

PREFACE

*Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

I can sing *Great is Thy Faithfulness* with my whole heart and from my experience. I have found God's faithfulness to be true in my life.

Through the pain of childhood –
dysfunction, divorce, and distress.

Through sexism and discrimination.

Through anxiety attacks.

Through miscarriages.

Through disappointment layered on loss.

Through near-death experiences.

Through caring for and losing two parents to cancer.

Through adopting two times, one on each coast.

Great is your faithfulness.

Theology is autobiography.

My understanding of God has come as I have lived this life journey. These things I have experienced, and the presence of God, in the midst of those experiences, has changed me. Here I am. Alive, whole, and healing. God's

deep call to me has ushered me into a place that I would not be on my own. God has anointed me and renewed my call. We don't control what happens to us, but many times we can choose how we open ourselves to growth. Then, for the times we cannot choose, it is simply grace upon grace.

"I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace, given me through the working of His power" (Ephesians 3:7).

What I get to share with people in my work as a pastor has all been formed by my experience of God's grace in my life. Each sermon, small group, and meeting I lead are a reflection of the gift of grace, God's power in me.

My son Josiah loves stories. We read together all the time and we also make up stories. At bedtime one night when he was 4-years old, I started to weave a made-up tale. Many times, he gives me promptings and I need to run with it. "Tell me a story about when a butterfly crashed into hot lava," was my story prompt one time. This night though, when I started to make up a story, Josiah interrupted me.

Josiah: "Remember we were in the car ride and driving around the parking lot at the Redlands Market, mommy?"

Me: Yes.

Josiah: "Remember when we drove fast and you held on and we had so much wind in our hair?"

Me: Yes, I do.

Josiah: "Tell me that story."

Yes, son. In the midst of the beautiful, creative stories that we read and tell, we must remember to tell our own stories. The ones that actually happen to us. Yes, my boy, I will tell the story of us. I will tell the story of what happened and what we really experienced. I want to savor that story.

It's easy to forget to tell our story. Yet, discipleship is about telling our story. We are shaped and formed by God as we share our own story with

each other. Disciple-making is being willing to share our lives. In 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Paul says, “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.”

This is the call to discipleship: to share the gospel and to share our lives. So, on these pages, you will read about being rooted in the gospel, how God can root believers in your church or ministry or small group in the gospel of Jesus Christ. You will read about the invitation of God and the transformation by the power of the Holy Spirit through this journey. You will also read about my life. Because the gospel and my life are intertwined.

To tell God’s story we must share our story.

As you lead and make space for discipleship in your church, business, small group, or your family, would you have the courage to show up and tell your own story? Yes, share the good news—we all need to hear the good news. Yet right alongside the good news, will you share your story?

Let me pause for a moment to speak to those of us who are struggling to believe. Yes, leaders, elders, pastors, administrators, and long-time members, we can all struggle at different times. Perhaps right now it feels like too much—an invisible God who wants a relationship with us. Look for a moment. Love is visible all around you. Ask God to wake you up to notice grace. Then look at the evidence in you. Whenever you want to love someone, not for something he or she can do for you, but just simply from love, whenever you forgive someone for a wrong, or you share sacrificially, these evidences show the Spirit and grace at work. Even if you don’t see and don’t feel what you have believed before, when you do these things, we see God in you. You evidence God’s goodness.

When it feels dark and we don’t know the way, hear the words of Jesus to Thomas that become words for us. Thomas had a mix of doubt and faith, confusion and confidence. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have come to believe” (John 20:29).

Seventh-day Adventists believe that all life change starts with responding to God who loves us first. Turning towards God in response to

grace.

You and I are invited into a relationship. You and I are invited to live in this love as a disciple, and to make other disciples on the journey.

“Now to Him who is able to do infinitely more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

May God bless the journey before us.

CHAPTER ZERO

Making Space for God



“We want to go to God for answers, but sometimes what we get is God’s presence.”

NADIA BOLZ-WEBER

THE SMALL GROUP IS GATHERED in a tight circle around the audio recorder. They have been on a journey of growth and change over the last three months. They have laughed, prayed, and cried together—sharing themselves as they have grown closer. You can see by the eye contact and the affection in the room that the space between them has grown sacred. This is the last time they will be together as part of a 12-week discipleship process. The relationships will continue between them, but the group time has come to an end. Now they are taking a few moments of this last session together to record their thoughts and experiences for my doctoral research. Significant themes arise from what they share. These are some highlights.

INTEGRATION:

“This just totally transformed my walk with God... It was so good to have the creative expressions enter my devotional life... I talk to God about everything now.”

SLOWING DOWN:

“I’m always running around, but God really slowed me down through this process. It was wonderful to stop and reflect on the Scripture.”

SUFFERING AND COMMUNITY:

“There were trials in my life during this process, but I didn’t feel alone in them, I shared them with others. It actually felt like less of a trial, even though the circumstances didn’t change, because I had people that cared and I understood more about God’s care for me.”

FINDING PEACE:

“Now, when I surrender things to God I actually feel peace. Before, it was me telling myself that I am at peace, but now it’s God telling me that I am at peace.”

PRAYER AND PRAISE:

“A lot of my prayers before were focused on me and life—what I need to do. But this has helped me to focus more on praise in my prayer life. It’s great to have focus on God and who He is.”

RELATIONSHIP:

“I think one of the greatest blessings was the time I had with my spiritual companion.”

INTIMACY:

“I fight against intimacy because I don’t like getting close to people. I don’t like getting close to people because I don’t like getting hurt... This process just took all of that fight away.”

Tears spring to my eyes when I think about the growth that I have witnessed in my own life, and in the lives of those who have participated in this and subsequent discipleship journeys that I have had the privilege of facilitating. The transformation is real and significant. Time and again, I have watched in wonder as God has grown individuals and our community.

So how did we get to this moment where we revel in the growth and changes that God has brought among and through us?

I am inviting you to begin with a glimpse of the details that make up an intentional discipleship process. This is both the beginning and the end of a process. This is both a first and a last chapter. Learning experientially is a cycle of doing and reflecting on why one does what one does. I will begin this book by describing the specifics of how a 12-week discipleship process can be implemented in a local church. Later chapters will explore the research and biblical foundations for each of the concepts and themes that you see reflected in this chapter.

The Beginning

At the start of each retreat and discipleship group, I make a speech. Inspired by several authors and teachers,¹ my words are as follows:

We are not here to learn facts about God or how to hear God in our lives, we are going to practice together how to show up in God's presence and listen for God's voice. Our role in spiritual life is the same as our role today. Your role is to (1) show up and (2) surrender to what God is doing.

I ask you to turn off your cell phones or put them on "do not disturb." You are making space in your life to spend time with God. Extended communion in God's presence takes focus. We rush so much and have days filled so much with noise that at first silence might actually be scary. I get it. Take a deep breath and trust what God is doing in you.

This is about allowing the Holy Spirit to mentor you. I have found again and again that God comes alongside you, asking questions you hadn't thought of, challenging you to think in new ways, capturing your imagination, and letting your heart soar in love.

I asked you all to bring a Bible, a journal, a pen, and a water bottle today. However, I caution you not to force yourself to think of something to write. Pray and open yourself to writing what God brings to your mind.

Don't expect to leave today a different person. This is important. You will be different, but not in the ways you might notice or expect.

Let God show you where God is leading you. Sometimes we try to control everything, including the change process in our own lives!

We are creating space for God to work in our lives. God is the only one who knows what needs to happen in your life and in mine. God is the director of our process.

These words mark the beginning of a very intentional and sacred process. The planning for this process began months earlier. Here is a glimpse into how I prepared for this moment.

A Discipleship Journey

A discipleship journey is all about making space for participants to show up for the work God desires to do in their lives. I share an invitation for anyone who wants to experience growth in their relationship with God to sign up. Participants are accepted on a first-come basis through an open invitation to the church and a voluntary sign-up process on the church website. I created a promotional video for advertising the discipleship journey. This is shown in the church on Sabbath morning, typically about 4-5 weeks before the desired launch date, and is placed on the church's website and social media pages.

The individuals who sign up each year are diverse in age, race, gender, and education. They represent a diversity in spiritual maturity, including newly baptized believers, members not yet engaged in ministry, and long-time members, all wanting to grow in their relationship with God.

Spiritual Companions

Participants are paired with a spiritual companion of the same gender with whom they journey throughout the 12-week process.

I have seen God lead in this process in incredible ways, pairing people with one another who could aid their growth in ways we could never guess at the outset. I intentionally pray for this part of the process, knowing this has the potential to affect the experience on the journey dramatically. The

Holy Spirit leads as participants join with me in prayer and choose a partner at the opening retreat.

At the start of each discipleship journey session there is an opening question that is discussed between the spiritual companions. This time of sharing allows them to grow closer with one another—allocating time for peer-to-peer mentoring, support, and accountability. Spiritual companions are taught how to support one another. I firmly believe, and research supports, that we grow most by encouragement and affirmation, by listening, and by being seen.²

Transformation comes from the presence of God, and when we engage in this process with others, we help each other become more aware of God's presence in our own lives. Spiritual Companions help us to become more aware of how God is moving and speaking in our lives. Spiritual companions accompany us on our journey with God. The space between us is sacred, not because of us, but by the very presence of God in our midst. They are a “safe space” where we are able to more freely experience the love of God. Spiritual companions learn how best to engage with the spiritual journey of another through the discipleship process and how this is modeled by the leader.

At the start of the journey, a Personal Assessment (*see Appendix*) is given to each participant, with instructions to spend two hours exploring the questions. The next week, the spiritual companions share from this assessment, showing up honestly with one another.

Small Groups

Within the class, each pair of spiritual companions finds another pair and forms a small group of four. This peer group of four people (ideally of the same gender), remains consistent throughout the discipleship process. Most classes allow for small-group time of at least 30 minutes each session and encourage the small groups to gather outside of the class setting for the purpose of spiritual growth and accountability.

All of us have made commitments to ourselves regarding many things such as exercising or eating right or devotional practices. Not unlike these

other life changes, the discipleship journey is something that happens best in a community. Peter, James, and John were disciples of Jesus, not individually, but as a group. The groups covenant with one another to show up, no matter what they are feeling, and to be present with each other and with God. The small groups covenant to trust God in the process, agreeing to depend on God for answers, not needing to solve or answer one another's problems. They are committed to hearing one another.

Retreats

The discipleship journey begins with an all-day spiritual retreat. This has taken place at different locations over the years, including a Christian retreat center, a summer camp, a hotel conference room, and on a university campus. My favorite locations allow for food to be easily available at the same location, and provide ample outdoor space for participants to move between the indoors and the natural setting outside.

The opening retreat begins at 9:00 a.m. with several worship songs and a time of prayer. The theme is "Learning to Hear God's Voice." The participants are given time to spend alone with God for each part, using only their Bible and their journals. Participants are encouraged to trust God and come into the silence, knowing and expecting that God is waiting to speak to them. After each time alone, participants are then invited back to share for one hour in their small groups, allowing approximately 15 minutes per person to process what God has been speaking to them. A one-hour break is given for lunch and fellowship time. At the close of the day, the class processes the question: "What was the most significant part about today?" Each person has the opportunity to share with the larger group. The day ends at 5:00 p.m. with a conversational-style group prayer.

At the end of the 12-weeks, the discipleship process concludes with a second all-day spiritual retreat at the same location. The theme for this retreat is "Abide and Adore" and centers around John 15, the parable of the vine and the branches, and Mark 14:1-9, the woman who anointed Jesus at Bethany. This retreat opens with prayer and worship songs at 9:00 a.m. Scriptures from John 15 are set up by the leader on sign boards located throughout the garden area outside the meeting room doors. In other

venues, Scripture sign boards have been set up around the conference room, church fellowship hall, or the campus lawn. Participants are invited to take their journals and move around from verse to verse in any order, as they are led by the Holy Spirit. Following this time, participants meet with their small groups and share how God has spoken to them.

Next, participants explore God's presence in their past and their present.³ They write out their major life events—joys, losses, moves, celebrations—and perhaps create a “timeline” for their lives. They ask themselves where God has worked in their past and where God is present and working in their lives right now. Participants are given time to spend alone with God, using only their journals and their Bibles. Following the time of reflection, the small groups take time to share how God led during their time.

After lunch, each person is instructed to choose one of four characters from Mark 14:1-9—the woman, Simon the Leper, a disciple, and Jesus—and to enter the reading of the Scripture from that unique perspective. After listening to God in the Word, they are then invited to share with one another in their small groups. It is powerful to witness how participants open up to one another during this experience because the relationships they share are deeper as a result of the 12-week process.

Transitioning from this time in the Word, the group is led to an art room with various supplies, including paper products, paint, clay, yarn, and markers. Participants are instructed to spend time in silence with God, listening to God answer the question, “Where do you, God, want to take me from here?” They are instructed to use whatever art supplies they wish to share where God wants to take them from there. Each person then shares with the entire group what they created and how God spoke to them. The revelations of God's direction are astonishing and beautiful. For many, using the art supplies in this process opens them up spiritually and allows them to go deeper with God. The day concludes with the spiritual companions anointing each other with olive oil and praying for one another in affirmation of the specific direction God showed during the previous session. The group gathers for one last time in conversational prayer before dismissing at 5:00 p.m.⁴



Weekly Meeting

Following the first all-day retreat, the class meets once a week for two hours. I have found the day of the week changes depending on the church schedule. However, the time that has worked best has consistently been 7:00-9:00 pm. The sessions focus on the eight calls of God detailed in chapter nine, and three foundational values from chapters five and eight: relationship with God, community, and purpose, also referred to as witness and service.

Experiential activities are a part of each class, in addition to activity suggestions given at the end of each class so that members are able to practice what they are learning throughout the next week. Participants are invited to read one verse per day in the Gospel of John throughout the discipleship journey. When participants share with their spiritual companions at the start of the meeting, they are encouraged to share their gospel of John experiences after the opening question.

Each class time involves a balance of time alone, one-on-one reflection with spiritual companions, four-person peer mentoring groups, and larger group interaction. The eight calls of God—some might call them spiritual habits or disciplines—are explored during this time (more on this in chapter nine). Content is taught, and then members are given time to experience and practice how the lesson connects with their current place in their spiritual journey. The discipleship journey time focuses on process and involvement, engaging each member in the experiential learning triad: knowing, being, and doing, as shared in chapter eight.



Throughout the years, I have found that sending email reminders and text messages to participants encourages continued engagement in the process. Leaders are facilitating a journey that is constructing new habits. Reminders help participants learn these new habits.

Community Building

Intentional community building is incorporated into the discipleship journey in order to facilitate further relationship growth. This takes place at lunch time on the two retreat days, and through a discipleship group fellowship dinner, which takes place midway through the journey at my home. The evening fellowship is typically from 6:00-10:00 p.m. on a Saturday night and includes dinner, games, dessert, and conversation. This time allows for an integration for participants between the self that is processing deeply in the discipleship journey and the self that shows up for games on a Saturday night.

Length

The 12-week length was selected for this discipleship journey as a manageable length of time that people can commit to, while still allowing crucial time for growth and depth of relationship to form among participants. Discipleship expert Bill Hull states that small groups average around 40-days in length and that groups need to meet for longer in order to form together as a group.⁵ This length is also supported by the witness of practical ministry discovered during my phone interviews with pastors whose churches excel in discipleship. These churches averaged 8-10 weeks for their small groups.⁶ In my experience, the 12-week length afforded time necessary for group cohesion and bonding, as well as teaching and forming new spiritual habits.

Though there are good reasons for selecting the 12-week length for this discipleship journey, other researchers indicate that a longer time as a discipleship group is preferred over the shorter length of time. Greg Ogden recommends that discipleship groups stay together through at least a one-year process.⁷ Stanley and Willits keep participants in their community discipleship groups consistent through an 18-24 month covenant. Bill Hull

recognizes that groups become most effective around six months, or at their twenty-fifth meeting.⁹

In the context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I have found that a commitment to longer than 12-weeks for a stand-alone discipleship journey is challenging to implement. The weight of evidence leans towards a longer time frame for maximum growth and transformation. This is best seen in the Sabbath School group. Many Sabbath School classes have been together for 5, 10, or 15+ years. The depth of relationship and life change can be seen in healthy classes. In the Adventist context, it's important to remember that growth continues for many participants by being part of a group of this kind.

Size and Make-up of the Group

Every time I have implemented the discipleship journey through voluntary sign up, the groups varied in race, age, gender, and socioeconomic status, as well as maturity of faith and relationship with Christ. The goal is to maintain diversity, while being intentional about recruiting leaders who will then be able to replicate the process of discipleship by starting a group themselves. A leader must experience the discipleship journey to know firsthand the closeness and transformation that takes place. As they go through the entire process led by the pastor, they are more equipped to be able to lead in that process with other believers.

Regarding group size, I recommend that groups have an even number of participants, either 12 or 16 people. After over a dozen times of implementing the discipleship curriculum, my preferred group size is 12 participants. A group size of 12 affords for three small groups of four participants each. This smaller size allows for deeper bonding in relationships, and therefore greater change in the lives of participants. The smaller size also contributes to a higher level of timeliness and faithfulness in attendance, because one person's presence is greatly missed by the spiritual companion and the small group. During Spiritual Companion or Small Group time, the leader/facilitator is in constant prayer, asking for the Holy Spirit to work and interceding by name for each of the participants while slowly walking around the room. The leader is not paired up with a

Spiritual Companion or in a Small Group so that they are free to pray and partner with God. They may observe the group and create a prayerful space during these times.

Hands-on Service

Participants are encouraged to get involved at a higher level in service and witnessing. The discipleship journey group provides hands-on opportunities for service, allowing participants to engage in both service and witnessing.

Before the discipleship session on service, the leader/facilitator prepares a list of service opportunities with descriptions for the small groups to choose from. Some ideas may include collecting sleeping bags for homeless veterans, starting a Bible study, creating care kits for those without homes, volunteering in a children's Sabbath School classroom, reading stories to school-age children, knitting prayer shawls, picking up trash in a park, writing/ mailing encouragement cards, volunteering at a soup kitchen or food pantry, preparing a church mailing for the community, and so on. You'll want to see what is available in your community. Keep in mind that some options should be less action-oriented so that, depending how able-bodied people are, there are some projects that can be done sitting down. During the session, small groups review the list of projects and decide on one to engage in together.

Conclusion and Implications

I've seen through research and experience that a discipleship journey in the local church is most effective when it embraces an experiential model of learning, which equally values knowing, being, and doing in the life of the follower of Jesus. What emerged through prayer, research, and the process of implementation are the following five goals that form the structural framework for the discipleship process:

- A. **Provide opportunity for connection with God:** By practicing the eight calls (devotional habits), participants will learn to listen

to God by connecting in a personal relationship and by being transformed in God's presence.

- B. **Develop community:** By teaching, one-on-one mentoring, small groups, and process orientation, the groundwork for healthy relationships is established.
- C. **Inspire a life of purpose:** By coaching and instructing individuals to serve others and share Jesus in their sphere of influence.
- D. **Emphasize life-long transformation:** By encouraging individuals that transformation takes time—highlighting the importance of abiding in Jesus throughout the transformation process, which lasts for a lifetime.
- E. **Simplify discipleship practice:** By intentionally teaching the devotional habits and inviting participants to disciple others they know, this process demystifies what it means to disciple others.

As each of these priorities are kept in focus through prayer and the leadership of the Holy Spirit, individuals will experience change in their lives and will begin to live differently in the world. Inward transformation leads to mission orientation.

May you have courage to allow God to direct the growth in your life and in the lives of those you lead.

May you find companions for the journey, mutually investing in one another's lives.

May you make space for the work of discipleship God is doing and desires to do in your midst.

Discussion Questions

At the beginning of the chapter is a list of quotes from participants of the discipleship process, highlighting significant themes. Which of these resonates most with you? Why?

Which part of the discipleship process makes you the most excited? The most uncomfortable?

Which of the five goals that form the structural framework for the discipleship process does your church or community already excel at? In which area do you see room for growth?

CHAPTER ONE

You Will Be Like a Tree



“When life is sweet, say thank you and celebrate. And when life is bitter, say thank you and grow.”

SHAUNA NIEQUIST

What if I told you that God could radically transform your life and ministry through ordinary spiritual habits, but that the days, months, and years may not feel radical at all?

What if I told you that discipleship is the most important area of ministry you can focus on, but that many times, everything else will feel more important and more urgent?

What if I told you that transformation is possible, but that it’s less about what we do and more about making space for God to do the work God is already doing?

I have been on a journey with God that has transformed my life and ministry. In 2010, I began my Doctor of Ministry degree in Discipleship and Biblical Spirituality. It was through this process that I was able to reflect on what has sustained and anchored me over the last 25 years since I came to faith as a teenager. I was able to put words to God’s work in my own life and what has been most meaningful in my ministry. Looking back and naming the ways God had been effectively growing disciples through my

ministry, as well as naming the things that didn't work have been a critical part of my learning.

On the journey to complete my degree, I wrote a 12-week discipleship experience for the local church. I have now implemented this curriculum over a dozen times in the past 10 years. It has grown and I have grown. I have pastored for 20 years in three states. I have lived "up close" with the joys and challenges of ministry. I have suffered. I have developed resolve and grit and perseverance. I have seen God's glory, even with wounds and an aching heart. I have seen God's faithfulness. All of this has changed me and has changed what I bring to the discipleship journey.



Like a Tree

Growing up in the Northwestern part of the United States, I have a life-long love of trees. I spent time backpacking and hiking in the forests, breaking off pine needles and rubbing them in my hands to smell the fresh pine scent. I learned the names of the trees, counted their rings, and played beneath their branches. You've heard of a "tree hugger?" Yes, that's me! I am from Washington, after all! I remember being afraid as a young child, perhaps 6 or 7 years old, and crawling underneath the towering Douglas Fir by our home. I leaned against the trunk and felt secure, even in the damp, cold afternoon.

When I became a Christian, I gravitated to the image of the tree of life. Over the years I have collected paintings and wall hangings of this imagery made from various materials from different countries around the world. Whether created with rough rope, watercolor, stained glass, or embroidery, this image connects with me deeply.

About the Torah or Wisdom, Proverbs states, "It is a tree of life to all who grasp it, and whoever holds on to it is happy; its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all its paths are peace" (Proverbs 3:17-18).

The Torah refers to the Pentateuch or books of Moses, which are the first five books of the Bible. Yet, it also refers to the Jewish understanding of their origins. The Torah, or the Tree of Life, was an anchor for the Jewish people. The story of how God created and called them, held them through trials and hardship, and covenanted with them to embody a way of being which honored God in all areas of life, morality, religion, and civic duty. The law of God was pictured as a tree—a tree of life—rooting the people of God in God’s story, which was actually their story, as well. The Word of God was never just the Word; it was the story of God and God’s people, a shared story.

Then the time comes for the redemptive purposes of God to be made visible. Jesus comes incarnate in human flesh—walking and talking, eating and drinking—living among us. Fully God and fully human, Jesus comes to us dependent, vulnerable, and enfleshed. Jesus didn’t come to abolish this law (the tree of life), but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). God brought the tree of life to full fruitfulness through God’s own gift of love in Jesus. Jesus connected us with this Word and lived its significance in ways we couldn’t picture before. Jesus’ life, and then his death on the tree, brought life, hope, and healing. Jesus rooted us in our identity and God’s story, which it turns out, is our story too. In a world tired, suffering, and distracted, a life is still the best way to show what God is like. I believe, as Eugene Peterson says, that the Word of God can be lived.¹

Roots

We humans have always yearned for roots, to know where we come from. The phenomenon of genealogies and ancestry sites highlight this inner need to know. Send in a sample and get back the full report about who you are and where you come from. Why do we do this? We long for roots. We want to understand where we come from because maybe if we get that, we can know where we’re going.

With so much information and the speed we live with each day, we need to know who we are and why we are the way we are to root us. Our ancestry, we hope, will help to ground us. Like a tree.

People have often asked me, “How did you make it through what you’ve been through? What allowed you to be able to go through this and emerge on the other side?” The short answer is, by the mercy and grace of God alone. How? God has rooted me deeply in Jesus and in my identity. Through it all—discrimination, death, rejection, loss, and heartbreak—I have found roots in my Creator.

The biblical story of humanity began at a tree. Pain and heartache started there. The law, pictured as a tree, was not able to be kept and we fell short. Then, in Jesus, our redemption came on a tree. The law was enlivened and we were empowered to live this Word with strength beyond our own. Our story ends, or really begins again, at a tree—gathered as we will be around a tree of life for all eternity. In this one image is our shared identity, calling, and hope. Deep roots, deep love, deep calling.

“You will be like a tree planted by streams of water” (Psalm 1:3).

This is discipleship. *Deep Calling* is a journey of becoming more rooted in God, for we are all like trees, sinking our roots deep into the love of God.

As a person and as a leader, my hope is that as you read this book you will hear the invitation of God to open up your life to the process of transformation that God is working in you through ordinary life habits, see the supreme importance of discipleship in the church, have a clear and simple path to implementing a discipleship group in your church, and experience the bridge between a reflective, prayerful life and an active, missional life—the peace and stillness that leads to making a difference in the world.

It isn’t about becoming more sanctified or “spiritual” by our own efforts, as if that were something we could control. Instead, the discipleship journey is about learning how to trust. Trust the mystery of what God is doing in you. That’s first and foremost. Before you and I run off with application to the local church, ministry, conference, or group where we serve, we must let the Holy Spirit speak into our own lives. How does God want to root us?

Then, trust the mystery of what God is doing in your ministry. As you and I abide in Jesus, there is fruit we don’t know about that is growing and

coming. There is more that God is calling you and people in your area of influence to experience. The single biggest impact you can have on those you are discipling is to share an understanding that **this is a life-long process, not a destination**. The journey is about learning how to lean into trust in God and surrender to the work God is doing in our lives.

I am not an expert. Yes, I did earn the Doctor of Ministry degree in Discipleship and Biblical Spirituality. Yes, I have loved implementing discipleship groups through all these years. Yet, what I have learned is that what matters most is having the courage to make space for what the Holy Spirit wants to do. God desires to grow the people of God; my role is to respond and guard space for this work in my own life and in the lives of others. This work you have in your hands is no exception. I don't have all the answers, but I've found that I don't need to. What God asks of you and me is to be faithful. This book is the next step for me in seeking to share faithfully as God calls me to share. It is my hope that God will use this process to lead you to the next faithful step for you and for your ministry.

I'm here praying for you, cheering for you! You see, we all need you to be fully you. Our world and the church are depending on your living deeply from rootedness in God, answering that deep call to communion with God. Then, from that place of rootedness, for you to live from the gifts and calling that are uniquely yours.

I am grateful for you.

Thanks for being a partner on the journey.

Thanks be to God for this amazing love and grace.

Discussion Questions:

Which of the three questions at the beginning of this chapter inspires you the most?

What has rooted you in your own discipleship journey?

In what ways is God calling you to trust the mystery of what God is doing in your life and ministry?

CHAPTER TWO

What is Discipleship?



“We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God.”

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER

YOU’VE HEARD IT SAID that if you can just find the right process, you’ll keep people in the church. I believe that as long as we are dealing with people, we will deal with mistakes and failures and suffering. This means that we don’t have the power to “keep” people anywhere. Not much hope in that, right? Actually there is, and that hope is found in relationship and in trust with Jesus.

From the moment I heard about Him, Jesus captured my heart. I learned that God desired to be with me and this changed my life and shifted my priorities. I came to believe in and experience a God who sought me out, accepted me as I am, and, over time, is transforming me. When I first believed, I was invited to live out ways that connected me to God and I began prayer journaling, reading Scripture devotionally, sharing my story (witnessing), and sitting in stillness with God. Over the years since coming to faith as a teenager, these habits have grown, changed, and deepened. As I have followed Jesus, living in a relationship with God, I have experienced benefits. The blessing of peace of mind, purpose, and passion for a life of service; joy in the midst of difficulties; and a sense of security in the love of

God. It's not easy. In fact, some days sitting in silent prayer is difficult and the distractions frequent. Yet, time and again, God comes. God's presence is what makes the difference in my life. This is the Christian disciple's journey.

This is something many have experienced. There is beauty in the diversity of how God meets with us and walks with us. Sadly, this is not the experience for all. Some have come to God because they were convicted of the truth and they knew they needed to follow it. While that was a meaningful step in their lives, they were told little of where to go from there. They didn't take the next steps of learning how to live in a relationship with God and join in the work of God. They have not experienced for themselves the sweetness of the presence of God and the invitation to join the purpose of God in the world. This relational and experiential void can lead to a propensity towards legalism and fear for some, or growing lukewarm and complacent for others. Still others walk away altogether when something new comes along.

The majority of Seventh-day Adventist churches in the North American Division are in a state of plateau or decline, begging the question: Has an emphasis on "having the truth" resulted in the development of devoted disciples? Do people with orthodox biblical information automatically become people who are Christ-like, living Jesus' love and mission in the world? Does the church have a discipleship strategy that is working? While some would say that the primary purpose for the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the transmission of right knowledge, Scripture suggests that a healthy church lives and breathes through a love relationship with Jesus. It is this personal encounter, and not merely information about God, which in turn draws others to want to experience Jesus for themselves. The church exists to *be* God's presence in the world, teaching people to become followers who are in a relationship with Jesus and with one another (John 13:35). Could it be that an over-emphasis on right information in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to the neglect of teaching the primacy of how to have a relationship with Jesus, has caused members to become malnourished in the area of spiritual growth? The fact that hearts and lives lack transformation is seen in the bitter fruit of a lack of assurance of the love of God, spiritual pride, disregard for mission, and a lack of forgiveness, among other fruits.

So... What is Discipleship?

I was speaking on discipleship at a conference recently and I asked the group a question: “What is discipleship?” A young woman said, “I went to a whole weekend on discipleship at my church.” Feeling hopeful I said again, “So, what is discipleship?” She looked back at me and said, “I don’t even know.”

Somehow in the midst of all we are doing and all we believe, we can miss the very thing we are called to. *Deep Calling* is a discipleship journey focused on making space for what matters most.

Let’s start with the basics. Seventh-day Adventists are Christians. A Christian is a person devoted to following Christ. Discipleship is a word we use to describe the process of growth in Christ. Discipleship is a posture of learning. To be a disciple is to be a life-long student and follower of Jesus. Discipleship is a relationship, devotion, journey, a new perspective, abiding, and a “Spirit imbued” life. Discipleship is the process of transformation or formation in the life of the believer.

Christianity has placed an emphasis on receiving the gift of salvation, often at the loss of emphasizing the sanctification journey that follows. Adventists have placed a greater emphasis on sanctification, often at the expense of the security of salvation in Jesus. Discipleship is both justification (receiving salvation as a free gift) and sanctification (the ongoing growth and life transformation) that God desires to work in the life of each believer.

I come to this journey with a few presuppositions—core beliefs that guide the process. I believe God is personal and loving and active in human life through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. I believe God desires close communion through the means provided to us: the Scriptures (the Word), the Church (community of Christ), the Creation (this world), and the Call (an experience with God that arises from our partnership with God’s work in the world). I believe we are called to keep central a relationship with Jesus, the love of the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. All other beliefs move from a relationship with a Triune God.

Discipleship in the Church

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

In the first example, Jesus met a Samaritan woman at the well, and in this initial encounter Christ revealed to her that He was the promised Messiah. Jesus also showed that He knew who she was, and still accepted her. She could not contain her joy and immediately ran to the town to share the news with others. Many were converted because of her testimony (John 4:1-42). For this woman, seeing God and experiencing love and acceptance, led to a missional witness.

In the second example, the disciples were in an upper room waiting for the Holy Spirit before going out to give witness to the resurrection of the Lord (Acts 1:4-5). When they experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, they shared Jesus and 3,000 joined the church in one day (Acts 2)! The presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples resulted in missional activity.

In the final example, Saul, who became Paul, experienced a dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. He met Jesus for himself. From that encounter, he was changed from a persecutor of the church to an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul began witnessing and teaching others about Jesus (Acts 9:19-22). Inward transformation became a catalyst for worldwide mission activity. The common theme in each of these stories is this: An experience with Jesus leads to sharing God with others.

In these biblical examples, we can note several practical features that must be included in a discipleship process for the local church. First, there must be an emphasis on a personal experience with God, which involves connecting in a relationship. In this discipleship process this is primarily experienced through the eight calls, or devotional practices. Second, time

must be given for God to transform the life of the believer inwardly. It's not easy, but discipleship involves waiting for a work in us that we don't control or manufacture. We must recognize that the discipleship journey is a process, a work God is doing in us. It is not solely about learning content, but instead opening up to transformation. Third, one-on-one mentoring (as Jesus did with the woman at the well and with Paul), growth in community (as Jesus did with the twelve original disciples), and shared experience (as with the believers at Pentecost) are helpful learning models that lead to inward change. Fourth, and finally, the discipleship process must focus on both a relationship with Jesus and an active joining in God's mission. Time spent with Jesus leads to action in the world in the unique ways God has gifted each disciple.

The following four features are what make up the foundation of this discipleship process for the local church: (1) Focusing on a personal experience with Jesus, (2) allowing consistent time for transformation, (3) process orientation and community context, and (4) joining Jesus in His mission. We will explore these in greater depth below.

Personal Experience With Jesus

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

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

Time for Transformation

Jesus believed that He needed to spend time with the disciples in order for change to happen. The discipleship process cannot be boiled down into a pamphlet, tract, or even a book. Discipleship is an experience, modeled and lived in community. Has the church lost the point when she substitutes time spent modeling what it looks like to follow Jesus, with a focus on the transmission of information, apart from relationship?

Discipleship is learned in the context of relationship with God and other believers. Discipleship is the process whereby individuals allow God to transform their lives through time spent with Jesus and the practice of what God has taught them. Knowledge is essential to the process, but disciples must allow God to move them from knowledge, to reflection, to action. This takes time and is the process of yielding to God for the work that only God can do. As Eugene Peterson says, the question of the disciple is not, “what do I do” but “what is God doing?”¹

Process-Oriented

The Scriptures contain evidence that Jesus was process-oriented with the disciples. For example, when Jesus taught His disciples something they failed to grasp the meaning of, He would often repeat the teaching in a different way so they could understand it. Jesus repeated the prediction of His death three times (Matthew 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). Jesus was patient with the lack of understanding the disciples exhibited (John 14:1-14), and there were times when the disciples did not understand a lesson until much later (John 2:22). In the Upper Room, as Jesus washed the disciple's feet, He told them clearly, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand” (John 13:7, 19). This reveals that Jesus was teaching with a process in mind that extended beyond the current interaction. Lastly, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus encountered two disciples and taught them the Scriptures (Luke 24:25-27, 44-45). These were disciples who had heard this instruction before, but still did not see the meaning. Jesus' response was to teach it again. Rather than moving on to new content, Jesus paid careful attention to their level of comprehension and adjusted His teachings accordingly. Jesus' teaching was typically

grounded in the practical experiences which were taking place in His disciple's lives.

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

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



Joining Jesus in Mission

Disciples are those who are with Jesus and who make disciples. As stated above, Jesus invited the disciples to be with Him and to learn how to "fish for people" (Mark 1:17-18). Both were essential to their role as disciples. In each of the scriptural examples given above, individuals met Jesus and proceeded to share Jesus with others. Essential to the discipleship process is an understanding of this emphasis and practical instruction in mission, both witness and service. Foundational to the process of discipleship is the fact that a personal relationship with Jesus always leads to greater purpose. This mission orientation is the act of joining Jesus in His work in the world. For a local church process, this means helping believers understand their giftedness, their purpose, and how to live out their calling in the world.

It is my conviction that experiencing the process of discipleship can change the way we stay connected and grow in God. I long for all those who join the Seventh-day Adventist Church, either by birth or conversion, to be led in what it looks like to grow in God. Each believer is called to focus on a relationship with Jesus, to allow time for transformation, to realize that discipleship is a process, not an event or “arrival,” and to learn how to join God in the work of the Kingdom.

May Jesus capture your heart and guide your life.

May God bless you to discover one way you are called to grow in Christ where you are now.

May God give you courage to create spaces where others can experience growth in Christ.

Discussion Questions:

What are the practices or habits that have been most meaningful for you in your growth as a disciple?

What is one way you are called to grow in Christ right now?

How is God leading you to disciple others?

CHAPTER THREE

The Experience of Discipleship



“There are only three ways to teach a child. The first is by example, the second is by example, the third is by example.”

ALBERT SCHWEITZER

WHEN RAISING KIDS, the goal is to help them grow into independence. Moms and dads are encouraged to keep perspective by parenting with the end in mind. If you want a healthy relationship with your adult child someday, parent toward independence.

Kids share this desire with their parents, starting as soon as they can speak. “Mine” and “Me do it” are phrases of little ones far from independent, but desiring it all the same. My little girl, who is not yet two, often says, “Ava do it” with insistence.

We marvel at watching kids learn to feed themselves, dress, and tie their own shoes. It’s incredible to witness the transformation of growth. If all is well developmentally, kids grow more independent as they age.

As kids become teenagers and adults who function more independently, they learn another crucial lesson: interdependence. Emotional maturity is

this ability to be both dependent and independent—to live in the tension of independence (self-sufficiency) and interdependence (needing others).

We get so accustomed to this trajectory of growth, it's no wonder we struggle when it comes to our relationship with God. To grow up in Christ is to grow in our trust and our willingness to be dependent. God told Paul, “My strength is perfected in your weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Discipleship is about making space to grow in dependence on God, rather than in our independence, and at the same time being willing to live in interdependence with the body of Christ—the believers around us. Maturity in our journey with God recognizes our inability to do life alone.

Discipleship

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

The Jewish concept of discipleship emphasizes the relationship between the rabbi (master) and the disciple (student). The disciple was to seek to *know* what the master knew, in addition to *doing* as the master did. The Jewish understanding of discipleship centered around the entire life being devoted to the rabbi—complete dependence.¹ Although the word “disciple” occurs only once in the Old Testament (Isaiah 8:16), the Old Testament parallel to discipleship is the concept of the covenant relationship with God (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 28:12-15; Exodus 13:21-22; Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 29:1-29). God called Israel into a relationship, which necessitated choosing God over all others (1 Kings 18:21) and serving God with complete devotion (Deuteronomy 10:12-13; 4:1-14; 1 Samuel 12:14). In both the Old Testament (Isaiah 43:10), as well as in the New Testament

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

A Call to be With Jesus

God's relationship to us through Jesus is highlighted in the title given to Him in the book of Matthew, "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:23). In the deepest meaning of the Old Testament covenant, God had now joined in relationship with humanity through Jesus Christ.²

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

How did Matthew, John, Peter, Andrew, and the others become disciples of Jesus? Jesus invited them (see Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17; Luke 5:1-11; John 1:35-51). How were these ordinary men transformed to be like Jesus and carry the gospel to all the world? Mark recounts that "He appointed twelve that they might *be with him* and that he might send them out to preach" (Mark 3:14). The first calling of the disciples was to be with Jesus. From being with Jesus, the disciples were transformed. Their calling was personal, for Jesus called each one of them uniquely. Their primary focus was to spend time in His presence, and in so doing, join in the mission of God in the world.

What can be learned about the discipleship process through the lived example of Jesus? Jesus spent three and a half years of everyday life with those chosen to follow. It is easy to ignore the significance of this fact. The disciples' learning extended beyond the preaching and teaching of Jesus, to the time spent in His presence on an everyday basis.

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

As present day disciples approach the Christian life and seek to help others become disciples of Jesus, we must remember the heart of our calling. A. W. Tozer says, "The presence of God is the central fact of Christianity. At the heart of the Christian message is God."³ Following Jesus is about spending time in God's presence and developing a relationship.

Ellen White expresses the believer's need of Jesus in words that make central this relational experience of the disciple. "The very first outbreathing of the soul in the morning should be for the presence of Jesus. 'Without Me,' He says, 'ye can do nothing.' It is Jesus that we need; His light, His life, His spirit, must be ours continually. We need Him every hour."⁴ In Jesus is all the abundance of God—light, life, and spirit—and all that is needed to live a transformed life. We are called to live a life of dependence on Jesus.

God is the Focus of Discipleship

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

Jesus invites us to see our dependence on God with this image. “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). The first calling of a disciple is to abide in God as in the vine (John 15:1-11). Fruit will grow in the life of the disciple as the disciple learns to remain in God (Galatians 5:22-25).

In the same way the first disciples were called to be with Jesus and to live in dependence upon Him, so every disciple is called to do the same. In the act of following after Jesus, the disciple is called to rely on God for transformation. Action and obedience are done in response to love, and not from compulsion or fear.

In John 6:68, “Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’” Peter was compelled to follow Jesus because he found Jesus to be all that he wanted and unlike anyone he had ever met—the only source of life. I’ve found this to be true in my own life. Even in the hardest times, I declare, “There is nowhere else I can go. I have found life in you.”

The Apostle Paul declared that the primary goal of his life was to know Jesus, and to experience His sufferings and resurrection (Philippians 3:10-11). This was his singular purpose and hope, which he pressed towards during the course of his life and ministry. “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2). For Paul, knowing Jesus was everything.

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

When the apostle cried *that I may know Him*, he uses the word *know* not in its intellectual, but in its experiential sense. We must look for the meaning – not to the mind but to the heart. Theological knowledge is knowledge about God. While this is indispensable it is not sufficient. It bears the same relation to man’s spiritual need as a well does to the need of his physical body. It is not the rock-lined pit for which the dusty traveler longs, but the sweet, cool water that flows up from it. It is not the intellectual knowledge about God that quenches man’s

ancient heart-thirst, but the Person and Presence of God Himself. These come to us through Christian doctrine, but they are more than doctrine. Christian truth is designed to lead us to God, not to serve as a substitute for God.⁵

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

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

Discipleship Today: People After God’s Heart

To Abraham, God said—all people will be blessed through you (Genesis 12). In John 20:21, Jesus said, “As the Father sent me so I send you.”

Throughout history, God was about raising up a people, a community seeking after God’s heart. In each generation, God had a people. Some of the people God chose were pretty unlikely choices. Now, God’s goal is the same as it was then: raise up a people of God who seek after God with all their heart, pursue God together in community, and serve and love in the context of where they live. Disciples of Jesus who show what it looks like to live the ways of God today, living in dependence on the one forming and transforming their lives.

What concerns me is not just what happens on Sabbath, or how you and I preach and teach, or how much we like what happens in our

churches. What concerns me is how we, as the people of God, are living on Monday. In our Monday-through-Friday lives, what does it look like to live as disciples? Are we living dependent on God's grace as we sit down at our desks to work or clock in for the day? What does it look like to live as a disciple where you live? A disciple is a learner, a follower, a student of God's love. The learning comes in the moments, hours, days, weeks, and years of following—in all the everyday, ordinary moments.

Reading a menu is fundamentally different than tasting a meal. Listening to people describe their travels is different than traveling yourself. Hearing people tell you what they heard at the concert is different than hearing the symphony play.

It's ridiculous if we think people could experience the same thing we have by just telling them about it, right? That I could expect words to capture the taste of food. Or hearing something second-hand be the same as the adventure or concert. Words cannot equal experience. So it is with discipleship and with God's love. We grow in God by our experience. We must live it. Likewise, our invitation to others is not to hear and to know alone. The invitation is to experience. Learned dependence and relationship with the One who created us and recreates us.

There are no words adequate to describe to you what it's like to share my own experience with God and have it connect with others and move them deeply. I can't describe to you what it's like when someone says, "I wouldn't have come back to church if it wasn't for you—you made me feel welcome here." I can't describe what it's like when the worst pain I've been through somehow gets translated into empathy and love for someone else who's going through it, too. I can't describe what it's like to notice or hear about a need and be the one who gets to fill that need.

God doesn't want us to rely on a secondhand word about a relationship with God or joining Jesus in His work in the world. We are invited to join in ourselves and to make space for others to experience the same. This is discipleship—an invitation to follow God on the adventure of growing in trust and dependence.



May you, disciple of God, grow in dependence on God and interdependence in the Body of Christ.

May you be unwilling to settle for a second-hand story, instead pursuing a personal experience.

May you experience the blessing of satisfaction in God alone, the One who first pursued you.

Discussion Questions:

Which biblical example of discipleship resonated with you the most? Why?

In addition to doing ministry and church life, how can we invite people to be with Jesus as a disciple?

When in your life have you experienced a distinct difference between theological-knowing and heart-knowing?

CHAPTER FOUR

All Are Invited



“Whoever you are, you are human. Wherever you are, you live in the world, which is just waiting for you to notice the holiness in it.”

BARBARA BROWN TAYLOR

I want to tell you something.

It’s so important, I want you to listen very closely.

Ready? Listening?

We don’t all agree.

Even though we are part of the same church, or the same family, or we share the same occupation or vocation, *we do not all agree.*

Oh, you realized that already?

Sometimes I get disheartened by this. Sometimes I don’t know what to do with it. Sometimes I struggle with how to respond. I get discouraged by our differences, but even more so how we deal with our differences. Maybe I’m not alone in this. Maybe you’ve felt this too. It’s not always easy.

There are so many ways to live, believe, and think.

The appropriate involvement of the government.

What we eat.

Who should be in the ministry.

Immigration.

Sexuality.

Parenting.

Yes, we are the family of God. *One family*. Yet how can we be so different? God calls us children, and other believers become our brothers and sisters—the church becomes our spiritual family. In the church, we are all brothers or sisters, mothers or fathers in the faith to those around us. We are a large, multicultural, multigenerational family of faith. But we are so different.

An Effort to Control

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

The situation in the time of Jesus reflected this age-old human challenge. There were defined ideas of who was allowed to participate with God's work and who was not. Who had first entrance into God's presence and who was confined to the outer limits of interaction with God. In this environment, the actions of Jesus are quite surprising.

Perhaps the shock of Jesus' actions are lost on us who live in a different cultural context. Jesus called the *undesirables*, those whom others had decided were not permitted to join the work of God, to come along and join the kingdom work. This showcases that all are God's children and all are invited to follow. Inclusiveness was a core principle in the life of Jesus because this reflected the nature of God within the cultural confines of where Jesus lived. Included in this list of outsiders were:

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

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

sinners (Matthew 9:10-13)

tax collectors (Mark 2:13-17)

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

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

All are called to be disciples of God. Those who are black or white, Asian or Hispanic, male or female, gay or straight, rich, poor, or middle class, conservative or progressive. When I say all are called to be disciples, I mean all people. Because the gospel is for all people and meant to move each of us to faithfulness.

A large curtain separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies—the innermost Temple chamber that represented God’s presence among the people. If you remember, when Jesus died, this was miraculously torn in two, from top to bottom, declaring that the way of approach to God was no longer found inside this granite and marble structure, but was now open to all who would enter by the sacrifice once for all given by Jesus Christ (Matthew 27:51). The new dwelling place of God is each individual who accepts this sacrifice on their behalf, is filled with the Holy Spirit, and becomes a temple of God, showcasing the glory of God in their lives.

During Jesus’ final words of instruction to the 12 disciples, He commanded them to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:18-20). In an imperative command, Jesus said, “Go and make disciples of all nations.” Jesus did not leave room for them to decide who was chosen, but instead directed them to go, and specifically told them to go everywhere—to all nations and all peoples. The phrase *all nations* knows no borders of country, language, race, or gender. For the disciples of Jesus, raised as God-fearing Jews, these orders stood in direct opposition to what they were taught and what was culturally acceptable.

After Jesus’ ascension into heaven and days of prayer in the upper room in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit was poured out onto the disciples and they began to speak in many languages (Acts 2:1-4). Peter addressed the confused crowd and quoted from the prophet Joel, linking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with a special act of God during the last days. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be on all people—sons and daughters,

men and women, young and old (Acts 2:17-21). Peter recognized that this was the beginning of the inclusive priesthood of all believers that Jesus' ministry inaugurated (1 Peter 2:9, 10).

A biblical theology of the call to discipleship recognizes that individuals become disciples from the first moment they accept Jesus' invitation to follow. Disciples are declared clean by Jesus— even as they are being made clean (John 8:11). This is in direct contrast with the idea of some that the individual has to get things together to be useful to God. We say “yes” in response to the love and grace of God, who always makes the first move towards us. As we journey with God, we are transformed.

The call to discipleship is an inclusive call, extended personally by God to every human being. In spite of the ways humans try to exclude one another, Jesus personally invites each one to follow God. Jesus' disciples are to reflect this same inclusion in the way they disciple diverse people groups. This same all-embracing call should pervade the current practice of discipleship, for in Jesus, all of the walls that divided and separated peoples are now torn down (Ephesians 2:14).

The Church as a Body

In Romans 12:3-8, Paul illustrates his point that the Christian community is a diverse but united whole by comparing it to a body. The imagery of the human body wasn't first used by Paul. A number of ancient writers used that metaphor for the political state—even though it was made up of many people, it made one single “body.” A few writers even said that the state is the “body” of the emperor.

Paul was using the language available at the time, but scholars also see from his letter here and to the Corinthians, that this imagery of the body had deep roots in his own theology. In 1 Corinthians where Paul described how we are to take communion, he compared the body of Christ—our Savior—to the body of Christ—the church. I believe this helps us to see that Paul was thinking of Christ's death on the cross as the means by which the community came to be a community—the living body of Christ. Each

of us participates equally in the benefits and gifts of Christ's redemptive work.

The church as a body is a metaphor that keeps us grounded. The church as a body is Christ manifested here in this place.

We are inescapably joined to the other members of the Christian community. We can no more separate ourselves from the body than the hand can decide it doesn't want to be attached to the arm anymore or the arm can feel it doesn't need the torso.

This is ultimately what Paul was claiming. The believers are *in Christ* and they are joined to His body, becoming His living body in the world (1 John 4:16-21; Ephesians 1:22-23).

The Church as Family

I opened this chapter by calling us a diverse, multicultural family of faith. Family imagery in the New Testament is frequent, especially in the writings of Paul. We are all adopted as children of God which unites us into one family of God (Romans 8:14-17; Ephesians 1:3-5; 1 John 3:1-2; Ephesians 3:14-19). The family is where we are nurtured and loved—where we find our place and belonging; where we feel safe to grow and stretch, becoming who we are. There's also a dark side to family. The family is the place that you experience your greatest pain and where we are most deeply wounded.¹ The church, as well as the family we are raised by, are both a place of belonging and a place of wounding. The church is called to be a part of the healing of each member of the body. For many, healing begins by knowing they are invited, knowing God welcomes them and intends them to be a disciple.

God calls us to be a healthy family. Healthy families deal with differences with humility, respect, and sensitivity. Healthy families build bridges to one another. Healthy families recognize the way each one belongs and the uniqueness of what each one brings to the family unit.

We are bonded as the people of God who are rescued by the gift of Jesus Christ. All of us. Salvation through grace alone. After all, we are only able to bridge to one another because God first bridged to each one of us (1 John

4:19). The role of the family of God is to extend the invitation to all (Matthew 24:14).

We are so diverse that we disagree and fight, yet remain in fellowship with each other anyway because of and enabled by the grace of God in our lives (1 Peter 4:8).

Next Generations

I believe one of the main things that stops us from successfully sharing our faith with next generations is this question of our welcome and how we deal with our differences.

How we welcome diversity and how we deal with our differences have great implications for our relationships, as well as the mission of the church to disciple all people. Many of us have given in to the temptation of writing people off or cutting people out who are different from us or disagree with us. If you've got people in your church, your family, or your friend group who don't agree with you (and I hope you do!), this understanding of how we can hold space for diversity can make all the difference.

Jesus started off His work here with a homogenous group. Think about it. Twelve Jewish men from a similar region of the world. Even with their differences, they had many commonalities including culture, customs, diet, religious upbringing, and family structure. Jesus started with this group that was, in many ways, very similar.

Then, in the book of Acts, we see that everything started changing. In Acts 2, we read about how thousands of believers were added to the group from all different parts of the world. But at least all were adherents to Judaism. They had a common Jewish faith they had embraced. Shortly after that, we read in Acts 10 that other Gentiles started joining in and following Jesus. Now that's when things really started to get messy!

Why did Jesus do this? Why was this part of God's plan?

Do you think the disciples were wondering that too? Jesus didn't solve it for them. He didn't give them point-by-point instructions on what to do when they disagreed. Jesus trusted His followers. There was something

sacred in the mess of figuring it out together and trusting the working of the Holy Spirit. One thing I know is that it wasn't easy, but it all came together as everyone had a seat at the table.

Coming to the Table

At the first church council in Jerusalem, we see concession and compassion for one another exhibited between the Jewish and Gentile believers in the early church (Acts 15). God led the church through:

sharing experiences of the Holy Spirit's work (Peter, Paul/ Barnabas),
exegesis of the Scriptures (James), and
the generous character of Christian leaders (Peter, James, Paul, and Barnabas).

You see, God was leading them to a new place. It was not the same as the Jews had experienced before, and it wasn't the same as the Gentiles had experienced before. Ellen White says it this way, "We must not think, 'Well, we have all the truth, we understand the main pillars of our faith, and we may rest on this knowledge.' The truth is an advancing truth, and we must walk in the increasing light."² What Christ was doing with this family of God was leading them step by step, building a bridge between them. As they met on this bridge of grace, both could exclaim, "We are saved by grace 'just as they are.'"

Most of the agreements that came out of the council had to do with dietary choices because of how important table fellowship was to the early church. The church remained together, building bridges to one another, at the table. They came to the table spread by the One who first came to us.

The challenge with the spread of the gospel is that it's tempting to make new disciples just like us. If they just became like us— other cultures, people groups, next generations—it would ease the tension. If you could just believe and act the same as I do, then we can get along.

Like the early church, we must set boundaries around what is foundational—"not making it difficult" for those behind us and around us

who are turning to God. We are called to build fellowship, realizing this requires sensitivity to the needs of new disciples who may think, feel, and behave differently than we do.

All Are Called to Transformation

All are called to be disciples. Fortunately for all of us, God doesn't just see who we are. God sees who we can be. God doesn't see the church as she is. God sees who she can be.

All are invited. We are a community, not defined by our collective problems, but by our creation in the image of God. Our belonging is to the One who called each one of us. Our becoming is a process. In 2 Corinthians 3:12-18, it says, "we are being transformed." The present tense indicative is used here, indicating that the action is both fully complete, yet ongoing. We experience this in the present as transformation. Yet, God continues in the ongoing work of transforming our lives day by day. Transformation is a Holy Spirit process that is both completed and "not yet."

In the church, we are known, not by what is wrong with us, but by who we are becoming. That is the gift of the church family. All are welcome. Each of us belongs. We live by God's grace—the free and unmerited favor of God—not based on what we offer to God, but what is gifted to us. This grace characterizes our day-by-day living. We recognize that none of us is finished. At the core, the life of a disciple is a life of belonging and growth. We are life-long learners seeking to be stronger and more ready to embrace the adventure of following God, as well as embracing the others who are on this shared journey together.

May you recognize that you are invited and welcomed into full belonging in the family of God.

May you experience God making space in your heart for those different from you.

May the grace of God bring understanding as we come to the table with one another.

Discussion Questions.

Have you or someone you know ever been excluded from discipleship or ministry? What was that experience like?

What does it look like today to follow the example of the church council seen in Acts 15, both in setting boundaries and “in not making it difficult” for new believers?

What is one action you can take this week to make space in your life for someone different from you?

CHAPTER FIVE

Bringing the Pieces Together



“The reason why many are still troubled, still seeking, still making little forward progress is because they haven’t yet come to the end of themselves. We’re still trying to give orders, and interfering with God’s work within us.”

A. W. TOZER

DR. ALLAN WALSH TURNED TO HIS CLASS and asked a question. “On the continuum of relationship and information, with relationship being a number 1 and information being a number 10, where do you think the Adventist Church falls in its emphasis?” Most people say eight or nine; one person in the room calls out three. In the years since, I have asked this question to countless groups and the response has always been the same—a recognition that as a church we place a heavy emphasis on information, many times eclipsing the importance of a relationship with God.

In previous chapters, we have recognized that the call to “go and make disciples” goes beyond the mere transmission of information about God. Our call is to invest time relationally with others, to learn experientially how to follow God in our everyday lives. In the last chapter, we recognized

that those who are invited to be disciples may not always be the ones we would choose. Still, we need each other in this process of becoming who God has called each of us to be. Discipleship is always found in the context of community.

It would be natural to focus on a curriculum that prioritizes right information about discipleship as if to say, “If you know these things about a relationship with Jesus, prayer, and devotional time in the Word of God, then you will have growth in the life of the disciple.” From the study of Scripture and from experience, I have come to realize that it’s not information *or* relationship, but information in the context of relationship. We need both in order to experience growth. Yet, the order is important. Information and learning must come in a relationship and experience with a personal God. The journey in community and the focus on experiential learning that are inherent in discipleship allow us to maintain a focus on both relationship and right information (life-giving truth) at the same time.

Biblical Foundations of a Discipleship Journey

Christ’s appeal to the church from the Scriptures is to move beyond lukewarm religion into an authentic discipleship relationship (Revelation 3:14-20). A discipleship journey can support this momentum towards an authentic relationship. The following principles, from our study in this and the previous chapters, serve as the biblical foundation for the discipleship journey shared in this book.

Discipleship centers on Jesus Christ and following Christ as the foundation of all religious belief and practice (Galatians 6:14). As everything in the church and the created world is held together in Christ, so God, as revealed in Jesus, must remain the center of discipleship—all of our belief and practice (Colossians 1:15-20).

Discipleship is personal—characterized by a personal call from God —“Come follow me” (Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17).

Discipleship is relational—a friendship with God —“He appointed twelve that they might *be with him* and that he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14, emphasis added). Scripture affirms that God’s desire is to be

near the church, sharing an intimate relationship with God's people (James 4:8; John 15:15; Revelation 3:20; Romans 8:15).

Discipleship is demanding—costing everything—“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Jesus must be Lord in the disciple's life, regardless of what persecution, challenge, or rejection may follow.

Discipleship must take place in the context of community—love for one another bears witness to Jesus—“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thessalonians 5:11). The call to discipleship cannot be separated from a call to become a part of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-14) for it is through the body that disciples understand what it looks like to follow Jesus. Paul instructed believers to imitate his example (1 Corinthians 4:16), as well as the example of God in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Discipleship is missional—following Jesus in His mission in the world—“I will make you fishers of people” (Matthew 4:19; Mark 1:17). While the call is a personal one to be with Jesus, it is also imperative to be with Jesus where He goes—on a mission to reach and to save the world.

Discipleship is inclusive of all people regardless of race, gender, or age—“Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19-20). Especially in the last days, the Holy Spirit will use all parts of the body of Christ to proclaim the Good News and invite others to find salvation in Christ (Acts 2:17-21).

The *Deep Calling* discipleship journey is built on these foundational principles. This foundation serves as a catalyst for genuine growth in the life of the believer. This growth is experienced in three overlapping and interrelated areas: deeper devotion to God, richer life in community, and greater purpose in mission.

Discipleship



Deepening Experience with GOD

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

the same time richly rewarding in both the present life and the life to come (John 10:10; Psalm 16:11; Isaiah 35:10).

The cost of discipleship is described in Luke 14:25-33. In verse 27, Jesus said, “Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” In verse 33, He reiterated, “In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.” Jesus then went on to caution the disciples to count the cost before deciding to follow, for it would cost them everything (Matthew 19:23-30). The call to become a disciple of Jesus is more than accepting Christ as Savior; It is the devotion of the entire life to God’s will and purposes. This is how disciples grow deeper in their experience with God.

What does this look like today? This means a complete surrender of my life—not only my time, resources, and gifts, but also my hopes, desires, and longings. It means reorienting my priorities to live in faithfulness to God’s call. It means laying down my concern for the opinions of others. Understanding the costly nature of discipleship reframes the suffering I’ve been through and the stillborn dreams I have experienced in my life.

A disciple’s sacrifices reveal the value they place on following Jesus. Like the person who found a pearl of great price and sold all they had to obtain it (Matthew 13:45-46), so is the person who forsakes all other priorities to follow Jesus, for they have found God to be worth more than anything else.

Ellen White asserted that discipleship is seen in the everyday actions of the believer:

True religion means living the word in your practical life. Your profession is not of any value without the practical doing of the word. “If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.” This is the condition of discipleship.¹

As disciples practice faith in day-to-day life, they experience what it means to take up their cross and follow. It is through this surrender that we experience growth in God.

The call to be a disciple is both personal and relational. Jesus calls each individual by name and invites them to experience a living, daily

relationship with God. In response to this call, it becomes the paramount need of the disciple to focus on Jesus as the center of life and the spiritual journey. This calling is costly, for accepting the Lordship of Jesus displaces all the other lords in the life of the disciple. Yet, the disciple has found Jesus to be worth giving up anything for. This is the heart of discipleship. Suffering and surrender cultivate spiritual growth in the believer through a deepening experience of relationship with God.

Deepening Relationships in Community

A remarkable sense of community develops among disciples who are following Jesus together in mission. What binds the community of disciples together? First, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer points out, each disciple has experienced the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.² It is this understanding of who disciples were before encountering Jesus, and who they are now in Jesus that characterizes the relationships between believers. All those gathered to Jesus know that without God, they are without hope. Together they stand on common ground as they recognize that they are sinners saved by grace (Ephesians 2:4-6; 1 Peter 2:9). Second, it is the shared commission to do Jesus' work in the world that unifies God's people together (Matt 28:18-20). God lives in the church (Ephesians 2:19-22) and is reconciling the world through God's people (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). This binds believers even more closely together as the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12).

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

praised, and enjoyed favor together, God was able to bring about growth. **The community they experienced led to expansion.**

This does not mean that community comes easily or quickly. Genuine community comes about as people follow Christ together, and it is not something that humans can fabricate themselves. Not unlike the salvation experience, community is a gift that only God can give.³ It is God who drives all aspects of authentic Christian community. The disciple's ongoing experience with Jesus' extravagant forgiveness slowly transforms them into a person who forgives others (Ephesians 4:31-32). The disciple's experience with God's consistent love changes them into a person who shares love with others (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). The way the disciple treats others is evidence of God's work in them. The outward fruit testifies to the inward transformation (Luke 6:43-45).

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

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

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

The knowledge of the Saviour's matchless love for them (the disciples) was to bind them heart to heart, preparing the way for the Lord to

anoint them with his Spirit. United by this love, they were to go forth to witness with convincing power to the divinity of their Leader. And their Christlike love for one another was to be the sign of their discipleship.⁴

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

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

A Deepening Experience of Purpose

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

In 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Paul succinctly summarizes the interconnectedness of becoming a disciple and heeding the call to mission. He asserts that believers are reconciled to Christ, made into new creations, and given the ministry of reconciliation. These three truths, which are often compartmentalized in church processes, are actually inseparably bound together in the Scriptures.

Believers' sins are not counted against them (justification) as they experience God's reconciliation and recreative power (sanctification), which enables them and compels them to share the good news of these realities (evangelism). The disciple is called to appeal to others to experience what they are experiencing. This is the calling of every believer, not just a select few. The only qualification for belonging to the priesthood of all believers as spoken of in 1 Peter 2:9 is the experience of being called "out of darkness

into his wonderful light.” All who are called out of darkness by Jesus are likewise called to live out the mission of Jesus through the Holy Spirit.

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

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

The call to be a disciple is by nature missional, for the disciple is invited to follow after Jesus in mission to the world. As disciples spend time in Jesus’ Presence, the love of Christ for the world becomes a part of them. The disciple, in turn, then lives out this love in the world through witness and service. This mission is fulfilled in the context of community, while growth through relationship with God in surrender and suffering is taking place in the life of the believer.



The Future

It's my prayer that in future years the Adventist Church will more wholly embrace a relational focus of discipleship. When a group of Adventists are asked this question in the future, "On the continuum of Relationship and Information, with relationship being number 1 and information being number 10, where do you think the Adventist Church falls in its emphasis?" the answer will indicate that we firmly prioritize the importance of a relationship with God for every believer.

May you know the delight of joining God in the mission of sharing love to the world.

May you understand both the sacrificial cost and joy of discipleship.

May you experience the messy, but Divine gift of community with other believers.

Discussion Questions

In what way has personally experiencing the love of Jesus impacted how you view the mission of Jesus?

What is one of the most significant sacrifices you've made in following Christ as His disciple? What is one of the richest joys?

What is an area of slow, difficult community-building that your church faces right now? How can you encourage them?

CHAPTER SIX

What's Bothering You?



“When Jesus said, ‘Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy burdened,’ He assumed we would grow weary, discouraged, and disheartened along the way. These words are a touching testimony to the genuine humanness of Jesus. He had no romantic notion of the cost of discipleship. He knew that following Him was as unsentimental as duty, as demanding as love.”

BRENNAN MANNING

DALLAS WILLARD INSISTS that instead of trying to think of what you are passionate about and where you feel called to invest, answer a different question. His question arrested my attention and has been a reorienting call over the years:

*What's bothering you?*¹

What's bothering you can lead you to the very area where you are called to make a difference.

This is exactly how it worked for one of my heroes, Mister Rogers. In an interview with CNN in 1999, he said, “I went into television because I hated it so. And I thought, there’s some way of using this fabulous instrument to nurture those who would watch and listen.”²

There has to be a way...

Perhaps, like me, you find yourself able to make a long list of what is bothering you. In the context of the church, several things have troubled me, bothering me to the point that I found myself thinking, “There has to be a way.”

Treasuring our special knowledge while at the same time living in insecurity about our salvation.

Thinking it can’t be a call from God unless it is outside your gifts and passions.

The idea that spiritual life and growth look the same for every believer.

Believing there are some who are “spiritual” and some who are not; some who can pray and some who can’t.

“Once I came into the truth...” – as if truth is a destination we arrive at.

Counting some people out of Divine favor.

These are just some of the things on my list. There has to be a way, I thought, to allow people space to experience God, develop security in God’s love, to be set free to live their unique purpose, and come to the realization that this is a lifelong journey.

With the majority of Seventh-day Adventist churches in North America in a state of plateau or decline, the question must be asked: Do we have a discipleship strategy that is working?

In 20 years of ministry, I can see that the discipleship principles have been at work in my ministry from the beginning. The things that were most meaningful and fulfilling always took place when I joined Jesus in the work of being and making disciples. In the last 10 years, though, I have been led to prioritize the invitation of Jesus to make disciples in an even more

intentional way. First and foremost, I've been making more space in my life to be a disciple of Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20). Second, this inward journey has led me to invite others to participate in an intentional discipleship process and respond to the eight calls of God in the context of community. I try to guard this time to share my personal experience with others in the ongoing discipleship process, but ever present is the opportunity to be distracted.

I believe there is nothing more important than prioritizing (1) being a disciple and (2) joining God in making disciples. I believe this is true. You might even agree with me. Yet, how do we see this reflected in our schedules? In the way we pull back to sit in the presence of God? In our teaching and preaching? God continues to invite me into this way of life—this sacred priority of being and growing disciples.

What distracts us from this focus on discipleship? We have the regular distractions that anyone has—a finite amount of time, the pressure of too much to do, and the external expectations of others on our time and attention, to name a few. Beyond these common struggles, Seventh-day Adventists struggle with unique distractions from discipleship.

For some Seventh-day Adventists, the focus placed on *right* beliefs has overshadowed the importance of spiritual development and transformation brought about by a relationship with Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit (see 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:22-25; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Romans 12:2). We are able to *believe* all the right things, and yet remain unchanged in our spiritual life. Many times, we are so focused on having *the truth* that we forget that, as disciples, we are following the *Truth* in the person of Jesus Christ. This failure to experience a vibrant relationship with Christ in turn arrests involvement in the missional and evangelistic ministry of Christ (see Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 4:15-21).

The church has taught people doctrinal theology (how to believe), but has neglected to teach them moral theology and ethics (how to behave in society) and devotional theology (how to relate spiritually to God and others).³ The abandonment of teaching these three elements of theology, and the exclusive emphasis on the one element, doctrinal theology, has left many Seventh-day Adventists longing for more.

Church members can have orthodox Adventist beliefs, yet remain unchanged in their heart and lifestyle. Being an Adventist Christian does not make them any more loving, joyful, kind, or long-suffering (Galatians 5:22-23) than they were before they joined the church. As Russell Burrill states, “They know the truth, but do not know the *Truth*.”⁴ For some members, belief in Jesus seems to be a transaction which brings salvation, getting them into heaven someday, but does not develop into a living relationship. Sadly, for some it doesn’t even give assurance and peace in their own spiritual journey.

Still for others, Jesus is *one* of their doctrines, but not *the One* who is the foundation of all other doctrines and beliefs (Colossians 1:16-17). The church has been unsuccessful in leading them to see that a relationship with Jesus, learning how to follow Him, is *the* central point of their faith.

In Jesus’ final address to His disciples, He commanded them to “make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20). Yet, we are so often distracted from being and growing disciples. We easily get caught up in other things we are doing as a church. Although there are many distractions that could be highlighted, I believe there are three that deserve our focus – three primary behavior patterns which distract us from prioritizing discipleship in the Seventh-day Adventist Church: legalism, compartmentalization, and fear of deception.

Legalism

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

inner relationship with Jesus. When challenges are encountered, believers can find themselves asking, “What was I doing wrong?” in order for this to happen.

Compartmentalization

Compartmentalization occurs when believers view their spirituality as one facet of life, rather than as a radical shift that transforms the entire life. As with legalism, Jesus is not Lord; the individual is. Without examples in the body of Christ and relationships that show how to be disciples—coaching, practice, and peer-to-peer mentoring—many believers continue to live out the same routines they have always had. The only difference is that they come to church on Saturdays. Their primary understanding and identification is not as a disciple of Jesus, but as a member of the church. Faith does not affect the rest of their lives—their Monday-through-Friday lives. An intentional discipleship process is essential for each local church to train people in how to surrender to Jesus and experience transforming power daily.

Before moving on to the third distraction, it is important to acknowledge that there is tension between legalism and compartmentalization. Either striving to keep the law or working hard at the spiritual disciplines can become legalistic in approach. It’s important to remain sensitive to the fact that it is possible to become legalistic in the way we approach discipleship. Jesus, not the individual, must remain the primary focus. The Christian life is primarily what is being done to you, not what you are doing.⁶

Fear of Deception

The fear of deception is a growing and prevalent distraction from discipleship in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This fear of deception affects many aspects of the spiritual life by diverting the focus of the disciple from a relationship with Jesus to learning *truth* in order to avoid deception. Fear of deception paralyzes the disciple’s pursuit of a personal relationship with Christ, and instead, prioritizes correct knowledge as the source of security. This fear results in a form of evangelism which emphasizes the

transmission of right information in order to safeguard the hearers from deception.

This emphasis on avoiding deception often ends up eclipsing the necessity of having a relationship with Jesus and inviting others to follow Him. The Bible confronts this emphasis on fear and deception. The Bible declares, “Perfect love drives out all fear” (1 John 4:18), including the fear of being deceived. As believers live in a relationship with Jesus and submit to God’s will, they have nothing to fear. Again, the Scriptures emphasize, “Greater is He who is in you than He who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). The Lord provides protection in Christ and in the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17). As disciples are rooted in Christ, they are able to stand against deception. Paul’s counsel to the Colossians is to “continue to live in Him” (Colossians 2:6-8). Later, in his counsel to Timothy, he stated that “God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love and a sound mind” (2 Timothy 1:7). Jesus is the way to security in this life (John 14:6).

Some have even feared silence and stillness with God, worried that the enemy would whisper in their mind and take over their lives. Special inspiration testifies, “When every other voice is hushed, when every earthly interest is turned aside, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God.”⁶

I have talked with church members who felt so afraid of deception in the way they were praying that they took a break from prayer altogether. I am not alone in this experience. Other pastors have shared similar stories with me.

In response to our tendency towards legalism, God responds with grace.

In response to our compartmentalized life, God calls us to integration.

In response to our fear of deception, God promises to hold us in perfect peace.

What’s Bothering You?

Leader, I’m wondering, what’s bothering you? Is there a way discipleship is being missed in your life and in your church? Remember, this is much more

than about you or me. There are some who are deeply bothered by where we are as a church right now. Some of you are despairing about where you are on your spiritual journey—you long for more. How is it that God wants to lead you from that place to nurturing new life?

This process you're embarking on is not just about you as an individual. Or about your local church. It's about all of us. As you are healthier, so we are healthier. Each of us must come alive to what God has called us to. Who are you serving? Who is this about? Let's spur one another on towards courage and hope in what God is doing among us.

It's about deepening your love and trust in God.

It's about discovering more of who you are.

It's about imagining what is not yet in our church and in our communities.

It's about making a difference by growing disciples.

It's about learning how to dream, implement, and discover.

For some, it will also be about pushing yourself to make time for what matters most. Opening up to the power of God at work in your life. Being real with others about your longing for God.

May you feel your own heart stirred to longing after God, even in the midst of distractions.

May you know God wants nothing more than for you to be a disciple and join God in making disciples.

May you join God in this sacred work of being and growing disciples by ruthlessly making space for what matters most.

Discussion Questions.

What's bothering you? Is there an invitation from God there?

Where is there the greatest need in your church: doctrinal, moral, or devotional theology? What is one way you can help balance and focus your growth as a church this week?

Which of the three distractions—legalism, compartmentalization, or fear of deception—have you struggled with the most? How does the discipleship process re-focus on Jesus?

CHAPTER SEVEN

Discipleship and the Adventist Church



“It is not earthly rank, nor birth, nor nationality, nor religious privilege, which proves that we are members of the family of God; it is love, a love that embraces all humanity.”

ELLEN WHITE

I LOVE THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH. Let me tell you a few reasons why.

We are a people who believe we are accepted fully and completely by God because of grace through Jesus. The gift of righteousness given to us by Jesus changes our lives.

We are a movement defined by a continued search for truth. As a lifelong learner, I love this about our church.

We are people who hold on tenaciously to hope for all people. We are people of the Advent—the hope of renewal, restoration, and recreation.

We are people who believe all individuals deserve rest, including the manservant or maidservant—which means the minimum wage worker, not

just the salaried professional, deserves the human dignity of worth that comes from resting, knowing that our worth comes not from what we do, but from who we are.

We are a people of purpose. We believe Jesus has called us to make a tangible difference in the world (Matthew 25; Luke 4:18-19) and we engage this together.

We are a people who believe God wants to transform this world radically. God doesn't want to get rid of this earth, but wants to restore it, making the prayer "On earth as it is in heaven" our reality.

There are so many reasons, I could go on. I believe this church, this church you're a part of, this church you're leading, or perhaps this church you're currently struggling with, is beautiful. Let me acknowledge right up front that this has always been and will always be an imperfect church. Imperfect people that we are, as long as we are here, it will be imperfect. Yet, all the same, what God is doing in our midst is worthy of celebration.

Discipleship in the Adventist Church

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

Given these differing interpretations of doctrine in the Adventist Church, is it possible to find a uniting paradigm of discipleship? Based on the biblical study in the previous chapters, we will unpack how this can be applied specifically in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, though I believe this application extends to other contexts as well.

Three principles will be helpful in moving toward a common understanding of what is central to faith and the subsequent establishment of a process of discipleship in the church.

The Role of Scripture

First, in defining discipleship, the Bible must be maintained as the authority in determining the principles and practice of nurturing a personal relationship with God. The Bible is inspired by God (2 Peter 1:20-21) and testifies of Jesus (John 5:39). Therefore, the Word of God must guide understanding and be the authenticator of personal, heart experience. This, however, does not put the Bible in the place of Jesus, as if we were worshipping the Bible itself or the knowledge received from study, but emphasizes that it is the only source for seeking the rule of faith and practice. The written Word of God exists to lead us to the Living Word of God, Jesus Christ (John 5:37-39; Hebrews 10:1). According to 2 Timothy 3:15, the Scriptures bring understanding and knowledge, which in turn leads to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. If we ever struggle with understanding the Bible, we are to turn to the Living Word made Flesh (John 1) and understand a clearer picture of what God is like by how Jesus lived in this world. This guides our discipleship journey.

Jesus at the Center

Second is the recognition that the Bible declares Jesus as Lord, demanding that disciples surrender all other things to this Lordship, including all beliefs and practices (Galatians 2:20, Philippians 2:9-11, John 14:6). This emphasis on Christ does not diminish the importance of other biblical truth—for the Scriptures make it clear that *all things* are held together in Him. Rather, Jesus puts these understandings in their proper focus (Colossians 1:16-17). As Elder Dan Jackson shares, “Christ is the center and substance of our faith.”¹ Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and prophets (Matthew 5:17). In Jesus, all doctrines make sense and become profitable in the life of the disciple (2 Timothy 3:15-16).

Relationship, Not Just Information

Third, in practice, not just our words, we must value the experience of a relationship *with* God, as well as information *about* God. Adventists hold in common a conviction that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was raised up to restore certain biblical understandings to the broader, Christian church. Among these are the biblical Sabbath, what happens after death, and the nature of hell fire. While emphasizing these and other distinctive beliefs, the focus on discipleship and the imperative of having a relationship with God is, at times, minimized. This living relationship with God then becomes secondary to the *distinctive* truths which the Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches from the Scriptures. Information is important, for it is through biblical teaching that individuals are able to understand who God is and what God is like. Nevertheless, information without the context of a living relationship with Jesus is dead.

What We Bring: the Adventist Contribution to Discipleship

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has much to offer in the area of discipleship and spiritual growth. Here are four contributions that I believe are significant to the process of discipleship in the local church.

Personal Devotional Habits: As a community of faith, the Adventist Church espouses core beliefs that encourage a rule of life, that elevate the importance of the Word of God, and that stress the necessity of personal prayer.²

Sabbath Practice: Adventists emphasize that every member experience a weekly Sabbath as God commanded,³ a practice which Christians from many traditions are recently rediscovering.⁴

The Role of the Holy Spirit: Even more important, the Seventh-day Adventist Church emphasizes the changes that God brings in the life of a believer through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.⁵

Wholistic Perspective: Rather than a compartmentalized faith, Adventist doctrine encourages a wholistic view of human existence,

recognizing that God wants to redeem every area of life.⁶

Challenges

Amid these blessings, there are also difficulties. As a result of the emphasis on doctrine in the Adventist Church, people can feel that once they embrace new beliefs, they have “arrived.” In reality, discipleship is a process that takes time and intentional openness over the course of a lifetime. In his work centering on the mission of the local Adventist Church, Russell Burrill points out that the word *disciple* “does not suggest a rapid conversion . . . but a slow process by which one is made into a disciple.”⁷ Discipleship must be recaptured as a process, rather than an event.⁸ It is imperative that the Seventh-day Adventist Church become deliberate about this heart-focused process.

Discipling Next Generations

Young people are especially adept at noticing the emptiness of religious practice without a living relationship. They can help the Seventh-day Adventist Church gauge effectiveness in these important areas of discipleship. Studies show that approximately half of Adventist young people in North America leave the church in their twenties.⁹ Researchers agree: the attrition of youth and young adults in the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues at a steady pace.¹⁰ I believe this is because of a failure to connect them with the heart of what following God is all about: a relationship with Jesus, joining God in mission, meaningful community, while viewing suffering from a redemptive perspective.

The best indication of whether a young person stays in the church is not how well they do in Bible class, or even daily study of the quarterly (though attending an Adventist school and engaging in Sabbath School can make a positive difference). It's the relationships that they have built with loving, Seventh-day Adventist Christian adults who are willing to journey with them as they discover what it looks like to be disciples of Jesus themselves. Information matters when it is experienced in the context of a relationship. When their faith is challenged and what they thought they understood becomes irrelevant, to whom do they turn?

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

The Importance of Discipleship

Each disciple is called to follow God and to be transformed like Jesus in doctrine, behavior, purpose, and relationships. Discipleship is about the integration of the entire life of the disciple under the instruction of the Master, Jesus.¹¹ It is essential for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to elevate the importance of intentional discipleship.

The crisis of plateaued or declining churches could indicate that correct beliefs are not enough for people to realize spiritual growth. There must be an intentional focus on Jesus and discipleship in the local church. This, in turn, will result in transformation and mission orientation in members.¹²

We have all dealt with our share of struggle. Disharmony, chaos, darkness, pain. This is the Great Controversy. Yet, Adventists believe harmony is coming. Love, unity, completion, renewal, and wholeness are our story. God comes to show the way. Adventists believe that living in light and life start now through a relationship with God, the One who loves us deeply and completely. Relationship. It's what changes our lives.



The In-Between

We live in between the inauguration and the consummation of the new covenant. Discipleship is the ongoing transformation of the people God is creating in the midst of the sinful, messy, and beautiful world, showing the power of the Spirit hovering over our lives. The display of God's righteousness and glory is seen in both the work of redemption and transformation, as well as the final restoration into the image of Christ when He comes.

“We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be seen of God and not of ourselves” (2 Corinthians 4:6-7). In God, we not only find forgiveness, grace, and a call to be disciples ourselves, but we find transformation in the way we treat other people and invite them to be disciples too.

The Remnant

Seventh-day Adventists believe in a faithful group of followers who are on earth at the close of history. What characteristics mark this remnant? The remnant are a people called out for the sake of the world. Not an organization unto themselves, but a people faithful to God, in order to draw other people into faithfulness to God (see Exodus 32). Blessed with a precious relationship with God so that they can be a blessing to others, inviting them into relationship. According to Revelation, these people keep the commandments—they live in the way God designed—and have a testimony or experience with Jesus themselves. The people described are disciples— following after Jesus and living the way He lived, while experiencing Jesus and sharing their testimony of that experience (Revelation 14:12). This is discipleship. This is the call of the remnant.

The Call to Sacrifice

Captain Lawrence Chambers was in the first month of his command of the USS Enterprise. He was the first African American in history to command a US Navy aircraft carrier. It was early April of 1975 and the Vietnam War was coming to an end. The United States was engaged in operation

“Frequent Wind,” which meant the Navy was evacuating all remaining US nationals and as many South Vietnamese military personnel and their families as possible in order to protect them from almost certain death at the hands of the North Vietnamese army as it pushed southward. The Enterprise was fully loaded with helicopters for the evacuation and had received thousands of grateful evacuees. The last helicopters were arriving when the officers on the bridge of the Enterprise received word that a small fixed wing aircraft was slowly approaching. They attempted to contact the unidentified craft on all frequencies but received only static.

A few hours earlier, a young South Vietnamese military officer realized that he and family were not going to make it out before the enemy troops arrived to kill them. Fortunately, Major Buang Lee was an experienced pilot. He sneaked onto the airbase with his family and crammed his wife and five children into a tiny two-seater Cessna O-1 training plane. They took off amid gunfire and somehow made it out over the sea. He had no idea where they would go to survive. Suddenly he spotted the cluster of ships making up Operation Frequent Wind. The plane’s radio was broken.

As the officers on the Enterprise tried to identify this strange plane’s intentions, they noticed, through their binoculars, children looking out of the cockpit windows. The plane circled and the pilot kept throwing papers out which kept blowing away in the wind. He finally wrapped a note around his service pistol and threw it out. It read:

“Can you move the Helicopter to the side, I can land on your runway, I can fly 1 hour more, Please rescue me.
- Major Buang, wife and 5 child.”¹³

The officers of the Enterprise held an emergency meeting. The ship’s main power plant was down for maintenance, leaving them with little power for maneuvering. The flight deck was covered with chained down Huey Helicopters that had been used in the evacuation. Captain Chambers and his team felt certain that the family had little chance of survival if they ditched in the cold South China sea. They needed to land on the Enterprise. The crew immediately put all ship systems on emergency generator power as the main power plant was put back in operation. All hands were called to

the flight deck, where they were ordered to start stripping gear from the helicopters and began pushing them over the edge of the flight deck and into the sea. Working together, the crew picked up over 10 million dollars' worth of helicopters with their bare hands, and threw them into the ocean. As the crew worked to clear a space, five more helicopters arrived – they were quickly unloaded and then pitched into the sea as well.

With only minutes of fuel remaining, Major Buang brought his tiny craft in for a perfect landing on the deck of the Enterprise. He and his family were greeted with cheers and waving open arms. The crew unanimously donated money toward a fund to help the Lee family settle in the United States after claiming refugee status. Chambers was certain that his decision would get him a court martial and end his career. Thankfully his decision was upheld by his superiors, and he went on to become a Rear Admiral.

Captain Chambers chose compassion. In the split second he had to make a decision to save a family, he put their lives above his own, knowing this could be the end of his career, a career he had worked so hard for. Yet, he chose to save lives and worked with an entire crew, who together made space and saved an entire family, those precious seven people.

As disciples, we realize there's so much we cannot control. We cannot control what happens to us or what happens in the world. We cannot control what happens in our cities or in the lives of our members, but we can put ourselves in a position to experience God's transformation. To grow as disciples, being transformed to embrace the world. We can open ourselves up to bring life to the lives of others. Captain Chambers did whatever it took to bring life to the family. He was willing to let go of precious things, costly things that got in the way of making space for those individuals running on empty. The remnant are called to make space for others too. They are to bring life, salvation and healing from God. The faithful people of God experience God themselves and then relentlessly focus on being used by God to disciple others.

To be the remnant means we are transformed to love others as God loves them. We are willing to work together to do whatever it takes to be disciples and to grow other disciples.

When we started as a Seventh-day Adventist Church, there was risk and bravery and courage. There was faithfulness as our founders stepped into the territory where God was leading with very few guarantees. It was not certain, neat, or packaged into a set of fundamental beliefs, but our founders said, we will follow where God leads us.

This means that even now, in this new territory in our time and place, “we have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.”¹⁴ We don’t need to fear. God’s presence is with us and the Present Truth will be available to us for what we face today.

May you see the beauty and the gift of being a part of the diverse, imperfect body of Christ.

May you recognize the great value God places on each person - you and everyone you meet.

May you commit your life and ministry to doing whatever it takes to be a disciple and grow other disciples, even at great sacrifice.

Discussion Questions.

What is one thing you love about the Adventist church?

Which of the four Adventist contributions to discipleship is most needed by the world? Your church? You?

Thinking of the story of Captain Chambers, what helicopters in the church or in your life do you believe are worth throwing overboard to make space for people in need?