministry that when the father was growing spiritually, the family unit had a greater tendency to grow with him, and the children were much more likely to stay connected to God and the church. It was imperative for me to find a way to break through the barriers of spiritual stagnation with the men at Tampa First. This project has led the way to spiritual growth and an intentional disciple-making process for these men in my congregation.

Statement of the Task

The task of this project was to develop and implement a mentoring for discipleship process in a small group of men in the Tampa First Church. I poured myself into five key male leaders over a 12-month period and empowered them to be disciple-makers for other men in our local congregation and in their spheres of influence.

Delimitations

The scope of this project was limited to the evaluation of results of my interaction with five key male leaders of the Tampa First Church during 12-month spiritual

mentoring process. I measured the progress of their development specifically by the number of men each of them mentored by the end of this time frame, their involvement as leaders in the local church, as well as a qualitative survey that evaluated their spiritual growth and wellness in important relationships.

Description of the Project Process

The process of discipling five key men at the Tampa First Church contained five phases. These five phases included: theological reflection of discipleship in the Bible, a literature review of contemporary studies in discipleship, a description and implementation of the project, and finally an evaluation of the process and results. I planned and succeeded in having this project completed by December 2015.

Theological Reflection

Theological reflection emphasized examples of discipleship in both the Old and New Testaments of Scripture. In terms of the Old Testament, I studied the stories of Moses mentoring Joshua to be the leader of Israel and Elijah training Elisha to be the next prophet of Israel. In relation to the discipleship of Jesus, I focused on the Savior's interaction with the twelve disciples and specifically His work with Peter, James, and John.

Literature Review

My discipleship plan had several areas of focus in scholarly literature. I initially reviewed contemporary literature in the area of discipleship as it relates to methods of spiritually mentoring men. Another source of literature was biblical studies on discipleship as it relates to the 21st century Christian church. Finally, I reviewed the

doctoral research and conclusions from Adventist scholarship in the realm of the discipleship of men in local congregations.

Project Development

There were several stages of development for the discipleship of men. First, I identified five key male leaders in my local congregation who were open to my spiritual mentoring. Secondly, I asked each candidate if they were interested in joining me and two other men on this 12-month journey of spiritual growth. Finally, I planned an initial meeting with the five men where we agreed on specific bi-weekly meeting days and times and came to a consensus on a curriculum for spiritual growth which included Bible reading, prayer, and reflective journaling. Before we began our bi-weekly meetings, I had a one-on-one interview with each man evaluating his personal, spiritual, and church leadership level of growth.

The Implementation Process

The implementation of the discipleship process with these men happened initially on a bi-weekly basis for 1-2 hours. We began the time with prayer and a personal check-in where specific questions relating to their time with God were asked. The three main questions in the meeting dealt with completing their assignment, hearing the voice of God in the process, and actions steps to follow His voice in obedient faith. We spent significant time praying for each other in our spiritual and personal lives as well as interceding for those who God was calling us to disciple. The participants encouraged one another to explore different biblical practices such as solitude, fasting, and Bible memorization for the sole purpose of growing spiritually and hearing the voice of God more clearly. As time went on and the group grew to trust one another, it was decided to

meet weekly and add a list of eight accountability questions that would be asked as a guide in every meeting.

As we continued to implement the process, my group decided to call themselves the “men of valor.” I affirmed this decision because it identified the importance of being strong in the Lord and strong for one another to grow as husbands, fathers, friends, and co-workers that share God’s light in a world that is pushing for darkness and sin. We felt that a man of valor would commit to go against the flow of influence in our society.

Project Evaluation Methods

The discipleship of the five key male leaders was evaluated on several levels that were part of the accountability in the bi-weekly group meetings during our personal check-in time. First, their spiritual growth was monitored by the quality time they spent with God and their ability to hear His voice and follow the Lord in obedient faith. Secondly, the progress of these men was evaluated by their performance as leaders in the local church developing others for leadership and service. A third step was to monitor their discipleship progress by the ability of these men to effectively find and mentor others in their own spiritual journey. The men were also called upon to keep a daily journal of their spiritual experience, which I collected at the end of our 12 months to gather data on their growth. They also filled out a spiritual growth evaluation chart or a Life Thermometer at the end of the 12 months which monitored their progress in 10 key areas of discipleship. Finally, I planned to have a one on one interview with the candidates asking the same questions given before the bi-weekly meetings started to determine how much growth occurred in their personal, spiritual, and church leadership areas.

Desired Project Outcomes

In the process of discipling five men of valor in the Tampa First Church, I will obtain several outcomes that could benefit the men involved, their families, their friends, and the local church. First, I desired to see these five men grow spiritually in a closer walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. Secondly, I wanted these men to mature in their marriages, parenting, or in other significant relationships. A third outcome was to see these five men grow as leaders in the local church. One final goal for this project was to witness these men mentoring other men in the church and in their spheres of influence outside the body through this discipleship process.

CHAPTER 2

A THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION OF BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

The theological framework of discipleship has its biblical foundation in many narratives in both the Old and New Testaments. I have narrowed my scope of study to three biblical illustrations of discipleship; the relationships between Elijah and Elisha, Moses and Joshua, and finally Jesus' mentoring of the twelve disciples. I extracted biblical principles of discipleship that will inform the development of my discipleship approach with five key men in the Tampa First Seventh-day Adventist Church.

God's Answer for Elijah's Burnout and Depression

God told Elijah to go and anoint Elisha (1 Kgs 19:17 New King James Version) after the Lord revealed Himself to the prophet at Mount Horeb in the whispering voice (1 Kgs 19:11-12). Elijah had proclaimed the drought before King Ahab (1 Kgs 17:1-2), was fed by ravens by the brook of Cherith (1 Kgs 17:3-7), had a great victory over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:20-40). However, in response to Queen Jezebel's death threats, Elijah ran. Yet, God did not desert his scared prophet. An angel brought food to Elijah strengthening him to travel 40 days and 40 nights until he reached Mount Horeb. Many believe that Elijah was not just afraid of Jezebel and her murderous

threats, but was also very discouraged and maybe even depressed, feeling as if he was the only person in all of Israel that still followed the God of heaven. In answer to Elijah's complaints, God responded by sharing that there were still seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed their knees to Baal (1 Kgs 19:18).

God's answer and remedy for Elijah's discouragement and burn-out was for the prophet to get up and mentor his replacement, Elisha. There are not any real biblical references of the details involved in Elijah's mentoring of Elisha, but the account shows that Elisha was with Elijah when he condemned Ahab for stealing Naboth's vineyard and after murdering him under false accusations (1 Kgs 21:17-29). Elisha was also present when Elijah was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kgs 2:1-11). Elisha started his relationship with Elijah by sacrifice. He not only sacrificed the oxen that he plowed with in the field (1 Kgs 19:21), but he also sacrificed his time with family as he kissed his parents and departed on the journey with Elijah (1 Kgs 19:20-21). Elisha's time spent learning from Elijah immediately bore fruit as Elisha used his mentor's mantle to part the Jordan River which was seen by prophets in Jericho who immediately bowed and recognized him as the new leading prophet in Israel (2 Kgs 2:12-18). Elisha's ministry continued to flourish after Elijah's translation as he performed many miracles and started a school for prophets in Israel (2 Kgs 6:1-7).

Although there is little to be studied in regard to the details of Elijah's discipleship of Elisha, we can conclude that God's answer for Elijah's dejection and depression at Mount Horeb was finding Elisha. The Lord knew that Elijah needed companionship and support beyond just saying that there were 7,000 who had not bowed their knees to Baal. Elijah was feeling burned out in the ministry to the people of Israel

and he felt all alone. God called him to go out and find Elisha so that he could not only have a companion, but also a student to pour himself into along the journey. Elisha was convicted by God to follow Him but needed Elijah to show him the way. The narrative of Elijah and Elisha teaches us that the discipleship process can be symbiotic as both the teacher and the student can benefit from the relationship.

Moses Disciples Joshua in the Fire

Along with the story of Elijah and Elisha, the narrative of Moses mentoring Joshua brings more elements that can be gleaned in regard to biblical discipleship. We first find Joshua leading the fight against the Amalekites while Moses was on the hill with his hands and staff raised with the help of Aaron and Hur (Exod 17:9-16). Moses called Joshua to go and fight the people of Amalek with untrained warriors from Israel. Joshua learned from Moses that the battles belong to the Lord as he gave them a great victory over their enemies early in their sojourn to Canaan. Joshua was with Moses as they raised a memorial to the Lord giving it the name; *My Lord Is My Banner* (Exod 17:15-16). Moses threw Joshua into the fire with untrained men to fight the enemy in order to see if Joshua had the ability and faith to trust in God even when human reasoning would recommend otherwise.

After passing the test with the Amalekites, Moses made Joshua his assistant and they went up Mount Sinai together leaving Aaron and Hur to lead the people in the valley below (Exod 24:13-14). Joshua witnessed the cloud of God's presence on the mountain as he waited with Moses for seven days until his teacher was called to enter the cloud for 40 days (Exod 24:15-18). These 40 days were another test of faith and character for Joshua as he developed patience by waiting for Moses to come out of the cloud with a

message from God. We can see a principle in discipleship of giving our disciples opportunity to fight and defend the faith as well as time to rest and wait on the Lord alone.

The conclusion of Joshua's time with Moses on the mountain of God was filled with turmoil as he witnessed Moses punishing the people for making a golden calf and worshipping it while the leader was receiving the commandments of the Lord (Exod 32:17-35). Moses showed Joshua the importance of taking strong action against sin as a leader and a follower of the Lord. Moses broke the tablets of stone, ground up the calf into powder, mixed the powder with water, and gave it to the people of Israel to drink as a punishment for their sin (Exod 32:20). Joshua witnessed Moses calling upon the people to choose between the Lord and their sinful ways. Moses commanded the Levites to go out and execute those who refused to obey the Lord, which ended up being around 3000 men (Exod 32:24-28). Joshua witnessed Moses in the tabernacle of meeting speaking to the Lord face to face while the people of Israel worshipped from a distance as he stayed in the tent even after Moses went to talk to the people (Exod 33:7-11). Joshua's action to stay in the tent in the presence of the Lord suggests a growing maturity and yearning to be in the presence of the Most High.

Along with his experience on Mount Sinai with Moses, Joshua also needed to be corrected by Moses when he zealously asked his teacher to forbid two men who were not part of the seventy selected elders to prophesy in the camp during the time when the people of Israel were complaining about the manna and demanded meat (Num 11:26-29). Joshua was seeking the Lord, but he still lacked the spiritual maturity to see the Holy Spirit working in people outside his scope of human understanding. Joshua's reaction

was similar to John the Beloved's when he asked Jesus to forbid a person from casting out demons in the Master's name (Mark 9:38). Moses and Jesus both responded in a similar fashion to their students' overzealous passion for God by allowing them to see that there are others who are led by the Spirit even though they work outside the traditional landscape of human understanding (Num 11:29 and Mark 9:39-40). Another principle of discipleship can be extracted from Moses correcting Joshua in that a disciplinemaker must be willing to redirect the student's passion for God and stretch them beyond their current maturity level.

The discipleship of Joshua reached its pinnacle when he came back with Caleb after spying out the land of Canaan. Joshua and Caleb gave reports filled with faith and trust in God while the other ten spies could only see their inability to conquer the land in their own strength (Num 14:6-9). Caleb and Joshua even went so far as to tear their clothes and stand in the gap for God against the popular opinion and sharing that they had nothing to fear as God was on their side (Num 14:6-9). Joshua's faith grew in the Lord during his time with Moses and it paid off as he stood firm with Caleb in the belief that God could conquer the giants in Canaan even under the threat of being stoned by the people of Israel. Moses gradually gave Joshua opportunities to see God's power and it led to Joshua's ability to go against the tide of popular opinion when it mattered most.

The discipleship of Joshua by Moses did not end at the Jordan in Numbers 14. It continued for 40 years in the wilderness as the student continued to learn from his earthly teacher who was reflecting the character of the heavenly Father. Finally, after all the adults died including Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, Joshua was given the responsibility of leading the Children of Israel into Canaan along with his trusted companion Caleb. On

his deathbed, Moses laid his hands on Joshua and the spirit of wisdom filled the student as all the people of Israel listened to their new leader (Deut 34:9). Moses did not leave the people of Israel void of leadership when he died. He spent over 40 years mentoring Joshua to be the leader who would lead the people on the next phase of their journey with God conquering the land of Canaan. Joshua was given some of Moses' authority, but not as much since the Children of Israel had matured in their wilderness sojourn and the next generation needed to be empowered to take the land of Canaan. Joshua's leadership was much more dispersed into the leaders of the tribes than what Moses was able to do with them just coming out of slavery. It most likely will not be 40 years of discipleship, but the biblical principle of passing the torch of leadership to the disciple is a concept that can be extracted from the relationship between Moses and Joshua. We must invest in those that God calls us to mentor so that they will be ready to stand in His strength. Unfortunately, Joshua did not continue the discipleship pattern given to him by Moses and Israel fell into an up and down journey with God during the time of the judges until Samuel came along and turned the hearts of the people back toward the Lord. Discipleship must be replicated as disciples are called to become disciple-makers for the kingdom of God.

Jesus Disciples the Twelve

In the Gospels Jesus displayed mentoring for discipleship in his relationship with his twelve disciples for nearly three and a half years and his in his special connection with Peter, James, and John. Jesus began his relationship with His disciples by calling John and Andrew to "come and see" not only where He was staying, but to experience the Teacher that John the Baptist preached about in the wilderness (John 1:39). Jesus not

only spent time with John and Andrew, but also met Simon whom he renamed Cephas (John 1:42). According to the Gospel of John, Jesus met up with Philip who he called to follow Him as well as Philip's friend Nathanael who was sitting under the fig tree (John 1:43-48).

Many scholars believe these first disciples followed Jesus for several months up to even a year before the Savior formally called them to leave their fishing nets and follow Him as full-time disciples (Mark 1:16-20). During this time, the disciples were able to periodically follow Jesus and witness such events as the miracle turning the water to wine in Cana (John 2:1-11), the first cleansing of the temple (John 2:13-22), they talked to Jesus after his interaction with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well (John 4:5-42), the healing of the Nobleman's son (John 4:46-54), and the Savior's rejection in His home town of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-30). Jesus gave these first disciples opportunity to see their Teacher doing the Father's work in different cultures and scenarios so that they would have a greater understanding of what they were committing to when the Savior formally called them to full time discipleship. One can glean from Christ's initial interaction with the disciples an important principle of allowing our pupils in discipleship an opportunity to watch our example of being connected with God and the actions that flow from the Holy Spirit through a life of surrender. It is difficult if not almost impossible to lead others in discipleship when they have not seen the Lord working in one's own life situation. The shaping of theology in the life of a disciple many times begins before the formal call actually is given through the example of spiritual leadership over an extended period of time.

In his initial months of ministry, Jesus seemed to attract a significant number of followers who traveled with the Savior through the towns of Judea and Galilee. Eventually, Jesus made the decision on twelve disciples whom He would give special attention in the mentoring process (Luke 6:13-16). At this point, Jesus had performed several miracles and He began to receive criticism from the Jewish leaders for breaking the Sabbath according to their interpretation by healing the lame man by the Pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-47), plucking heads of grain to eat (Mark 2:23-28), and healing a withered hand in a Galilean synagogue (Matt 12:1-8). These 12 were selected by Jesus not because of their educational background or their status in society, but because He saw their potential to be receptive to the kingdom of God and their willingness to leave everything to follow Him. Among the chosen, there was a zealot in Simon, a doubter in Thomas, four headstrong fishermen, and Judas who would eventually betray the Savior because of his lust for power and money (Luke 6:12-15).

The Selection of the Twelve

Christ's selection of the twelve disciples brings attention to another key principle for discipleship. God does not look on the outside in the selection of His followers, but the Lord looks on the heart and the potential. The twelve that Jesus selected would not be chosen by most in Jewish society, but they were men of integrity who more than likely responded to the message of John the Baptist who paved the way for the Savior through the message and baptism of repentance. Even Judas Iscariot had this potential, yet he chose to betray Jesus because of his lust for the things of this world. God will lead disciple-makers to those who have the heart and true desire to be fully devoted, surrendered followers of His kingdom. This means that disciple-makers must be in tune

with the Lord and walk in step with the Holy Spirit who will give them wisdom in selecting those who have the potential to be frontline champions and disciple-makers for the kingdom.

According to Nichol (1953), Jesus had three Galilean tours with the Twelve between the spring of A.D. 29 and the spring of A.D. 30 (pp. 197-198). During these tours, the disciples witnessed Jesus healing, challenging the traditional view of Sabbath-keeping by plucking heads of grain, preaching the sermon on the mount, casting out demons, calming the sea, raising the widow's son from the dead, and feasting with tax collectors at the home of Levi Matthew. Just at the beginning of their third tour of Galilee before the Passover in the spring of A.D. 30, Jesus sent the twelve out on their own missionary adventure (Nichol, 1953, p. 198). The Gospel of Matthew shares that the Savior called the twelve to preach the message that the kingdom of God was at hand only to the lost sheep of Israel (Matt 10:5-7). Jesus also challenged the disciples to cast out demons, raise the dead, heal the sick, as well as cleanse the lepers in the surrounding villages without taking any provisions with them (Matt 10:8-10).

Jesus Sends the Twelve Out in Galilee

In the context of time spent with Jesus, we have record of Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, and Nathaniel being with Jesus for nearly two years (John 1:35-51), but the twelve were formerly called to full time discipleship just months before their challenge to go out on their own as missionaries in Galilee in pairs (Nichol, 1953, pp. 197-198). Why would Jesus just send out the twelve with such a difficult task in quite possibly a hostile environment with seemingly so little training? One answer could possibly be found in the reality that the disciples needed to grow in their understanding of

Jesus and God's kingdom in the mission field. They witnessed Jesus preaching, performing miracles, and also retreating away to spend time with the Father at night and the Savior wanted them to go out and spread their wings as envoys of the kingdom. Jones states, "Jesus demonstrated an amazing ability to empower others, to trust others with leadership, to allow others to stumble and fail without condemning them, and to share whatever and all He had with those He led" (as cited in Bell, 2014, Chapter 15, para. 22).

A key element of discipleship gleaned from Jesus sending out the twelve is that a student of the gospel finds theology while in the mission field doing the work of a missionary. The disciples were not only lacking in experience as missionaries preaching the kingdom and performing miracles, but many would conclude that they did not experience conversion until after the resurrection. So how does one apply Christ's sending of the twelve with discipleship in the 21st century? Are we to actually send undertrained or even unconverted disciples out in the mission field? Although Jesus took an extreme stance in sending out the twelve, I believe there is an underlying principle of empowering and equipping fledglings in the faith who are excited about the gospel and to share their new experience with God in their spheres of influence both in the church and in the world.

They key component to the sending out of the disciples and the sending out of disciples in today's context is that there must be a mentor or disciple-maker for these students to share their experiences and receive counsel, feedback, and constructive criticism. The Savior gathered the disciples together and they began sharing all that they had done in the mission field (Mark 6:32). Mark continues by sharing that Jesus encouraged the twelve to come away with Him on the boat to a secluded area to rest a

while (Mark 6:33-34). Jesus made sure that His new workers had time with Him to debrief and share all the successes and failures of mission work in seclusion and away from the ministry that could so easily consume them. We must encourage our disciples to practice solitude and retreating with God on a regular basis so that they would not become burned out and discouraged in the work of the gospel. Jesus took time away during the night hours to be with His Father, and He encouraged the disciples to spend time with Him after the intensity of ministry in Galilee. Disciple-makers need to both be there for the disciples to empower, equip, and counsel them, and to encourage the pupils to find solitude on their own with God for spiritual nourishment and filling for the next mission.

In summarizing Christ's sending out of the twelve to do mission work and its connection with discipleship in the 21st century, the issue is not necessarily when disciples are sent out into the mission field, but how committed are the disciple-makers in staying connected with their students and providing feedback and mentoring before, during, and after the mission experiences. There is a tendency to disciple and then cut the students loose into the great abyss of mission work where the ties are cut and they are left alone. This is a sure way to bring discouragement to a disciple to the point where they may even lose faith in their relationship with Jesus Christ. It is imperative that the discipleship process continues as the disciple learns how to be a missionary in the harvest of God. Thus, Jesus reveals in the sending out of the twelve that theology is shaped by both the being and doing in relation to the mission work of God.

Jesus' Relationship With Peter, James, and John

In the life of Christ on this earth, we find that not only did He narrow His focus in discipleship with twelve, He also extracted three from the twelve with whom he had a special connection. Peter, James, and John, three of the four first disciples Jesus interacted with at the very beginning of His ministry, had a closer relationship with the Savior than the other nine followers. The Gospel of Mark comments that only Peter, James, and John were permitted by Jesus to enter the room of Jairus' daughter who had died (Mark 5:37). They witnessed the resurrection power of Jesus after observing the healing of the woman with a 12-year blood flow when she touched the Savior's robe in a crowd. Jesus brought the three disciples with the most potential to be lead apostles in the new church after His resurrection and ascension to see that the Savior had power over death. The Savior's interaction with Peter, James, and John reveals a principle of discipleship in regard to working with smaller numbers of those who have a greater capacity to lead out in the disciple-making process.

Another example of Jesus pouring Himself into Peter, James, and John occurs when the Savior takes the three on a mountain where He is transfigured revealing His divinity (Matt 17:1-8). The three are overwhelmed at the sight of Jesus' glory along with the appearance of Elijah and Moses who began to talk with them. Peter even suggested that they make three enclosures for Jesus, Elijah, and Moses, but his idea was interrupted by the voice of God the Father which drove them face first to the ground in fear (Matt 17:4-6). Jesus gave the three disciples power to rise up from the ground when He touched them and they realized that He was back to "normal" without the heavenly radiance (Matt 17:7-8). This event on the mount of transfiguration happened in the midst

of Peter's confession of Jesus as the Messiah (Matt 16:16), and healing of the epileptic boy in the valley below who could not be healed by the nine disciples (Matt 17:14-21). Jesus wanted to reveal His true glory to the three after they had witnessed the power of the resurrection through the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead as well as to fulfill His own prophecy of some seeing Him in glory (Matt 16:28).

In the transfiguration event, Jesus revealed His glory to the three disciples to give them a clearer picture of heaven and the power of eternity that they would not only see in the resurrection at the second advent, but also the power at their disposal after Pentecost which would transcend all earthly authority. The voice of God that drove the three to the ground could have possibly been heard by at least one of them at Jesus' baptism since they were disciples of John the Baptist before becoming followers of the Savior. Jesus brought them on the mountain to see and hear God's glory. Disciple-makers are called by God to take their disciples on the journey to the mountains of spiritual awakening through the Word, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines in order to hear more clearly the Lord's voice. Although disciple-makers are called to bring people up to the mountain, we must teach them in the valley where we spend most of our lives in this world. Jesus went down with Peter, James, and John to the valley where a demon possessed boy had epileptic seizures and threw himself into the fire causing great confusion even among the disciples who could not cast out the evil spirit. The Savior rebuked the disciples for being "faithless", but then revealed to them privately that they needed more faith and that the demon in the boy could only be removed with prayer and fasting (Matt 17:17-21).

Peter, James, and John were discovering theology through these close encounters with Jesus' glory on the mount and with Jairus' daughter. Jesus revealed the importance connecting with God and tapping into His glory while in the midst of ministering to others. Jesus showed this principle of discipleship in the parable of the servants where the one with five talents invested and made five more talents and was given the talent of the unfaithful servant who buried it in the ground (Matt 25:14-30). Jesus' interaction with Peter, James, and John along with the parable of the talents calls disciple-makers to break down their larger group of disciples to a smaller number in order to have greater intimacy and enhance their opportunity to pour themselves into the students with a greater capacity or potential to grow. Some might see this as favoritism on the surface, but Jesus models that disciple-making must happen in small numbers in order for exponential growth to happen in future generations of disciples from the core group.

Another instance where Jesus separates Peter, James, and John occurred in the Garden of Gethsemane. After Jesus celebrated the Passover with the disciples by washing their feet and presenting the emblems of His own broken body and shed blood through the unleavened bread and unfermented wine, the Savior invited the eleven to join Him on the final walk to the Garden of Gethsemane. Judas had already made his final decision to betray his master and was helping the Jewish leaders to arrest the Savior for 30 pieces of silver. When they arrived at Gethsemane, Jesus asked the eight disciples to wait while He went further with Peter, James, and John (Matt 26:36-37). The gospel of Luke goes further by saying that Jesus asked the disciples to "pray that they would not enter into temptation" (Luke 22:40). According to the gospel of Matthew, Jesus became very distressed and He said to Peter, James, and John: "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful,

even to death. Stay here and watch with Me” (Matt 26:38). This request of Jesus to the three disciples suggests that the Savior trusted them more than the others. He gave them a glimpse of the inner agony He was facing bearing the weight of sinful humanity. In the midst of this struggle, Jesus went beyond just asking them to wait and pray as He did with the other eight down the path, but the Savior asked Peter, James, and John to pray and watch.

Why did Jesus ask the disciples to watch? What was Jesus’ reasoning for bringing the three more close to His suffering than the other eight? White (1898) shares this reflection:

With Peter, James, and John, He entered its secluded recesses. These three disciples were Christ’s closest companions. They had beheld His glory on the mount of transfiguration; they had seen Moses and Elijah talking with Him; they had heard the voice from heaven; now in His great struggle, Christ desired their presence near Him. Often, they had passed the night with Him in this retreat. On these occasions, after a season of watching and prayer, they would sleep undisturbed at a little distance from their Master, until He awoke them in the morning to go forth anew to labor. But now He desired them to spend the night with Him in prayer. Yet He could not bear that even they should witness the agony He was to endure. (p. 686)

White shares that this was not the first time that the three disciples had spent time with Jesus. In fact, the Savior desired their presence with Him in prayer because He needed their support during this time of struggle. The watching and prayer was for the benefit of the Savior as well as for the benefit of the disciples to grow in a greater understanding of their future role as apostles and servant-leaders in the church after the ascension and Pentecost. Jesus prepared the three disciples to watch and pray during a time when He would be struggling to accept His destiny to be crucified for the sins of humanity. Even though the disciple ended up sleeping instead of watching and praying, this experience would make a lasting impact on their future as disciple-makers.

There are several principles that can be extracted from Christ's call of Peter, James, and John to watch and pray with Him in the Gethsemane. First, we can derive the principle of asking students to participate in spiritual activities where they can grow by watching the teacher. Jesus made a habit of bringing the three disciples close to His side in prayer to the Father in order to prepare them to watch and pray during His darkest hour on this earth in Gethsemane. Disciple-makers are called to bring disciples along in the journey of spiritual growth so they can actually learn how to pray, study the Bible, and grow in the spiritual disciplines. In Christ's method of discipleship, disciple-makers are to model spirituality to their students as they are growing and modeling a connection with God in their own lives.

Another principle that can be gleaned from Christ's call for the three disciples to watch and pray in Gethsemane is that a disciple-maker must come to the realization that they can be supported and encouraged by the prayers and wisdom of the disciples. Jones (2014) writes: "The relationship that Jesus nurtured and sustained with His Father led to a life of transparency, authenticity, and honesty (as cited in Bell, Chapter 15, para. 36). Jesus did not think it was beneath Him to ask Peter, James, and John to watch and pray for Him. Disciple-makers must be willing to be vulnerable with disciples even showing weakness and struggles in the relationship. When the teacher brings the student into this level of intimacy and maturity, the disciple begins to realize that disciple making is not about status, but about a life of transparency and openness to the Holy Spirit.

After His crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus appeared to the disciples for a third time on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Some of the disciples decided to follow Peter's lead and go fishing, but they caught no fish (John 21:3). Jesus told the disciples from the

distant shore to cast their net on the right side of the boat and they caught so many fish that they could not pull up the net (John 21:6). Peter, realizing it was Jesus, threw off his outer coat and swam for the shore to see his Master (John 21:7). After cooking a fish breakfast on the beach for His disciples, Jesus restored Peter after the disciple denied Him three times before the crucifixion (John 21:15-19). The Savior challenged Peter by asking him about his love for the Master as well as the call to feed the followers described as lambs and sheep (John 21:15-17). This call to feed the sheep symbolized the fact that Peter was forgiven and restored to be a disciple-maker for the kingdom.

The restoration of Peter by Jesus along the shores of Galilee uncovers another valuable principle in regards to discipleship in the 21st century. Peter was broken and totally devastated when he denied his master. Jesus restored his repentant disciple and even challenged him to go forward and feed His sheep or make other disciples. On this topic, Tilstra comments:

In His final face to face encounter recorded in the gospels, Jesus not only restores Peter to his role among the other disciples but does so with both grace and accountability. Jesus speaks the truth in love, speaks with hope of Peter's future, and calls Peter to step from dysfunction into health. (as cited in Tilstra, 2014, para. 28)

Discipleship can be very messy since it involves interaction with people who have been broken by this world of sin and death. Christ calls disciple-makers to bear with those disciples who are struggling in order to restore them and continue to lead them on the path of righteousness. The apostle Paul confirmed Christ's actions on the shores of Galilee when he called the church of Corinth to restore the offender who has come to repentance and to reaffirm their love for him following church discipline by the majority (2 Cor 2:8). Disciples must suffer the consequences for their sins and bad decisions, yet

they need disciple-makers who are willing to be the ministers of reconciliation and restore them as Jesus did with Peter.

Summary

There are several theological ramifications for 21st century discipleship that can be drawn from the interactions of Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, as well as Jesus' discipleship of the twelve and the three. Discipleship can help discouragement and even depression in the work as shown by God providing Elijah with a disciple in Elisha. The interactions of Moses and Joshua along with Jesus' sending out of the twelve shows us that the theology of discipleship is shaped in the context of the mission field which includes both success and failure. Another theological principle produced from these relationships is the responsibility of the disciple-maker to show the disciple the path to spiritual growth in a life of transparency and vulnerability. Finally, the theological study of these three biblical relationships reveals the importance of the teacher spending time with the students, which also includes time in restoring them after they fall.

CHAPTER 3

A LITERATURE REVIEW OF DISCIPLESHIP IN 21ST CENTURY CHURCHES

The purpose of this literature review is to explore the wisdom and experiences of a variety of scholars and practitioners that will give me a greater understanding of discipling my five key leaders.

Changing the Scorecard for Church Growth

One of the influential leaders in evangelical Christianity over the past two decades in regards to church mission and discipleship is Reggie McNeal. McNeal (2009) shares that Christian churches today need to move away from an internal focused, program-based scorecard of success, to a mission focused and people centered evaluation of progress. McNeal (2009) focuses on Christ's method of spending time with the disciples and developing them as leaders and not worrying about the numbers. This connects with many local churches that evaluate their effectiveness by church attendance, baptisms, and giving. Although the internal numbers are valuable for the leadership of a local congregation, there is a need to focus on the mission of reaching the lost through developing disciple-makers internally who will influence others to go with them out to reach the increasingly secular people in western culture. McNeal upholds the importance of making disciple-makers in the local church setting for not only internal spiritual

growth, but also external kingdom growth by sending out missionaries into the local community.

In a similar vein to McNeal's research, Stetzer and Ranier (2010) report a need for changing the scorecard after extensive research of North American evangelical churches. They summarized their research in what they call the transformation loop consisting of three categories with seven elements. The elements include missionary mentality, vibrant leadership, relational intentionality, prayerful dependence, worship, community, and finally mission. I agree with Stetzer and Ranier especially as it relates to the first four elements. Typically, churches deal with facility, membership, and other internal factors, which totally neglect the gospel commission of Jesus Christ to make disciples. Churches need to evaluate and promote a missionary spirit that is fueled by a dependence on a life of surrender to Jesus Christ. This relationship with the Lord and missionary spirit will be manifested through relational intentionality and vibrant leadership that equips and empowers the members to action.

White (1942) says this about the discipleship method used by Jesus:

Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow Me." (p. 143)

Jesus method of evangelism as articulated by White is shared by many contemporary Christian scholars like Reggie McNeal who are placing the focus back on personal relationships and spending time in discipleship that leads to a mature mission mindset where disciples go and fulfill the Gospel Commission of Jesus Christ by making other disciples in their sphere of influence. McNeal and White point the 21st century

church back to the New Testament model found in the book of Acts where the disciples of Christ became disciple-makers and the church grew exponentially.

Discipleship and Spiritual Transformation

In relationship to men's discipleship and its impact on church family, several authors (Hardison, 2007; Templeton, 2010; Wheatley, 2011) share their research findings in this area. They authors share the positive impact of spiritual growth in the personal, family, and societal roles of men. Wheatley, in particular, emphasizes the advantages of the growth of men and their positive impact on the present and future well-being of their children. Hardison points out that there is a void in the prayer lives of men in our society, but there is an openness to seeking and connecting with a higher power in the lives of men.

A classic work of the 20th century which emphatically places emphasis on the importance of discipleship in the Christian life is *The Cost of Discipleship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1959). Mary Vandenberg revisits this classic in an attempt to contextualize the importance of spiritual formation with discipleship in a 21st century setting.

Vandenberg spends extensive effort in this article to give an overview of Bonhoeffer's life and details of *Discipleship* as it relates to the practical living out of theology. She shares how Bonhoeffer fought against the cheap grace mentality of Christianity in Germany during the reign of Hitler and how the theologian called leadership to emphasize the importance of discipleship and full surrender to God as a result of justification.

Vandenberg (2009, p. 348) applies Bonhoeffer's views on discipleship in her conclusion by saying:

Like Bonhoeffer, we must not limit our understanding of the theological task to the casting of doctrinal statements, no matter how important that may be. Especially in the context of seminary education, theology should be done in service to the church first and foremost, not the academy.

VandenBerg (2009, p. 348) goes on to say: “Without the task of transformation in mind, theology becomes just another intellectual pursuit with dubious ends.” She again amplifies that reality of having a discipleship process where there is an emphasis on the spiritual disciplines and having a genuine and surrendered experience with God while still learning doctrinal principles of the faith that are essential in growth. Discipleship comes at a cost just as our salvation has come at a cost in the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary. If salvation cost God everything in heaven through Jesus Christ, then the decision to be disciple will cost us everything on this earth. It is a difficult concept that must be broken down for the new believer, but they need to be supported, as experience will lead them ultimately to that conclusion.

Discipleship Through Relationships

Samra (2003, p. 50) claims that discipleship is a process where a person becomes more like Christ through an entry into salvation and growth into sanctification. According to Samra, there are two components to discipleship which include: teaching about Christ and imitating those who manifest the nature of Christ in their lives and are living out the truths of Christianity. Samra really brings some solid research to a balanced conclusion that there needs to be teaching as well as modeling for new believers in the church. Some shy away from the fact that God calls disciples to be examples of Jesus Christ. Paul called Christians to imitate him not because of his own strength and righteousness, but because Christ was living in and through him. Discipleship gives the disciple-maker an opportunity to reveal God’s light over time.

Samra (2003) concludes his article by stating:

All Christians are disciples and are called to participate in the discipleship process, both by receiving instruction and living out their faith for others to see and imitate. Those who are mature in the faith have the responsibility on the one hand to participate in educating and modeling other believers, and on the other hand, to ensure that their Christ-like character is being passed on to a select few individuals whom God has entrusted to them. (p. 50)

Sumara provides a summary of the Gospel Commission found in Matthew chapter 28. Jesus called his disciples to go and make disciples. Christians have a duty and obligation to go out and not only teach truth, but model it for others who are open to becoming disciple-makers. This means that there must be a commitment on the part of the disciple-maker of time as well as a personal desire to be spiritually growing. The gospel commission is a command from Jesus Christ to every believer to go out in their spheres of influence and show the kingdom of God through their actions. This is important information that I need to incorporate into the curriculum for my three men at Tampa First who are being mentored in order to be disciple-makers.

In the arena of discipleship studies, there are several terms that seem to be interchanged frequently which include, discipling, mentoring, and coaching. Crow (2008) defines discipleship as helping new believers grow in Christ, mentoring as empowering emerging leaders, and coaching as helping mature leaders take the next step. I tend to agree with Crow in these definitions from my own experience in disciple making, mentoring, and coaching. According to these definitions, my relationship with the three men in my project is more defined as mentoring even though there are elements of discipleship depending on the individual. Crow's definitions of terms seem to both complicate and simplify the understanding of working with others toward spiritually mature leadership. It is complicated because there are different levels that people are on

in their spiritual journeys, yet it simplifies the training process because it defines relationships and roles. Regardless, all three are vital in the pathway toward Christian maturity that does not end because there is always room to learn and grow.

Masango (2011) shares some findings in mentorship in South African culture that translates to discipleship in the local church. He connects mentoring with the term coaching and uses the analogy of good parenting as an illustration for the process. He talks about the importance of older and more experienced people in the workplace taking the younger workers under their wings. He also claims that the pressure of productivity in the business world can take away from mentoring because it can be seen as a waste of time in getting to the bottom line profit margins. I see the churches of today falling into the same trap as secular businesses as we strive to get to the bottom line of baptisms, attendance, and revenue. This internal focus can place a real hindrance on mentoring and making disciple-makers as it could be seen as not being productive.

Collinson (2005) describes the nature of discipleship as being relational, intentional, mainly informal, typically communal, reciprocal, and finally centrifugal. She combines these definitions of discipleship into this statement:

Christian discipling is an intentional, largely informal learning activity. It involves two or a small group of individuals who typically function within a larger nurturing community and hold to the same religious beliefs. Each makes a voluntary commitment to the other/s to form close, personal relationships for an extended period of time in order that those who at a particular time are perceived as having superior knowledge and/or skills will attempt to cause learning to take place in the lives of those others who seek their help. Christian discipling is intended to result in each becoming an active follower of Jesus and a participant in his mission to the world. (p. 242)

Collinson (2005) goes on to unpack each item in the definition in her article arriving at several conclusions that lean on the side of relationships and informal learning rather than proclamation and teaching. Her conclusion is that the end result of Christian

discipleship is to lead people to become active followers of Jesus and participants in the mission to the world. It is all about disciples becoming disciple-makers in the world. Churches all too often make the mistake of translating doctrinal studies as the discipleship process when it really is just a piece. There must be relationship building and informal learning through a self-discovery in the spiritual disciplines where people grow in Christ. The church must not throw out the components of biblical knowledge and doctrine in connection with discipleship; it is key to grounding and solidifying faith. There is a balance and I feel that Collinson does a good job of keeping a balance of both formal and informal teaching and learning in the disciple-making process.

McGrath (2011) makes an argument in favor of the discipline of the mind as it is a contrast to what some call a “new atheism” in the world today. This atheism denies the existence of God while at the same time encourages unity and acceptance. McGrath maintains that we must emphasize the intellectual aspect of Christianity in learning truth so that it can be shared with a society who has bought into this new atheism. He shares that some Christians use Paul’s contention that God’s wisdom is foolishness to the world in order to excuse themselves from intellectual conversations in the secular world.

McGrath argues:

Paul insists that Christians ‘have the mind of Christ’ (1 Corinthians 2:16), which he distinguishes from alternative approaches to wisdom already present at Corinth. A ‘Christian mind’ is the distinctive mindset, a way of thinking that is shaped and nourished by the Christian faith. It is not about a quest for exotic or arcane knowledge, nor the exaltation of academic arrogance, nor a lapse into the discredited rationalism of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. It is about allowing the light of Christ to shine upon our intellects, so that the transforming power of God’s grace might renew our minds, and not merely our souls. (p. 136)

I initially was somewhat skeptical of McGrath’s arguments about the intellect as it relates to discipleship in the local church, but then I realized that those who are discipling

must have both the experience of hearing God's voice through a life of surrender and the ability to share their faith with those who are living secular lives in their sphere of influence. This forced me to realize that part of the study in discipleship needs to have components of apologetics and an understanding of our faith as it relates or contrasts western culture worldview. I cannot possibly explore all the questions that an atheist might throw at my disciples, but I can open the window of learning for them and share with them resources so that they can make an intellectual stand for their faith in Jesus Christ.

In relation to modern discipleship in North American congregations, Hirsch and Warren (2010) write about the decline of discipleship in the modern church. They state:

The gospel cannot be limited to my personal healing and wholeness, but rather extends in and through my salvation to the salvation of the world. To fail in discipleship and disciple making is therefore to fail in the primary mission (or "sentness") of the church. And it does not take a genius to realize that we have all but lost the art of disciple making in the contemporary Western church. (p. 24)

I believe that Hirsch et al. hit on a real dilemma in Western societies. Western culture has lost the art of discipleship and disciple making and it has affected the kingdom of Jesus Christ in many different ways. Hirsch et al. (2010) point out that we tame or cage the power of God by making short cuts to discipleship (p. 22). They go on to unveil ways in which we can untame or release God's power in theology, culture, self, and mission. I feel that Hirsch et al. make an important contribution by fleshing out the need for intentional discipleship in the context of our culture without losing our view of God through His Word in the process.

Research in the area of young adult ministries in the Christian churches has yielded some important results for discipleship. Martin (2009) writes about making a discipling difference with young adults. He emphasizes the importance of pointing out

heroes to counteract the bystander effect that is happening with many young adults in local congregations. Martin shares that heroic relationships can come from many different sources who are willing to be authentic, compassionate, and willing to disciple young adults who the writer claims are craving to be mentored in spiritual growth. Martin's article connects with the bystander effect that is happening in many Christian churches today with all generations of both men and women. Heroes come in the form of spiritually mature Christians who are willing to disciple another so that they would have a spiritual awakening in their life and be motivated by the Holy Spirit to not only get involved in the church, but to go and make other disciples.

Another important element that connects with discipleship is developing leadership in the local congregation. Huizing (2011) studies discipleship starting with Jesus in the gospels of Matthew and Mark, through church history and into the realm of contextualization in the 21st century. He focuses on the topic discipleship and ecclesiastical leadership by stating:

As disciples are guided and admonished by those who lead them to become more and more like Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1), great leaders will be cultivated in the image of Christ and their actions will incarnate his presence. In this way, not only will great ecclesial leaders imitate Christ, but also through their actions, Christ himself will be acting through them, providing the greatest leadership of all. (p. 344)

This statement speaks to the importance of discipleship as it relates to making disciples who not only imitate Christ, but who also allow the Savior himself to act through them. This is the recipe for great leadership. Many times, churches select people for leadership positions by a spiritual gifts ministry or a nominating committee process without ever considering the importance of discipleship as a precursor. Huizing's scholarship and insight provides a template for discipleship in the church where willing students are called upon to explore the biblical practices and learn to be more like Jesus

as they behold his character in exercises such as Bible study, journaling, solitude, and fasting to name of few. Huizing's analysis initially struck me as simplistic, but I feel that we can complicate discipleship and leadership development to the point where it becomes so overrun with administration and strategies it becomes easy to forget that it all begins with surrendering our lives to Jesus Christ and training our minds to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit and allowing God's presence to do the work in us.

Discipleship in the Local Church

Sims and Lopes (2011) reflect on the challenge of disciple-making in a cross-cultural context. In their research of Brazilian and West Virginian cultures they derive principles for leadership development and transformational change in a cross-cultural environment. In their abstract, share that often the challenge in the Brazilian culture is too few leaders to disciple a large number of new converts while the opposite is true in the West Virginian culture where pastor-centered mindsets become an obstacle. Sims and Lopes utilize principles of adaptive leadership, missional DNA, and the assistance of international leadership to come up with three organizational principles that they claim to be transferable across all cultural boundaries.

Sims and Lopes (2011) share the findings of Spiritual Leadership, Inc. (SLI) that has developed over a decade of research based on case studies in local churches internationally the concept of the Leadership Incubator. According to Sims and Lopes "The Leadership Incubator is a process focused on the development of spiritual leaders in covenant community for the purpose of bringing greater missional effectiveness" (p. 61). In describing this process in detail, they write:

In the typical Leadership Incubator environment, 6 to 12 leaders spend significant amounts of time together for at least a year. Each session is structured around the

integration of three organizational principles and three operational values that are proving to be transferable across cultural boundaries. The three organizational principles are defined as a) becoming spiritual leaders, b) creating environments of transformation, and c) developing processes/systems that produce fruit. Each of these principles are characterized by three operational values: Loving, Learning, and Leading (L3). (p. 66)

Sims and Lopes (2011) spend most of their article on a case study with Community of Grace Church in West Virginia. There seemed to be a true revival at Community of Grace as they went through the process of the Leadership Incubator that became a catalyst for change and creating a missional DNA (mDNA) in the very fiber of the church. Discipleship became a major part of the church's vision as they began to see outside their walls and the need to disciple new believers into a pattern of spiritual growth and maturity. Admittedly, the Leadership Incubator has not seen as much success in Brazil as they are still contextualizing the process with Bishop Lopes.

In reaction to the findings of Sims and Lopes and along with Spiritual Leadership, Inc., I feel that there has been a void filled in evangelical circles as it relates to discipleship and leadership development in the local church. There are many books that are filled with experiences and opinions but are not proven by solid empirical evidence through research and analysis. Spiritual Leadership, Inc. has hopefully started a trend where others will spend time doing research across cultural bounds to find evidence of practical measures that a church can take in the arena of making disciples and empowering leaders to be disciple-makers. I personally find this research to be vital in my work with mentoring the three men at Tampa First who come from three different cultures and who serve in a church that is represented by over 40 nations around the globe.

In connection to the biblical practices in relation to modern discipleship, James M. Houston tackles the difficult subject of the future of biblical spirituality by looking at its roots and the contemporary barriers that effect its relevance in the local church. Houston talks about the traditional view of discipleship as learning to follow Christ's pattern of self-denial as well as taking up our own crosses. He states: "Human efforts to promote discipleship then become like a parade of 'changing fashions of ministry'" (Houston, 2011, p. 133). According to Houston's findings and opinion, there must be an intentional effort to promote and implement the practices of biblical spirituality when forming disciple-makers. Without the practices of biblical spirituality and following the pattern of self-denial, biblical discipleship would be impossible. This insight is helpful, because there are many different strategies for developing discipleship, but not all follow a pathway in the realm of biblical spirituality.

In step with discipleship in the local church, there are several key influencers that work together to develop spiritual maturity, Bauchman summarizes his study and research on the book of Titus to reveal that there is a three-pronged approach to equipping the generations in the church. He (2011) writes:

Therefore, we see that in each of the three prongs of discipleship in the local church—(1) godly, mature men and women, (2) godly, manly elders, and (3) biblically functioning homes—there's a link, in one way or another, to the ministry of the home and the family shepherd. There is thus a synergy between strong Christian homes and strong churches, with the ministry of the family shepherd serving as an indispensable element in the health, well-being, and future of the church. (Bauchman, 2011, p. 79)

Bauchman's main point is the need for discipleship on different fronts in the church. There must be discipleship with men and women along with key leaders who will in turn bring those valuable principles to their homes. The key in the home according to Bauchman (2011) is the shepherd or the father. Many homes are without a

father in American society so the mother is called upon to be shepherd or the priest along with her other duties. Even in homes with a father figure, the mother often takes on spiritual leadership for family worship and discipling the children in the ways of Jesus Christ. Bauchman has given me another resource and motivation to continue with my three men at Tampa First in our mentoring relationship so that they can be discipling-makers in their homes and with other men in our church. This will create an environment of family health spawning not only new areas of men's discipleship, but also discipleship with women, teens and children.

Along with the theme of integrated discipleship in the local church, Shirley (2008, p. 212) states: "The local church is composed of disciples who should be investing themselves in the lives of other disciples. The process of following Jesus—discipleship—is the curriculum of this Christ-focused school for making disciples." Shirley (2008, p. 212) goes on to say; "Instead of consigning discipleship to a program of the church, we should be magnifying its missional role. The health and strength of a local church hinges on her effectiveness in making disciples." I fully agree with Shirley's argument. I have unfortunately found myself making discipleship a program rather than being at the core of my church's DNA and mission. If a church does not uphold the primary importance of discipleship, it is disobeying Jesus Christ himself as he gave the commission to go and make disciples of all people.

In describing his integrated model of discipleship in the local church, Shirley (2008) writes:

In order to establish once again the primacy of formative discipleship in the local church, I would propose an integrative model for church-based discipleship. It is integrative in the sense that it joins together three essential elements in the formation process: a paradigm for the authentic disciple, the practices of the local church, and

the production systems used to make disciples in the local church context (see Fig. 1). Within this model there is an assumption that churches would use it as a philosophical and theological guide for decision-making and evaluation. (p. 213)

Shirley brings out the importance of the local church being the primary vehicle to make disciple-makers who will disciple others in the faith to grow in spiritual maturity. Although I am starting out with formerly discipling three men at Tampa First, this process will provide a template to be contextualized with other men, women, and young people in the church. There eventually needs to be a paradigm, practice, production of systems in my church so that the leadership and members will understand clearly that discipleship is not just an event or a program, but a way of life at Tampa First that is at the core of our DNA. The detail of each category obviously needs to be worked out with the pastoral staff and then communicated to the church leadership and members at large. Eventually, there will be a need for a full-time staff position that focuses solely on discipleship and holds all the ministries accountable in making it part of their DNA.

Summary

I have learned several key principles as I have researched contemporary Christian scholarship as it relates to discipleship in the local church. I discovered the need to integrate discipleship into the entire fabric of the church. I can begin by mentoring three to disciple other men and also make a difference in their own homes. I have also learned that there is a balance between intellectual knowledge and spiritual experience in the realm of disciple-making and that neglecting either arena can be detrimental to spiritual growth and maturity.

I have discovered that discipleship is not a program or a part of the church mission, but it is the foundation of its DNA and must be placed at the forefront of

everything that is done in the church fulfilling the gospel commission of Jesus Christ. This is not an easy task at Tampa First as some programs and ministries are not aligned with our church vision to “equip and empower to serve.” My study has brought me to the conclusion that there must be alignment over time toward a mission focus that emphasizes making disciples.

Finally, I have learned in this review that leadership and discipleship go together. When discipleship is emphasized in the church, new leadership will emerge and will be ready to be mentored and coached into the next step of their journey towards spiritual maturity.

Comparing the Biblical Theology and Modern Literature on Discipleship

In regards to comparing my theological reflection with my research in contemporary literature, there are several key elements that can be distilled as it relates to discipling my five key male leaders as well as discipling others in the faith. Jesus combined spiritual knowledge with practical experience with the Twelve by sending them out two by two into the villages only to be there for them when they came back with their stories of success and failure. My research in discipleship literature also reveals the importance of releasing others to succeed and even fail while being there to mentor and encourage them. People need to see active examples of disciple-making today just as Elisha, Joshua, and the Twelve needed to see their mentors in action along with their words of counsel. These biblical models of disciple-making must become part of the very fabric of the church which will transcend culture and generational divides all for the sake of God’s mission. This will take time, and there is no replacement for time spent with others in showing them the way to make disciple-makers for eternity.

CHAPTER 4

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE INITIATIVE IN DISCIPLING FIVE KEY MEN

Initiatives and Goals

In the initiative of discipling five key male leaders in the Tampa First church, I will develop a plan where I will select the five key leaders, have an initial meeting to lay the foundation and goals for our meetings, and begin to meet bi-weekly where there is accountability for spiritual growth. In terms of the project implementation, there are several areas of focus in each meeting including but not limited to sharing from their spiritual growth journals and intercessory prayer. Another key component in the implementation will be my availability outside of the groups for individual mentoring.

Developing the Curriculum on Biblical Practices

In terms of curriculum, I want to create opportunities in a safe environment for them to mature into disciple-makers for the kingdom of God. The first piece of the curriculum will be to assign significant amounts of Bible reading for the two-week period between meetings. I have chosen specific daily Bible readings taken from the *One Year Bible Plan* (2004). These readings will give my participants an opportunity to spend time daily in four different passages of the scripture. These will include chapters from the old

and new testaments as well as a chapter in the book of Psalms and a few verses in the Proverbs.

Besides daily Bible reading, I also plan to encourage my key men to journal and reflect on their daily readings and prayer time. The Bible reading and the journaling will be required assignments along with regular attendance and active participation in our meetings. The reading of the personal journals and reflections during our meetings will create a sense of bonding and accountability among the men and encourage them to grow in their walk with the Lord. This journal sharing will also serve as a medium for the group to explore other biblical practices like solitude, retreating, scripture memorization, and fasting.

In the context of exploring different biblical practices, Reardon (2012) talks about the practice of being alone by stating:

If you impatiently expect great gems each time you meet with God, you will be terribly disappointed and lose interest. Instead, it has to be all about simply being with him, the way you would want to be with anyone you love. When you come to him, say something like, “God, I just want to be in your presence because I love you. Tell me anything you want me to know; I’m listening. But if there isn’t anything I need to know right now, just help me to enjoy being with you.” (p. 3)

Reardon’s article emphasizes a very important aspect of spiritual growth that I want to instill in these key men in regards to silence with God. The author mentions the time and information overload in our society, which heightens the importance of the biblical practices of silence and solitude with God. I have personally experienced the benefits of solitude and silence before God. A spiritual mentor who holds me accountable to schedule these times away from the chaos of daily life is coaching me. I want these men to also experience the joy of silence and it is my intent to encourage them to explore this biblical practice.

Houston talks about soul care and the importance of spiritual formation in the post-modern world. Houston (2011) says:

This (the post-modern mindset) implies that left-thinking professional theologians, still affected by the evangelicalism of the Enlightenment legacy, and who present a logical set of posited truths to convince others, will become increasingly irrelevant to the pastoral concerns of post-modernity. (p. 138)

I am not in complete agreement with Houston's view on "left-thinking theologians" as a Seventh-day Adventist clergy who preaches logical truth from God's Word to convince others of His ways and their need to surrender to the Lord. However, Houston makes a valid point in that we must place an emphasis on what he calls spiritual formation in our mentoring because today's individual needs to experience God personally in their lives. I am still a strong believer in the Seventh-day Adventist truth after 20 years of ministry and a lifetime in the faith. Yet, without personal spiritual growth in the biblical practices, I would be struggling today. I want these men to realize the beauty of having intimacy with God through the regular practice of Bible study, prayer, journaling, fasting, and solitude.

Intercessory Prayer

Besides encouraging the group to explore different biblical practices, journal sharing in the group will lead to specific intercessory prayer as weaknesses in character or sins might be shared. Several leading Christian authors in spiritual formation (Ogden, 2009; Clements-Jewery, 2016; Whitney, 2014; Carson, 2015; Brown, 2012) share the benefits of prayer. Their research shows that intercessory prayer leads to a greater connection with God and in some cases according to Brown, benefits to the overall health of the intercessor. I have placed in the curriculum the opportunity to end our meetings with prayer for one another. Each man will pray for the man either to his left or right in

the circle until everyone has prayed. I have found this to be very effective in my past experience with small groups of men as there are things that are divulged in the safety of the group that need to be specifically prayed for before ending the meeting. Prayer is also important because individuals other than possibly clergy do not pray for other people. Vital intercession for one another in the group can evoke emotions from men that some may have not shared with other men in their entire lives. This emotional transparency can sometimes be a key to unlock some deeper issues that could be blocking the Holy Spirit from taking a man to the next level in his spiritual journey.

Developing a Vision for Group Multiplication

Along with the intercessory prayer and exploring different biblical practices, I will also establish a vision for the second generation groups that the five men will eventually facilitate that I have entitled; rules of engagement. In this curriculum, I will encourage my leaders to meet with other men in groups of two to three. Once they reach four, they will split into groups of two where they go out and seek another man to join their discipleship core. Cole (2014) shares in the context of gender-specific triads or life transformation groups, “Simple things multiply easier than complex things. A group of two or three can multiply much easier than a group of ten to 15” (p. 51). Neil Cole has become a pioneer in church planting through life transformation group triads (LTGs). Cole believes that LTGs can be the basic building blocks of new church plants. He claims that the LTGs grow into cell groups that form congregations of groups that finally form critical mass for church planting (p. 53).

In the context of triad multiplication, I will also stress the importance of allowing time for the group to gel for at least six months before multiplying. This is key in

allowing the less mature men in the group to understand the underlying principles of the spiritual growth curriculum, and to experience the blessings that come from having accountability within the safety of the triad. I have experienced groups that get so caught up in multiplication, that they are unable to develop leadership within the confines of the small group. I will stress, however, the importance of multiplication and the need to hive new groups, which goes against our comfort zones of intimacy and familiarity.

Along the lines of small group multiplication, I believe that healthy small groups not only bring quality leadership into the local congregation, but also reproduce into daughter churches. James (2014) states:

This is a major goal of small groups, to enter into community with God and with one another. In literature we find such words as authenticity, openness, and relationships to be synonymous with community. Authenticity is at the very core of real community. Being real to oneself and to others, and not pretending may bring about risk of rejection but is essential for community. (p. 136)

I agree with James that community is a major goal of small groups including my work with the five key men in our local church. Authenticity and openness are a key to success with these men who will eventually start their own groups that will potentially become daughter churches of Tampa First. I believe that this transparency must begin with me as the leader and begin to influence each of the members so that true community and spiritual growth can take place.

Tools of Evaluation

As I go down this journey with the five key men at Tampa First, it is important for me to have a tool to evaluate their progress. I have developed a questionnaire called a life thermometer that will chart the progress of each individual participant at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the 12 months (see appendix A). The

questions on this survey deal with different areas of discipleship ranging from personal devotion with God, quality time spent with family, and even progress in making other disciples. Stetzer and Rainer (2010) surveyed 4000 people and asked about the spiritual lives and level of maturity. The authors discovered the following eight biblical factors that consistently showed up in the maturing believer; Bible engagement, obeying God and denying self, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, building relationships, and unashamed transparency.

Participant Selection

Once I have the curriculum in place, I will begin the process of selecting the five key male leaders. First, I need to find men who I have played a part in their spiritual journeys. These men should be those who I have counseled and even helped through difficult times in their personal and family lives. It is important that these key men have a respect for me as a spiritual leader and possible mentor for their journey as disciples of Christ. I have already targeted several men who have come through our small group ministry at Tampa First. Our small group ministry utilizes life groups that become feeders to growth groups. The life groups consist of different 10 to 13 week courses dealing with parenting, divorce, grief recovery, marriage enrichment, and even personal finances. After the life groups, we encourage the participants to continue in fellowship with one another with growth groups that become more intentional in spiritual growth within the context of their specific areas of need.

The key men who have come out of these groups are either new in the faith or have come back to the Lord after years of backsliding. Some have already met with me in informal gender-specific accountability groups, and one in particular has risen to

become a leader at the Tampa First church. It has been my experience that most of the men interested in group discipleship are those who are newer in the faith as the more seasoned men have experienced a betrayal of their confidence which makes them wary of the process. This does not mean that more mature Christians will not join, but many will join in future generations of groups once they see that there is genuine growth and community in a truly safe environment.

In the context of rising to become disciples out of brokenness, McManus (2000) writes:

Restoring broken lives requires conviction, commitment, and community. Unfortunately, even when the church wants to help, often it assumes it doesn't have the power to heal. We profess that Jesus changes lives, but with broken people we tend to rely on psychotherapy. We'll entrust Jesus with the small stuff, but we refer out the really big problems to Freud. (p. 1)

McManus point about growing from brokenness exemplified by our life groups and some of the key leaders that will be part of my men's group that have grown out of brokenness and disappointment in their lives. Tampa First is beginning to realize the importance of our life groups as many who have experienced financial loss, marital breakdown, and grief over the loss of a loved one can find hope in Christ within the safety of a gathering of others who are dealing with similar issues. I am glad that I have inherited the vision of life groups from my current associate and previous lead pastor who paved the way for the development of men in the congregation. God has given His people the ability to help in the healing process if we would just open ourselves to those who are hurting.

The small group ministry at Tampa First has surfaced potential key male leaders because they were given liberty to share their feelings with transparency in safe

environments. Sikora (2015) talks about the importance of confidentiality in her article dealing with small groups. Sikora (2015) shares:

You want to assure your group members that anything they say belongs to them and neither you nor anyone in the group will share it with anyone, anywhere. The only exception to that is if you believe the group member's life or another life is in danger. Otherwise, they must know they can trust you—and you must be able to trust them. (p. 3)

I agree with Sikora's analysis through my own experience with life and growth groups at Tampa First especially as it relates to men. Typically, men have a harder time sharing their feelings, but become really open to spiritual and emotional growth when given that opportunity in a safe environment. Therefore, most if not all of my key male leaders will come from either a growth group or a group that I have facilitated where there is accountability and open sharing.

Another key factor in selecting these men for this project deals with the fact that they must trust me as their leader and be willing to follow me through this process. There are some who have sought counsel from me and even have participated in groups that I have facilitated in the past who have just not been able to fully trust me and buy into my leadership. Some had personality conflicts with me as a leader while others were blinded by their own personal issues. No matter how gifted and open to discipleship these men might be, they will not be able to be part of the five key leaders. I must have men who have open ears and hearts for me. Fostering these open ears and hearts for my mentoring takes time; my own investment in their personal and church lives. Phone calls, lunches, golfing, bowling, and just being open to stops to my office is key in developing this trust. This might initially sound self-focused, but I cannot pour myself into the lives of other men if they are not open to receive the counsel God has given me for them. I am a vessel

used by God to reflect Him into the lives of these men. They must be teachable and open to learning new ways of connecting with the Lord.

Personal Preparation

In terms of finding men to go on the discipleship journey, I must prepare myself to lead them on their journey of spiritual growth. This means that I must not only tell them how to grow in Christ, but model that growth in my own life. I have already begun this journey by being mentored by a life coach for the past four years. I will share this with my five key leaders and be transparent with them about my personal and even professional journey. I have discovered that no one will follow me if I am not willing to share with them my own personal story of growth not just from the past, but also in the present. I want to share with the men during our time together how important it is to have a mentor while they begin to mentor others.

Powell (2010) states:

This attribute of group life depends on the modeling of the leader. When you are honest in your prayer requests, others feel safer revealing their burdens. When you tell stories of a truth's impact on your life, that truth is more likely to penetrate their hearts, not just their heads. When your disclosures suggest that you are not self-sufficient and that you need to lean on Christ and other believers, people are less likely to live independently and more likely to seek the help that they need. (p. 1)

I agree with Powell that I must be a transparent disciple-maker in the context of mentoring these key leaders. If I do not model transparency taken from my current journey with God, then they will not have a living model of God's grace and forgiveness to follow. Obviously, there are limitations to my transparency being the lead pastor, but transparency is a must in order for these men to mature and become disciple-makers in this multiplication movement.

A Call to Commit and Create Balance

Once the key male leaders are selected, we will have an initial meeting where we review the ground rules and covenant with one another pledges of engagement and confidentiality. This requires me to share with them a covenant that they will agree to follow which includes the curriculum and a commitment to meet bi-weekly. I will lean toward having our group meetings in my office at the church because it is the most centralized location for the men that I am planning to invite. In light of the busy lives of these men, I suggested that we initially meet one hour before or after our life groups on Wednesday evenings. This will make life easier on those men who are actively involved in Wednesday night life groups to keep them from being away from their homes and families an additional night during the week. Swenson (1992, p. 78) shares, “To be healthy, we require margin in at least four areas: emotional energy, physical energy, time, and finances.” Swenson’s definition of margins are those healthy boundaries that are important to balance in life. He also shares that modern progress and technological advancements have challenged these margins necessary in our lives.

In light of Swenson’s comments and my own personal experience, it is important to make sure that our group meetings be balanced and within a reasonable time frame agreed upon by the group. I feel that the bi-weekly Wednesday night meetings should be no longer than one hour in length. This makes it somewhat difficult as there are many areas of need and growth that will most likely be discussed within the group setting. However, having drawn out meetings can be counterproductive as it relates to having balance and margins. One area that must not be neglected in our disciple group dynamic is intercessory prayer for one another. I need to be careful in time management so that

we do not leave little or no time to pray for one another. Prayer is the key that not only makes us feel more connected to each other, but it also opens up the divine power of God to do His work in our lives through the Holy Spirit.

Challenging the Men to Spiritual Growth

I want these men to experience prayer beyond the formalities. Moore (2014)

shares of her experience:

My prayer took the form of singing hymns and songs of praise, sitting, kneeling, standing, hands raised high, or falling on my face before God. We are flesh and blood. We must pray with our bodies. My prayer was also contemplation, meditation, listening to God's voice, sometimes writing letters to God, even emails. Often for evening prayers I would light a candle, sometimes with a Gregorian chant playing softly—the candle and the chant helping to focus my thoughts on him—standing in my often-chilly kitchen late at night, praying to the One who is the light of the world. (p. 11)

It is important for me to create a sense of discovery in the hearts of these five men so that they can have dynamic and even slightly odd experiences with God in the context of prayer and communing with Him. Some people are afraid to branch out and explore different aspects of the biblical spirituality for fear they may enter into the realm of the mystical. I desire to create an environment where these men can explore without condemnation and discover the blessings of dwelling with God. I must not only model and encourage these different approaches to spirituality, but also speak about it from the pulpit and to my church leadership so that there can be a healthy environment for these groups to grow.

In the context of intercessory prayer in small groups, Wheeler (2010) shares these thoughts:

One way to help keep the sharing time from dominating and preventing the group from actually praying is to focus on one person at a time. Have that person share a prayer request and ask the questions that need to be clarified in order to go to prayer.

Then have the group pray over that request until there is a sense that the situation has been covered sufficiently in prayer. Have someone close out that prayer time and then move on to the next person. (p. 3)

I agree with Wheeler's comments in terms of time management and intercession within the group. Our group dynamic will be a bit different in that the requests will come from each individual report of spiritual growth and learning. I am optimistic that as the key men begin to explore the biblical practices on a daily basis, they will be challenged and share them with the group, which will give us an opportunity for intercessory prayer for those specific areas. As stated earlier, I am planning on having each participant pray specifically for the man to the right or left at the end of the meeting. This does not mean that others are prohibited from praying for that participant, but it gives assurance for everyone to be prayed for in a timely manner. I am also open to the possibility of intense spiritual warfare happening in the life of a participant where it is necessary to break from the agenda and lay hands on the one hurting.

Along with praying for one another in the group, I am going to encourage my participants to pray for those in their sphere of influence who could potentially become their disciples. I do not feel that this process is totally linear, but a dynamic Holy Spirit-led process where my key leaders will be praying for and even discipling others in their sphere of influence before they are commissioned to go and start other groups of men. As I shared in my theological reflection, Jesus sent out the twelve disciples even though they were not fully mature as His followers. White states:

No sooner does one come to Christ, then there is born in his heart a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus; the saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart...If we have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, we shall something to tell. (1973, p. 305)

Although these key leaders have already accepted Jesus Christ, White's comment on tasting and seeing God's goodness are appropriate. I cannot stifle the influence of the Holy Spirit working on these men as they grow in God's Word and a more intimate relationship with Him. Therefore, I must encourage these men to follow the Spirit as they practice what I share with them and invest themselves in the lives of others. Briggs (2013) writes:

Small groups build social ties among members, and increase commitment, including financial giving, to congregations. But can they also have a darker side if congregations become so successful in developing prayer and Bible study groups that they lose focus on their mission to serve the world?

Potential Impact

It is key for me to keep a focus on mission as it relates to producing disciple-makers rather than just disciples. If true multiplication happens in the lives of the five men, then they will follow my footsteps and reproduce themselves. This will not only be of benefit for our local congregation, but it could potentially spawn daughter congregations that are based on these gender-specific discipleship groups. Tampa First can still birth daughter churches that have life group components as mentioned earlier, but they will have an extra element of these discipleship groups which will bring a more enhanced spiritual growth within the church that will expand to the local mission field.

McNeal (2009, p. 75) shares in the context of changing the scorecard in the local church: The major thrust of recrafting this part (people resources) of the scorecard is to shift from supporting a member culture to developing a missionary culture... a missionary culture focuses on the community and its needs, on the opportunities outside the church." I believe that these five key male leaders can be the start of a missional revolution that will go far beyond the walls of Tampa First, beyond their family units, and into the

outside community resulting in apostolic churches that thirst for reaching the lost and discipling them for the kingdom of God. It is nearly impossible to totally change the culture of an old, large church like Tampa First, but it is possible to birth daughter congregations and bring renewed health and vigor to the mother.

Cole (2010) states:

A strong church begins with a strong disciple who makes more strong disciples, who then go on to make more, and so on and so on and so on. This has always been the Lord's intention for His church. Paul tells us that a strong Christian is a reproducing Christian. A strong church, likewise, is a reproducing church. (p. 29)

I agree with Cole and it is my intent to pour myself into these five key male leaders to create an optimal environment of accountability where they can flourish and grow strong in the Lord and go and make more disciples that are strong in the Lord. These men will hopefully begin their own discipling groups in triads that will multiply within our church and expand beyond our church into our surrounding communities. It is difficult to talk to a 130-year-old church about multiplying other congregations when they only see the need to preserve their own and keep the lights on through the local church budget. They need a tangible representation of incarnational growth that reaches out and makes disciple-makers for Jesus Christ. Hopefully, these key male leaders will help in this change process for the mother church.

Group Dynamics Outside of the Meeting Time

Along with the internal dynamics of the bi-weekly meetings with my key male leaders, I believe that it is also important for us to bound periodically outside of the group in some agreed upon entertainment. I will allow the men to come up with plans for our out of meeting activities that could include such things as bowling, target shooting at the local gun range, paint ball, and even going to a professional sporting event in the Tampa

Bay area. I will set a goal of at least one bonding activity for the group every three months to replace our bi-weekly meeting and give us new avenues to connect with one another. This should allow for the group to connect socially enhancing the intimacy and transparency when back in our regular meetings.

Besides these quarterly activities, I will make myself available to these five key leaders for individual discipleship, counseling, and coaching. I must pour myself into these men, as they will encounter difficulties on their journey to spiritual maturity.

Huizing (2011) states,

Discipleship, to the extent that it is an imitation of Christ, is the means of leading others. Within different contexts and traditions, this may look different, but its goal remains the same—becoming like Christ in such a way that we incarnate his body in a physical, visible, and tangible manner. (p. 344)

I agree with Huizing's comment. I will mentor a group of men from different cultures and backgrounds which reflects the diversity of our church. It is imperative that I create an atmosphere where the life of Christ can be lived and reflected to others.

My Leadership Role

Huizing's research in the gospels and in the history of the church brings out a very important role for me to play in the discipleship of these men. I must imitate Jesus Christ in my life so that these men will also imitate Christ in their lives. Therefore, I must be available to these men not only in our bi-weekly meetings, but also during others times when they possibly need more one on one support so that I can reflect Jesus Christ to them. Hopefully, they will also see Jesus Christ revealed through me in my leadership of the Tampa First church where they are participating as leaders or participants in given ministries. It is a daunting task, but pouring myself into these key leaders and reflecting

Jesus Christ to them is a key for them to imitate the incarnate Christ through their lives of discipleship and ultimately in making other disciples for the kingdom.

In the context of the empowering these key leaders to grow and become disciple-makers for the kingdom of God, it is important for me as the lead pastor at Tampa First to promote a shift in our focus from programs to people. McNeal (2009, p. 100) states in contrast to a participation driven church: “In a people development culture, the key issue is maturation. Are people growing in every aspect of their life? Are they becoming more like Jesus? Are they blessing the world as the people of God?” I have been working on changing the scorecard at Tampa First for several years, but it can be a difficult task for a larger church that always was told from the conference level that success is measured in giving, attendance, and participation. Fortunately, our local conference is working on ways to begin to transition the local church evaluation scale from participation to a spiritual maturation model. There are still challenges as change is never easy for many. I believe that the multiplication of gender-specific discipleship groups within the body can help change the culture and maybe even change the way we evaluate our success in God’s mission field.

As I personally prepare to go through this journey with the five men, I am planning to add another level of accountability in my personal life that will be an accountability vehicle for me to grow with some of my pastoral peers in the area. My life coach happens to be my superior in the ministry, which can be a limitation to my sharing and vulnerability. Even though I will be transparent in the project group, I must be careful as I am the “disciple-maker” and the men are members of my congregation. I

have found two pastors who are willing to join me in a peer group triad that can give me an opportunity to be held accountable and grow personally and professionally.

In conclusion, the discipleship process for my five key leaders will involve continued spiritual growth on my part as these men will be learning as I show them through my own experiences in the present as well as the past. The curriculum will be designed to create an environment where the men can grow closer to God through experiencing different biblical practices outside of our meetings as well as bonding with one another through the bi-weekly agenda within the group context that includes intercessory and prayer, sharing, and spiritual accountability. Ultimately, this spiritual growth will lead to a multiplication of other gender-specific groups that could possibly become the building blocks for new congregations.

CHAPTER 5

THE NARRATIVE OF THE INITIATIVE

IMPLEMENTATION

The Implementation Process

The group of five key male leaders began to meet on a bi-weekly basis in my office at the Tampa First Seventh-day Adventist church in January of 2015. It was difficult to work out the schedules for all the men to meet together and we needed to change the days around to finally get into a routine that would accommodate the group. We initially met on Saturday afternoons immediately after the church service. Eventually we decided to meet every other week when some of our youth were in Pathfinders and Adventurers, which helped some of the men in the group who had children in these church auxiliaries. During our first few months of meeting, one participant needed to step away for personal reasons leaving me with four key leaders in the group. Finally, we moved our meetings away from the church to a Barnes and Noble on Wednesday evenings which was more centrally located for most of the men during the summer months when the Pathfinder and Adventurer clubs were finished for their fiscal year.

In the context of having a group of five key leaders, Ogden (2010) states:

It is my contention that a necessary and pivotal element in providing the motivation and discipline to grow self-initiating, reproducing, full devoted followers of Jesus comes only through personal investment. The motivation and discipline will not ultimately occur through listening to sermons, sitting in a class, participating in a

fellowship group, attending a study group in the workplace or being a member of a small group, but rather in the context of highly accountable, relationally transparent, truth-centered, small (three or four people) discipleship units. (p. 55)

I obviously agree with Ogden in regards to the dynamics of the group being smaller and having high accountability in the context of transparency in the relationship. Ogden's comment on being truth-centered is important, but a group heavy in doctrine could possibly be a distraction from the accountability and personal reflection on the spiritual disciplines that are being developed. I am not opposed to discussing truth as it comes up in our personal reflection, sharing, and spiritual growth, but it must be a fruit in the context of the relational application to God's Word rather than the main course.

Curriculum Success and Challenges

In relation to the internal group dynamics, we began by using the *One Year Bible* Online (1996-2015) as our Bible guide. Participants were encouraged to choose any version they preferred and follow the plan of Bible reading which included passages from the Old Testament, New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs daily. The men were to keep a daily journal of reflection and life application as they read through the Bible passages. Along with journaling their Bible reading, the men were also encouraged to spend time daily in prayer and write down some thoughts and reflections that came from their meditation with God during the day. Initially, the meetings consisted of our group sharing what we learned and experienced from our prayer and study time with God.

Admittedly, the most difficult aspect of these initiatives was the reflective journaling. It was difficult for most of the men to implement the practice of keeping a journal of their thoughts and reflections that were really ideas and even words that God was giving to them. I began to realize that the real struggle had to do with time. Most of

the participants would listen to the Bible readings on their way to work on their phone apps. Some even listened to the passages several times during the day in proportion to the length of their daily commutes. They could pray in the morning and evening at home as well as spend time talking with God and listening to His voice during their travels. Journaling, however, required a discipline that called for focus and it could not be done while driving. Some attempted to start journals, but only one man really allowed it to become a habit in his life and even then, he struggled with carving out the time consistently. It was clear that the men knew it was important to journal and reflect on God's voice, but the cares and frantic schedules of daily life kept most of them from truly making it a productive discipline.

In connection with disciple-making and spiritual growth, Barna (2000) comments:

True discipleship creates Christians who aggressively pursue spiritual growth rather than passively experience spiritual evolution. It spans individuals who develop renewed lifestyles instead of believers who mechanically check off completed assignments on a developmental agenda. (p. 18)

I initially wanted the key leaders to experience spiritual growth through different biblical practices. I agree with Barna in his assessment of discipleship happening when people actively pursue connection with God which leads to renewed lifestyles. I would take this one step further in saying that renewed lifestyles naturally take shape, as an individual grows closer to God through different disciplines. Reflective journaling was a practice that really helped me in my journey and I hoped that it would catch on with the group. Personality does play a huge role in how one reflects on God's word. Some write with pen or pencil, some type on a computer, while others draw pictures on paper or even in journaling Bibles. No matter what approach, I hoped that journaling would

accompany Bible reading and prayer as part the daily ritual for these men. In reality, this journaling was the biggest hurdle for my participants.

Accountability Questions

As time progressed, one of the participants suggested that we have a more tangible gauge for our spiritual development. This man was in another discipleship group that I facilitated where we used accountability questions adapted from the Cole's (2014). After prayer and discussion, the group decided it would be beneficial to use eight questions of accountability as part of our bi-weekly meetings. The questions discussed areas in our personal lives such as sexual purity, personal and family relationships, anger management, financial integrity, addictions, hearing to God's voice, and being a testimony for God in the lives of others. (See appendix A for the complete questionnaire). Obviously, these questions were a deviation from my initial plans of accountability for this project, but I could not bring myself to dampen the organic growth and group decision-making that was taking place. This development of direct accountability questions brought a fresh dynamic to our group and I began to see the men have a newfound intensity to grow closer to the Lord.

In the context of accountability questions embracing natural tension in the small group setting, Donahue and Robinson (2009) share:

Small groups cannot thrive by focusing on either end of the continuum. They cannot choose friendship over accountability, kindness over confrontation, task over community. Rather, effective life-giving small groups must embrace both ends of the continuum, in healthy opposition, and walk the tightrope between authentic community and life change. (p. 21).

I agree with the authors in that we must embrace the tension and even create tension in order to have results on what they call the tightrope continuum of growth in

small group community. My key leaders enjoyed coming together to pray and to talk about their walk with God, but they wanted more tension, more accountability to mingle with their friendships. Out of this bold move, there were times when we called each other out for behaviors that were detrimental to our walks with God and our witness to others in our spheres of influence. Sometimes one was called out for making excuses for a particular weakness or failure, but in a way where that man knew the group who cared enough to confront rather than gloss over issues would support him. By walking across this tightrope of tension, our group began to form more tight-knit bonds that went beyond our group settings.

As the accountability questions brought more intimacy within our group propelling spiritual growth, we all began to experience trials in different ways. Family, health, job, addiction, marriage, and even church issues started to consume our lives. Finally, we decided that bi-weekly meetings were too infrequent as some of us were becoming lax in our motivation for spiritual growth and we began to meet on a weekly basis. This change of strategy brought a new boost to our group and there was a greater effort to draw closer to the Lord through the different biblical practices.

It was very important for us to emphasize the importance of confidentiality especially when the accountability questions were added to the group. All of the men in the group knew and trusted one another. It was imperative that I stressed how any leaking of private information from the group could be a potential fatal blow to our community. Gladen (2011) comments on this topic by saying:

Many people have a fear of intimacy. They don't want to open up with others and risk the vulnerability that comes with honest and transparent relationships. To combat this, one of the strict rules you must drive home to your group leaders and group members is that what is said in the group stays in the group. People also need

to know that they will not be forced to share anything they do not want share...As the members move through the studies and begin to form relationships, the sharing will occur naturally. (p. 150)

I agree with Gladen in regards to forcing people to share within the small group context. I made it clear with the men that this was not forced confession time with the questions of accountability. Over time, the men gained even greater trust for one another and the group dynamics bringing most to the point of sharing points of weakness and even sin in their lives. These sharing times of confession in the context of answering the questions of accountability became a huge breakthrough for some in the group who found hope in the Holy Spirit working through godly men who were interceding for them and their difficulties. Several in the group who grew up in the Seventh-day Adventist faith where overwhelmed and could not believe that this could actually take place in their church.

Changing the Bible Reading Curriculum

Another challenge that we began to face was that some were getting behind in their Bible reading. Since we were using the *One Year Bible Online* (1996-2015), it was hard to skip passages as they all built upon one another in the goal of reading the entire Bible in a 12-month period. We decided to move away from this method of study and gravitated toward reading multiple chapters of the Bible on a weekly basis following Cole's (2014) template. In this strategy, Cole maps out a plan where 20-30 chapters of the Bible are read every week and if there is not 100% completion, then the entire group reads the passages again until everyone finishes the assignment in the same seven-day period. We decided to curb the total number of chapters from 20-30 to 15-20 as we were also working with other biblical practices like journaling and solitude during the week.

There was a learning curve that took place, and many times we read the same chapters for several weeks in a row. Sometimes we would read a book of the Bible that only had five chapters and would read those four or five times over the week. If we did not have 100% completion then we would read the chapters again until there was harmony in the group. This created a sense of camaraderie among the group and we learned new concepts about God as we read the passages over again.

Prayer and Intercession

Another way in which the group began to grow closer to one another is our prayer time at the end of our sessions. I called upon each man to pray for the one either to his left or to his right specifically interceding for him on the issues that were brought up in the accountability question responses. These times of prayer were powerful as we at times would lay our hands on one another and begin to become emotionally involved in the hurt, the joy, the defeats, and the wins of one another. We were walking in one another's moccasins and it was comforting to be yoked together with Christ in intercession. This dynamic was probably the most important piece in solidifying our bond as brothers. It was difficult for me to manage our time to make sure that these seasons of prayer were not rushed, as we wanted to talk about God speaking to us through His Word as well as the questions of accountability.

Even though we did not intentionally get together every three months for a social gathering as I initially planned, I began to notice how our families would gravitate toward one another and even get together more frequently. Some of the men began to call one another for prayer or just support during the week. Others would go play golf or just hang out together and talk at a local café or on the phone. In the midst of a driven society

filled with shallow relationships via social media, we began to forge lasting relationships with one another that were different than what typically takes place between men. Walton (2014) states:

Small groups can function for people like family. As people get to know each other over time and build an atmosphere of trust, they relax with each other and are prepared to reveal more about themselves. Relationships built in a small group are often extended through other contacts – telephone calls, meeting for coffee, sharing meals, or simply bumping into each other in the street or supermarket – and friendships form. (p. 73)

I agree with Walton and his comments on the extension of relationship through different contacts. I found members of our group talking about how they or their families got together for cookouts over the weekend. Some mentioned that they talked with one another on the phone about a particular situation or even just to hang out and talk about the day. I began to see real bonds of friendship and intimacy between the men in the group that extended far beyond our meeting time. This became important as most in the group experienced trials in their lives over the 12 months and realized that they were not alone and could be just one phone call or even one lunch meeting away from getting solid counsel and help.

Personal Challenges With Accountability Questions

Another challenge that I faced as the group facilitator is transparency with the questions of accountability. I knew that if I did not lead the way in being transparent with the questions of accountability, the men would also be apprehensive in sharing their failures during the week. After much prayer, I made the decision to be transparent and share with the group about my relationships, my spiritual walk, and even the temptations that I faced. I obviously needed to be careful in regards to confidentiality with the church

as the lead pastor so I tried to keep the questions in relation to my personal and family life. It was amazing how my transparency became transformational not only for the group, but also for my own spiritual walk with the Lord. The men began to open up and share the deepest pain as well as the temptations that they faced every week. We began to see the Holy Spirit working in each of our lives and true victory over sin happened with each of us in the group. As we became more open in sharing with the group, it became apparent that our confession time with God became more sincere and specific, giving the Spirit room to work as the blood of Jesus removed the clutter.

Along the lines of senior pastors being involved in small group ministry, Stanley (2009) shares these words:

Whenever I talk to senior pastors about their small group ministries, I always ask about their personal small group experiences. The majority of the time – and I mean the *vast* majority of the time – it turns out that the pastor is not actively participating in a group. At that point I say something rude. I think it is hypocritical for a pastor to champion something he isn't willing to participate in himself... Groups really don't impact a local church until they become part of the churches culture. And that begins with the senior leadership. (Stanley & Willits, p. 14)

I truly experienced this during the 12 months in working with the five key leaders in our small group. It was a challenge to carve out time to be at the group with all my responsibilities as the lead pastor and largest Florida Conference church in the Tampa Bay region, but it was essential in the growth of the group and in my own personal and professional development. It was not enough to be physically present at the meetings, I needed to participate rather than just lead the group as the authority. In becoming a transparent leader through the accountability questions, I began to see the others become more open and follow my example as a servant leader willing to come to their level and grow with them. I feel that it would have been impossible to sustain spiritual growth and

dedication to the group if I would not have become one of the guys who needed them for my own development.

Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger are influential church growth leaders who also agree with Stanley on having the church leadership participating in small groups in the church.

Stetzer and Geiger (2014) share:

So we are small group leaders and practitioners every week. Our desire is to serve you by helping you see group life lived out more effectively and fruitfully. We share as pastors, researchers, and small group leaders because we are convinced-that small group life matters. Church leader, your groups matter. (p. 2)

Along with leading by example, I have come to find that these questions of accountability helped with spiritual maturity because it went beyond academics and the traditional classroom setting. Murrow (2011) shares:

We cannot expect men to come to maturity in Christ in the classroom environment. Although reading, study, sermons, and classes can help, these academic exercises cannot penetrate to the hidden places in a man's heart. But discipleship can, because it's teaching by example. Christ did not hand out a study guide; He demonstrated a life pleasing to God...Men are changed by what they experience, not necessarily by what they are told. (p. 34)

I agree with Murrow based on my experience with the five key leaders in our discipleship group. The accountability in regards to Bible reading, prayer, and journaling really opened up the men to share how they were applying these disciplines into their daily lives. The other accountability questions were really dependent upon their connection with God through the spiritual disciplines. In fact, several of the men expanded even further and explored the practice of fasting when they really needed to connect with God during times of crisis in their lives. I feel that my leadership and transparency with the ups and downs of my own spiritual journey really helped the men to see that their walk with God was a work in process just as it was in my own life.

Authority in the Group

Although I tried to keep myself from being the “authority” in the group, I needed to own that fact that I was the pastor and the leading catalyst in the group. There were times where I was called to guide the accountability process in a more direct way when one of our men was clearly walking on a path away from God’s plan. Frazee (2013) states:

In the typical American Christian small group, we love to use the word *accountability*. But if we are precise in our definitions, we really don’t have accountability; we only have *disclosure*. A group member is often willing to disclose personal struggles and decisions, but there usually is no invitation to challenge the choices or to hold the person accountable to an objective standard. True accountability calls for appropriate and wise use of authority and leverage. (p. 42)

I agree with Frazee’s statement as it relates to the typical Christian small group in the United States. The notion of confession without accountability in a “safe” environment does not create the opportunity for a leader or even group members to frankly call one to step up and make righteous choices. Frazee’s points out the importance of having a leader or authority figure in the group. I agree that there needs to be a group leader, but it is the leader’s responsibility to grow other leaders so that there will be collective wisdom. Even though I was the leader for men of valor, I cannot remember a time where I was the sole voice when one of the members were going astray in their actions and decisions. It is important to have empowering leadership in the group if the goal is discipleship and multiplication.

Spiritual and Emotional Health in the Group

The sharing and relationship building along with the exploration of different biblical practices, began to create spiritual and emotional health in our group. Scazzero shares:

Despite all the emphasis today on spiritual formation, church leaders rarely address what spiritual maturity looks like as it relates to emotional health. For this reason, our churches are filled with people who remain emotionally unaware and socially immature. Sadly, I can think of a number of non-Christian people who are more loving, balanced, and civil than many church members I know (including myself!). (Scazzero & Bird, 2010, p. 18)

I agree with Scazzero regarding emotional health in the church. I find all too often emotional immaturity in the Seventh-day Adventist Church due to a lack of emphasis on relationships and a heavy dose of doctrine. I am a strong believer in biblical truth in the context of applying God's Word in our personal lives with family and friends. This is why I believe our men's group created a holistic approach to health as we grew spiritually as well as emotionally because there was safe place to share our feelings. Every week there were wide ranges of emotions expressed like joy, sadness, and even anger within the group which as therapeutic to most of us whether we were sharing or listening.

In the context of deepening accountability and emotional health, I began to see that our relationships with our wives and female friends began to flourish. One man in our group was engaged and married during our 12 months to a woman in the church while another started a relationship with a woman that is still growing today. Several of us were helped with the counsel and prayers of the group relating to honoring and understanding in our important relationships. There were times when I even shared with the group that I damaged my wife with my words and received prayers of intercession to be more sensitive to her needs. Others went through serious challenges in their marriages, but God used this group to be a place to talk and to pray about these life situations. In essence, this men's group could be viewed as a Holy Spirit led therapy sessions for those who are open about their brokenness to find healing in Christ.

In the context of small group life, Stetzer and Geiger (2014, p. 2) state: “In a world that is pushing against community, the church must push for authentic community. We have to work to keep the values of the world out of the church body. The fact is that the world’s values are not the values of the people of God.” True discipleship generally happens in small groups. Authenticity was the key in our valor group as we became more comfortable in sharing our successes and failures in lives and in our walks with God. As our group studied the Bible and grew in different spiritual disciplines, God’s values began to grow in our lives.

Along the lines of deepening accountability within a small group setting, Arnold (2010) states:

Since we learn best in relationship, we most effectively learn to be disciples that way. But disciples produced through loving community in modern churches are too rare... We need a community of fellow disciples who can help us learn to live a life transformed by the Holy Spirit.... Without community in which we can learn, practice, fail, and eventually move out as agents of change, we are left without a secure foundation. (p. 25)

I agree with Arnold through my experience with our group. The men were allowed to learn, practice, and even fail in their attempts to grow closer to God and be more holistic in their relationships with others. Our group offered a safe place for the men to come back from the weekly battlefield of life and share the victories and defeats. I believe that God used each man to be change agents in life transformation under the power of the Holy Spirit. God’s Word was uplifted, prayer was encouraged, and other biblical practices like journaling and fasting were promoted which all helped in our walk with the Lord and our relationships with others outside the group. Even though we all struggled at times with consistency in the biblical practices, we helped each other to grow in a nurturing community. I would take Arnold’s comments one step further by saying

that true and lasting discipleship cannot happen without an intimate relational community that fosters healthy accountability.

Accountability With our Families

Another sensitive area of challenge began to surface in the lives of these key leaders as we shared our challenges in connecting with our wives and children. We began to see the need grow in the biblical position of priest in the home that meant we needed to take an active leadership role in family worship as well as in the spiritual growth of each family member. We challenged one another to have monthly date nights with our kids and weekly date nights with our wives and significant others. Even though we held each other accountable for these events, many struggled to be consistent with them because of their busy lives. Growth did occur in some of the men as it related to increased connection interaction with their children and stepping up with family worship.

In the context of leadership in the home, Blackaby and Blackaby (2011) state:

Wise leaders schedule regular, quality time with their families. They are intentional about spending times with their spouse. They record their children's special events on their calendars well in advance and then guard those times from any encroachment. They protect the privacy of their home and avoid bringing work home with them if possible. Wise leaders strive to spend mealtimes with their family and refuse to submit to the tyranny of the telephone (or television). (p. 259)

Blackaby and Blackaby bring a new angle to leader development that connects with a balanced home life. Personally, it was difficult for me to keep my work as lead pastor out of the home, but our group became a great source of accountability for me to spend quality time with my wife and three boys. I was transparent when asked the accountability question that related to being honoring and understanding in my important relationships. At times, I would grade myself a five or lower on a scale of 1 to 10 with the higher number being better. This transparency not only helped in my development,

but it also helped the other men in the group to begin to make changes in their schedules to prioritize family life. For some in the group, this reprioritizing family life became a stepping-stone in their development as leaders and disciples-makers.

Premature Group Multiplication

After nearly six months of meeting together, two of the four remaining men shared that they wanted to start their own groups. By this time, we had named our group *men of valor* and it was catching some momentum through word of mouth with others in the church. I had reservations about starting new groups before the 12 months were complete, but I decided that this could be part of the process of multiplication, which is the ultimate goal. I was excited to learn that there were several key leaders from Tampa First who were more than willing to join with my second-generation leaders. I retained two of our original members while the other two started their own groups. One of my five actually wanted to start a young adult group and invited three men to join him. Two of the three took root and life transformation began to take shape in their lives. In fact, one young adult actually came to my office and thanked me for starting the groups. In the midst of this multiplication, the one original member who stepped away came back and became a co-leader with one of the new groups. I now had the original five men of valor back in three different groups.

Along the lines of group multiplication, Earley and Dempsey (2013) share:

Start from the very first week. Describe the fact that one of the purposes of the group is to make disciples who will make disciples. It exists to raise up leaders who will be sent out to lead new groups. At least monthly, pray in the group about the new group to be birthed from this group. Remember, people are down on what they are not up on. Keep the group informed of the plans and progress of each step along the way. (p. 170)

I definitely agree with Earley and Dempsey that the purpose of a discipleship small group is to grow and birth new groups of potential disciple-makers. I shared with the key leaders that we would eventually birth new groups after the 12-month training period. The excitement from these leaders as they noticed their life-change and spiritual growth became infectious and they went out and shared this with their friends inside and outside of the Tampa First setting. I decided to let three of the key leaders loose to start their own groups feeling that I did not want to dampen their zeal in disciple-making.

In the context of the importance of small groups growing in the church, Joy and Shelton (2014) quote Pastor J.D. Greear:

Our small group leaders are our ground war (infantry), helping to apply the Word to broken areas in the lives of our people in ways I cannot do from the pulpit...It is in the small groups that we empower for evangelism, that we hold people accountable, that we inculcate spiritual disciplines, that we develop mentoring relationships. In small groups, the Spirit is at work – exposing sin and knitting the body together in love and community. In small groups we mobilize our people to minister to the brokenness of our community. We even send out many short-term mission trips through small groups. In other words, in small groups, we make disciples. (p. 163)

I began to see what Greear was experiencing in his church with small groups. I saw the influence that the key leaders began to have on others in the body. The accountability and confession of sin combined with growing in the biblical practices created a desire for the men to branch out and birth new groups with other men. I began to see that these men of valor could possibly be change agents that could infect the Tampa First church with principles of discipleship.

In relation to the group wanting to change the structure by starting new groups, Cloud and Townsend (2003) share this statement in the context of small group facilitation:

Listen to the protests (of the group), but don't take them personally. Change what is reasonable to change, but *don't remove needed structure just because it annoys*

someone. You may be helping that person – and the group – learn a great deal about lovingly and gently holding to a firm value... The group needs to take responsibility for the structures. Give the members permission to speak up to each other and hold each other accountable. (p. 139)

I was definitely challenged with the structure of the men's group when the participant wanted change. I knew that it could possibly create some difficulty for the other members even though it would ultimately benefit spiritual growth if accepted. I also had the challenge of trying to stay on task with my project parameters and was concerned about the effects this might have on the results. I felt that the move was potentially premature, but I also did not want to stop the potential leaders from spreading their wings and sharing this concept with other men who desired to be part of our group. I agree with Cloud and Townsend in keeping the structure but allowing the group to have discussion and ownership. Fortunately, the man who brought up the new wrinkle of change was not trying to buck my authority but wanted genuine growth for the group. The topic was discussed as previously mentioned, and we made the collective decision to adjust for a second generation of groups. The same process can be said for our approach in adding the accountability questions, moving from the church to Barnes and Noble, as well as changing our time from bi-weekly to weekly meetings.

In connection with this change dynamic of multiplication within our group, Putman, Krause, Willis, and Guidnon (2010) state:

As we commission our spiritual parents to their ministry, they become our peers in disciple-making. They are now making disciples without depending on our direct leadership. We move out of the way so these new parents can rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance... We must get out of the way and allow God to work in the spiritual parents we are releasing. This creates healthy disciple-makers. (p. 140)

Even though I was apprehensive in regards to releasing three of my key leaders to start their own groups, my actions agreed with Putman and the other authors. These men

needed to lead their own groups of men to multiply disciple-makers or spiritual parents who would in turn do the same creating exponential growth. I do understand the authors' point of getting out of the way, but it was imperative for me to mentor and encourage these men from the sidelines. I needed to allow my new leaders to experience the success and failures of making new spiritual leaders. The formation of these new groups created a peer dynamic with me and the leaders that was different than our connection when we were in one group as the authors above bring to light. I believe that the valor group gained a new respect for the process and me as they attempted to create continuity and commitment in the hearts of the new participants.

Multiplication Challenges

With this multiplication came a new set of challenges as I worked with the two men in my original group while trying to encourage and equip my new leaders in the new groups. Unfortunately, the initial surge of excitement began to wane as we all discovered the difficulty of influencing men to commit to the valor concept for an extended period of time. I became busy with other church and personal duties and began to make assumptions about the second-generation groups without really spending time with the leaders. Even my own group began to stray as the two men remaining had a hard time meeting as the others were missed leaving a void in the group.

In connection to small group multiplication, Kreider (2010) states:

Encouraging each small group to multiply is a goal to encourage; however, we do not make it a requirement...Goals are important, but they must be birthed by the Holy Spirit and attainable. The key to the timing of multiplying groups is when new leaders have been called by God and trained to take on this new responsibility. (p. 113)

Looking back on the dynamics of our group, it would have been wise to encourage the group of key leaders to stick together for the full 12 months not just for the sake of my project because there were some gaps in training and commitment from all parties including myself to take on the task of multiplication. The good news is that three of the five key leaders did get back together near the end of the 12 months and began to meet and grew together with the hope and goal of starting new men of valor groups in the near future.

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION AND LEARNING

Methods of Evaluation

In the process of evaluating the progress and growth of the five key leaders, I decided to use four different tools. First, I created a questionnaire that I called a Life Thermometer that would be administered at the end of our 12 months. Secondly, I evaluated the observed commitment to the process during our time together. I also charted the participants' growth as church leaders. Finally, I monitored the growth of the participants based on my personal interaction with them.

The Life Thermometer

To evaluate the progress and growth of the five key leaders, I developed an evaluation questionnaire at the end of our 12-month journey for them to self-evaluate their development in key areas. These questions touched on areas dealing with spending daily time with God, exploring different biblical practices, hearing and following God's voice, and sharing faith with family and those in their spheres of influence (See Appendix B). My goal was to see how engagement with God through different biblical practices would naturally affect the relationships the five key men would have with others.

These questions from the Life Thermometer were a compilation of my personal experience with men's group, my study of the biblical stories in my theological

reflection, and my research of modern literature dealing with discipling others. Several authors in my literature review talked about the importance of balancing the theology of discipleship with the practical elements which ties hand in hand with Jesus’ example of teaching and showing. As I quoted earlier, Blackaby and Blackaby (2011, p. 259) share; “Wise leaders schedule regular, quality time with their families.” Here is a balance that must be recognized in our society where the pressures of keeping our marriages and families in tact are key while still being missionaries for God. Arnold (2010, p. 25) says; “Since we learn best in relationship, we most effectively learn to be disciples that way.” The Life Thermometer is a tool that tries to find growing points with disciple-makers in both the private and public realms of ministry

The figures 1-5 describe the self-evaluated growth or decline of each of the five key leaders after the 12-month period in the 10 key areas of their lives.

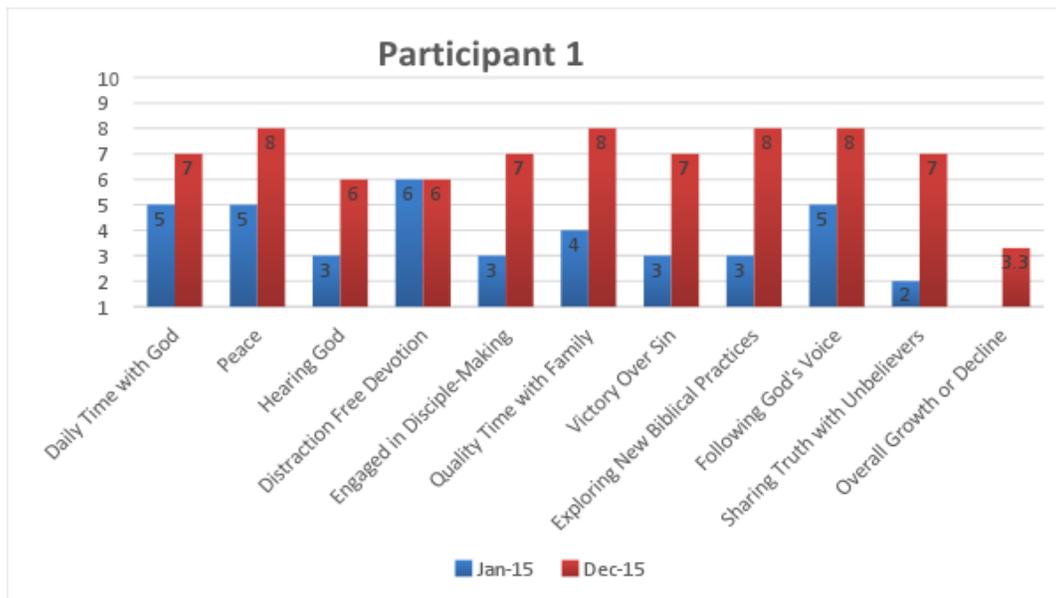


Figure 1. Participant 1.

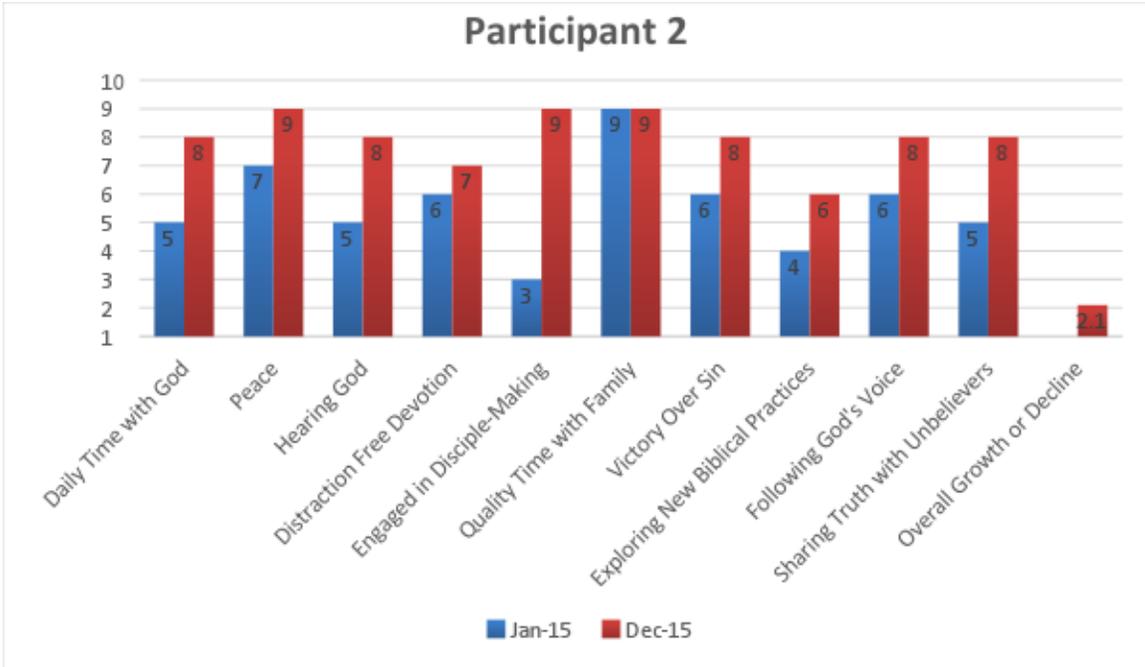


Figure 2. Participant 2.

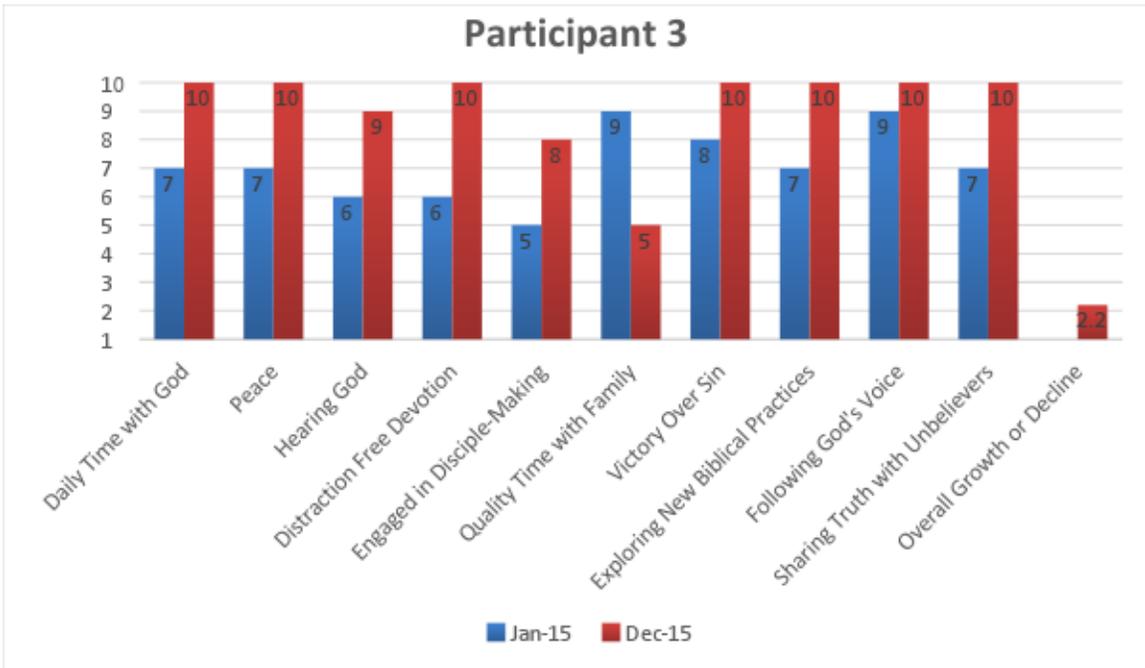


Figure 3. Participant 3.

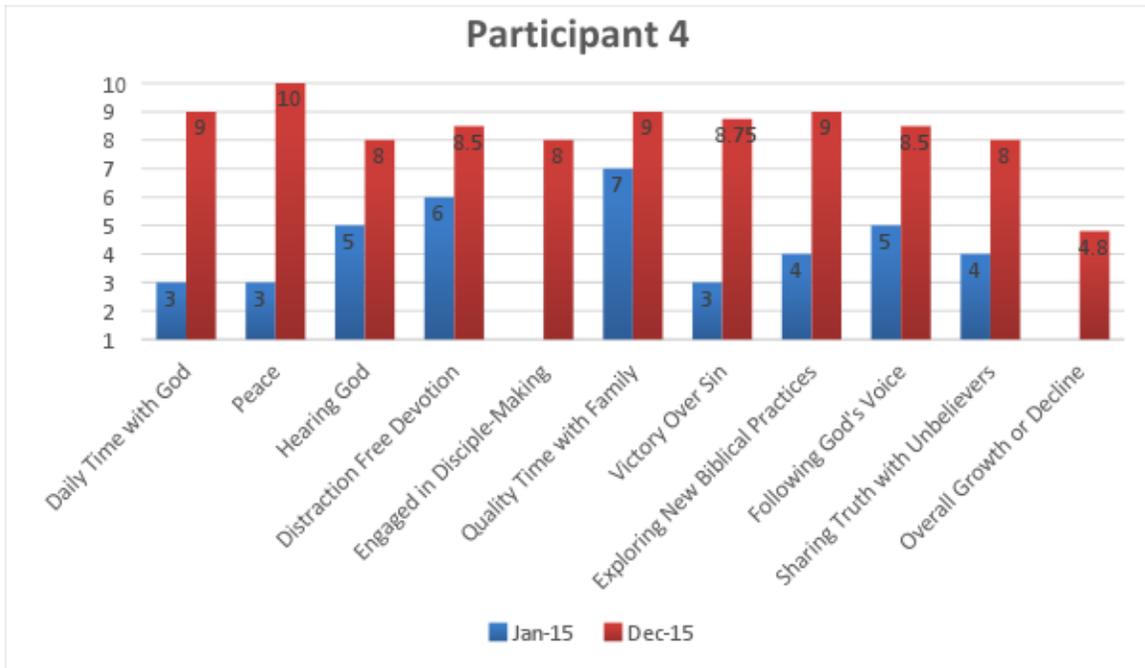


Figure 4. Participant 4.

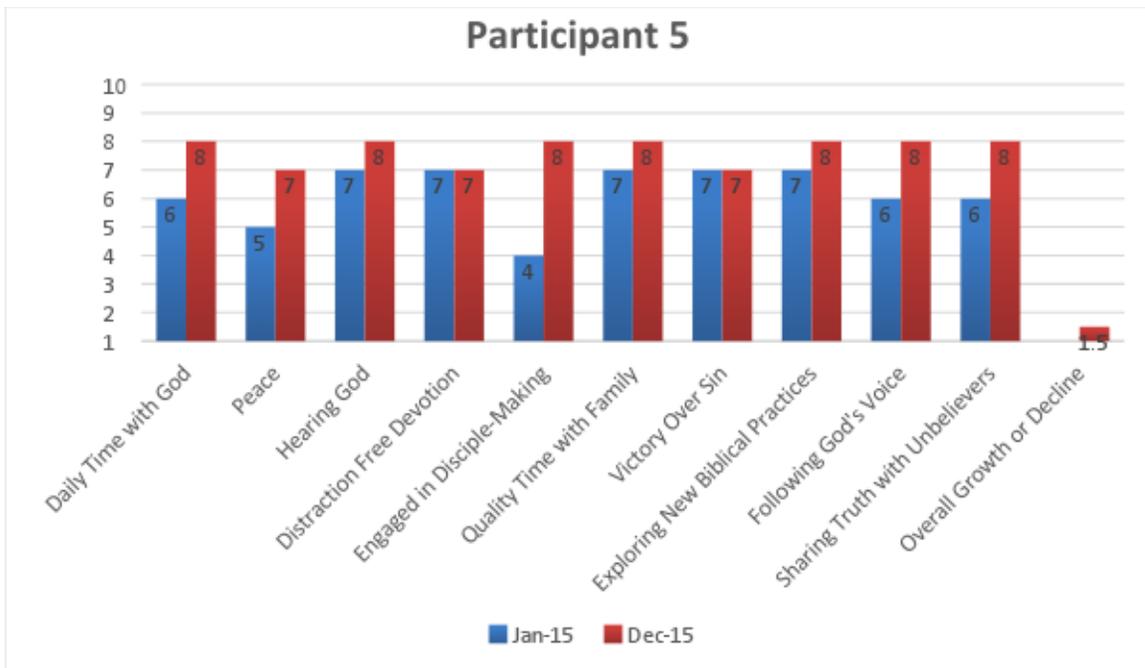


Figure 5. Participant 5.

Observed Commitment to the Process

Along with the life thermometer results, I also observed growth or decline as it related to the commitment of each participant to the process. All five participants were eager and engaged at the beginning of the process, but life situations and the premature group multiplication caused a decline in some of the member's commitment to this discipleship. As stated earlier, our initial group multiplied after six months into two groups with one of our original members opting out for various reasons. Once we reestablished our original group minus two members at the end of the 12 months, I observed the commitment was again revived for the three remaining key leaders. This commitment has grown as the group has continued to meet through 2016 and has expanded to include several new members.

Over the 12 months, I have seen an increase in transparency within the group setting as these three key leaders have become more open to their failures and successes in the discipleship process. This sign of maturity has become infectious for the newer members of the group who have become bold in sharing their failures and victories within the safe confines of our valor group.

Growth in Church Leadership

Besides growing in their commitment to the group, two out of the three remaining men have shown significant progress in their development as leaders in the Tampa First Church. One in particular has taken on several key leadership roles and is widely seen as one of our "go to" men in the church for counsel and direction. I have found myself leaning on these men for leadership because of their commitment to spiritual growth in our men of valor. These two men have encouraged others to step up in the realm of

discipleship and leadership. I have witnessed these key leaders mentoring other men to grow both personally and in their church responsibilities.

One on One Interaction

In my initiatives, I proposed to have an evaluation of the men at the beginning and the end of the 12-month period. I actually was able to evaluate them one on one throughout the process because of how we bonded in the group. I could evaluate on a regular basis on the phone, in my office, at my home, and even over lunch the growth and even the struggles each of my key leaders experienced. Those who dropped out of the group faced some real challenges, but they still grew in spite of Satan's efforts to sift them from the path of discipleship. It was also key to see how the men bonded with one another and met in different venues to the point where they became very close friends.

Observations and Learning

The life thermometer was administered at the end for overall growth evaluation. The self-assessments showed perceived growth with all five of the participants in the ten categories. In closer observation of the results over the 12-month period, only one disciple showed a decline. This decline was in the area of quality family time because he was going through difficulties in his marriage. Other than the one instance, all other responses either stayed the same or increased over the year in each of the categories.

These results suggest that all five of the men grew spiritually and as disciple-makers for Jesus Christ even if they did not return after the premature group multiplication experiment. There were improvements with time spent with God and their ability to hear His voice and follow in obedient faith. Victory over sin was a growth area

with these men. Although the accountability questions were not part of my initial plan, they brought significant growth impact to the group.

According to self-reflection of the key men, other growth areas developed as a fruit of the core practices. One was an overall increase in quality time with family. Several of the men went through family trials during our 12 months and they found support in their darkness within the confines of our group. Sharing faith as testimonies to Jesus was an area that showed improvement on the life thermometer evaluations. I believe that God was bringing people in the paths of these men of valor especially in their workplaces. There were stories every week of how God gave to them opportunities to share with co-workers and friends the good news of Jesus and the truth in His Word. Several of these friends expressed interest in attending our group meeting, but it never came to fruition. I believe that their friends wanted to come, but the busyness of daily life got in the way along with a possible fear of accountability.

Curriculum Challenges

Although there was an overall growth in the spiritual lives of the men, there were some aspects that could have gone better in the curriculum. The men did well as it related to the Bible readings and daily prayer, but they did not advance beyond these basic spiritual disciplines. I found that journaling was a key to growth with the men and only one truly caught on and began to keep a journal of spiritual reflection on a consistent basis. I observed the growth in the men when they attempted to journal, and I saw their stagnation when they got away from the practice. In hindsight, I feel that I should have pushed more on the realm of journaling and other forms of spiritual reflection that would resonate with participants' personality and spiritual affinity.

Along with the challenge of journaling, the men also struggled with fasting and solitude. Even though I never pushed these biblical practices as a top priority, I knew that the men could exponentially grow if they regularly experienced these elements of discipline. Some fasted, while others tried solitude, and they experienced an enhanced intimacy with God, but they rarely repeated the practices. It is possible that I was asking too much over the 12 months. Maybe these are growing points that can be fleshed out in the second year of our journey together and into the second generations of our men of valor?

My Transformation

As I reflect on my journey with this project of mentoring five key leaders to be disciple-makers, there are several key growth areas that I experienced both personally and professionally. It is important for me to reflect on the failures and successes of these 12 months in order for me to have a better understanding of my own personal and professional blind spots and strengths.

Personal Growth

Through this process, I have learned that I must be in an ever-growing state of surrender with God in Christ if I want to lead others to be disciples. Over the 12 months of 2015, I grew to be more intentional in the expansion of the biblical practices in my life. I began to journal more frequently during the week. These journal entries were not just about my Bible study and prayer time, but times of reflection and listening to the voice of God. I began to set aside weekly times of solitude for 3-4 hours and planned for quarterly retreats of 7-8 hours. Although the retreats were never accomplished in 2015, I did complete my first retreat in February 2017. Honestly, these 12 months have

transformed my personal spiritual life and I feel that it has become a catalyst for my spiritual growth.

Professional Growth

Along with spiritual growth, the 12 months with the men of valor has changed my outlook on ministry. I have really emphasized transparency in my ministry over the past decade, but now I have become more excited in growing disciple-makers for the kingdom of God. I took some real risks in being part of the men of valor process as a leader-participant. There were things that I shared with the five key leaders that definitely opened me up for possible scorn from some church members if confidence was broken. Yet, I had grown tired of the top-down methods of discipleship and decided to take a chance and become part of the men of valor. It was my transparency from the very beginning that drew these five men into a closer walk with God and with one another. They have mentioned on several occasions that if the lead pastor could be transparent, then they could as well. I must lead by example; using the wisdom God has given me. I have been blessed with confidence to take these risks in measure, and I will continue to do so as much as possible in the future.

I feel that this group has also had an impact on my overall ministry. I feel that my sermons have become more transparent within reason as well as my leadership on the board and with my elders. I am not only transparent in groups, but I have begun to see the value of coming along side my leadership and helping them on their life journey. I have become a better listener because I have spent more time listening to God and listening to the stories of these five men of valor. It is my prayer that I continue on my

own journey of spiritual growth and bring other men along with me on the path of discipleship.

List of Recommendations

Colleagues in Pastoral Ministry

Do not give up on small groups in our churches. By growing smaller, our churches will grow larger in quality relationships with one another that leads to healthy families, healthy church, and a deeper level of intimacy with God. Model these small groups by doing it them and even being transparent about one's own failures. We cannot disciple others without spending time in relationships.

Denominational Administrators

Emphasize small group ministry in the local conference and unions. We have learned through our Natural Church Development surveys that Holistic Small Groups is a very weak area across North America. Hire those who will promote and train others in small groups. Foster this in the conference office life and even start a small group in one's own neighborhood. Model and share these stories.

Those Who Teach Pastors to Disciple Their Peers

We are the ones on the front lines of ministry and possibly in our own church district who have the awesome task of mentoring our peers. I have started accountability groups with other pastors in my area and it was highly effective. Pastors will many times talk to a peer in a trust relationship before going to administration. Take a chance and be vulnerable to one's peers and the Lord will do exciting things for us and others.

Ministerial Directors and Associates

Encourage pastors to meet with each other outside of formal conference meetings. Reimburse them for getting together with the purpose of bonding and holding one another accountable personally and professionally. Do not ask the leaders what is going on in the groups as those discussions are confidential. Rest assured, pastors who experience small groups will share this with their congregations and discipling through relational groups will happen.

Future Researchers

Dig deep and do not be afraid to not only do research, but write about relational discipleship in small groups. Experience the blessings of this discipleship as we study the theology and the literature as it will make our words much more impacting to the reader.

APPENDIX A

ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS

1. Rate your walk with God this week on a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being low and 10 being high. Have you completed the daily Bible readings and written in your journal this past week? Have you explored other Biblical practices this week (Bible memorization, solitude, fasting, etc.)? Has God spoken to you in your time with Him? Share with the group.
2. Have you been honorable and understanding in your important relationships this week? Rate yourself again on a scale of 1 to 10.
3. Have you damaged another person by your words either to their face or behind their back this week?
4. Have you continued to remain angry toward another this week? Explain
5. Have you found yourself in compromising position with someone of the opposite sex or have you been exposed to sexually alluring material this week? Explain
6. Have you given in to a personal addiction this past week? Explain
7. Have you been a testimony of Jesus Christ this week? Share

APPENDIX B

LIFE THERMOMETER

Score yourself in the following categories on a scale from 1-10 with 1 being **low** and 10 being **high** both before and after spending time in men of valor.

Before After

1. Spending quality time with God daily.
2. Peace in your life.
3. Hearing the voice of God.
4. Free of distractions when with God.
5. Engaged in disciple making.
6. Spending quality time with family.
7. Victory over weaknesses.
8. Exploring new Biblical practices.
9. Following God's voice in obedient faith
10. Sharing truth with unbelievers

APPENDIX C

A DISTILLATION OF LEARNINGS

After reflection on my project of discipling five key leaders in my local church, I have written several key points of emphasis that are numbered below.

1. It is impossible to make disciple-makers outside the context of relationships.
2. Disciple-making is best accomplished outside of the church and in more comfortable settings like a home or a public place.
3. There must be a balance between teaching and modeling disciple-making on the part of the mentor.
4. Exploring and growing in the spiritual disciplines must be emphasized and encouraged among the group.
5. Be prepared for success and failure as Satan will try to attack at every turn.
6. Questions of accountability in gender-specific groups are many times desired by the participants.
7. The leader must show a measure of vulnerability and transparency when mentoring disciples.
8. Gathering together for down time outside the group meetings are key in developing bonds among the participants.

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