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The Church Discipleship: Real Praxis

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The Church Discipleship: Real Praxis

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Abstract

This paper presents a holistic model for effective discipleship. Definitions of discipleship used by several ecclesiastical denominations as well as a secular perspective are examined, but biblical examples and principles of discipleship serve as the platform to achieve spiritual knowledge and its purpose. The current state of discipleship in a sample of some of the denominational Christian churches in the West is presented in order to understand the necessary changes that need to be made. In the same manner, this paper offers some elements of healthy discipleship from around the world that provide a fresh way to integrate real discipleship in the local church.

Keywords

Discipleship, Biblical model, Community, Passive Praxis, Servant models, Active Praxis

The Church Discipleship: Real Praxis

Introduction

The Church, throughout the years, has subconsciously dismissed the Christ-commissioned praxis and has forgotten the development of discipleship. The purpose of this paper is to prove the hypothesis that effective discipleship: (1) happens in community and not in a weekend service, (2) develops a heart of compassion, (3) meets a community's social needs, (4) is led by a skilled coach, (5) follows evangelism and baptism, (6) and is doctrinal teaching working hand-in-hand with praxis.

The Purposes and Definitions of Discipleship

The purpose and definition of discipleship is relevant for every person on the Christian journey. Throughout the years, the Church has followed different praxes and dynamics regarding discipleship. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis paper is to redefine discipleship and encourage the Church toward *orthopraxy* and not just *orthodoxy* in its approach to discipleship. It is relevant to introduce the Church's definitions of discipleship and, at the same time, include a secular definition of discipleship before proposing a new definition more in line with Christ's method of making disciples. This discussion will include a general, ecclesiastical perspective of what can be observed within the Assemblies of God. (I'm not sure you are able to write on behalf of the AG.)

The Secular Definition of Discipleship

Webster's Dictionary defines a disciple as "a pupil or follower of a teacher or leader in religion, art philosophy, etc."¹ This secular definition has been taken from the scriptural spheres and the praxis of Jesus' ministry. In the same manner, the non-Christian Greeks defined *matthetas* (the word used for discipleship in the New Testament) as "one who learns from another who is a teacher."² The disciple is a student that follows or learns from a teacher. In other words, the word "disciple" denotes intentionally following in order to be able to learn.

Jesus called certain people to be His disciples and to follow Him. The narrative described the disciples leaving everything and following him ("οἱ δὲ εὐθέως ἀφέντες τὰ δίκτυα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ - Matt 4:20.")³ According to Allen, the word "follow" is the Greek word "ἀκολουθεῖν" which means, "I follow, accompany, obey [to come or go behind someone; comply with]."⁴ This praxis includes a radical action taken not only by the disciple, but also by the teacher or leader, as Lemke proposes:

Disciple-centered leadership is broadly defined as the process of influencing one's organization and its members to follow Christ by seeking to understand, develop, and capitalize on the passions, skills, and other assets that the members of the organizational community possess. Disciple-centered leaders recognize that these assets are possessed by a variety of stakeholders, including individual participants in the faith community.⁵

1. *Webster's New World Student's Dictionary*, ed. Jonathan L. Goldman and Andrew N. Sparks (Cleveland, Ohio: Wiley Publishing, 1996), 246.

2. James Allen, Michel C. Robbins, and Steven R. Johnson, *New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academy, 2009), 288.

3. *The Greek New Testament, Fifth Revised Edition with Dictionary*, ed. Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce Metzger (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart: Printed in Germany, 2014), 10.

4. Allen, 278.

5. Dale L. Lemke, "A Philosophy of Disciple-Centered Leadership," *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 2 (2017): 270, accessed March 6, 2018, <http://link.galegroup.com/seu.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/A508201127/ITOF?u=southec&sid=ITOF&xid=4a8ea4c9>.

Therefore, discipleship must be intentional on both sides of the line; otherwise, it will never accomplish God's design and purpose.

According to the biblical model of discipleship, some religious spheres have focused their model on a structure. The model of discipleship demonstrated in the book of Acts teaches the church that discipleship is to follow someone in the community and actively participate in the real praxis of discipleship. The current model of discipleship is one that puts all, if not most, of its emphasis on a structure instead of the person who has been added to the body of Christ. It must be remembered what the disciples said to Jesus regarding how beautiful the décor of the temple was and how Jesus responded that no stone would be left standing of the structure (Luke 21:5-6). This passage explains it is not the structures that deserve emphasis. Instead, it is the lives of believers that should be emphasized. This false model, as previously mentioned, can lead the church to lose focus on what true discipleship is and instead lead the Church into focusing on economic and structural interests, causing the Church to lose all empathy for helping others and giving their economy to the neediest in the community.

Roberto Bazanini expressed his concerns regarding the impact of the megachurch on the community and discipleship praxis stating that:

Regular retail physical markets have similarities with modern shopping malls, supermarkets or souvenirs stores. Ruthven (2012) considers that the dispute created by the faithful in the United States is a divine supermarket. Perez (2007) discusses the transformation of religion into a supermarket of faith, a religious self-service, which called religion "a la carte," relating to fetishism of the goods and the rationalization of the world.⁶

6. Roberto Bazanini and Celso Machado Junior, "Market as Religion: The Dynamics of Business Network in Megachurches," *Brazilian Business Review (Portuguese Edition)* 15, no. 3 (2018): 264.

In other words, the megachurch's priority goes in tune with the post-modern society, which is constantly in competition with the economy, politics, and religion.⁷ This type of model can easily be accepted by the new converts and adopted as the correct model in their future life in Christ; but discipleship is about relationships in the communal spheres. It is relevant to proceed to encounter the practical definition of the primitive church and the ecclesiastical church in the present day.

The Practical Definition of Discipleship: The Primitive Church

In the beginning of the Primitive Church, people were gathering in the houses, “and the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them (Acts 4:32).”⁸ The Church was compelled to move in love and compassion by the difficult situations of their brethren's daily lives, which took place in small group settings. This compelled movement was based on pure *ortho-praxis*. In the same manner, the most important concept about the primitive church is that the disciples were of one heart and soul (“ἓν καρδία καὶ ψυχὴ μία”).⁹ Therefore, discipleship in the Primitive Church involved developing compassionate hearts in Christ follower so that their hearts would be completely touched by the power of the Word that discerns the thoughts of the heart, transforming and renewing their inner being in a supernatural

7. Bazanini, 280.

8. Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible references in this paper are to the New American Standard Bible (NASB) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1973).

9. *The Greek New Testament*, Acts 4:32, 410.

form (Hebrews 4:12). The Greek word “*καρδία*” translates as a “causative source of one’s psychological, inner life, especially thoughts.”¹⁰ For this reason, intentional discipleship ought to transform to the heart of the disciple, not only in a theoretical sense, but in a scenario where his/her whole being will be able to develop a new attitude and thoughts that align to the heart of God. Jesus’ ministry shaped the disciples’ character in a holistic form.

What was occurring in the life of the disciples in that moment is similar to the philosophical explanation of Aristotle when he used the Greek word *poiesis* as the source that would provide the design for a final product.¹¹ Using this philosophical comparison philosophers, and the church will notice that the source of life who is the Word: Jesus Christ, which created everything that exists in this world is the supernatural *poiesis* (Jn 1:1). Thus, He does not only design the life of a disciple but also that of the universe. However, the only way that this theoretical design will be completed is through *praxis*.¹² This imperative action could be a sacrifice for those coming to Christ but it is the only way to see the transformation of a human being which in the process of *praxis* of the Scripture will be blessed (Jas 1:25). Praxis is the action of completing the design of the source and converting it into the final product that is the *telos*, which includes the characteristics of: maturity, perfection, value, goals, meaning, and character.¹³ The sapience purpose of the Word, even before the existence of the universe had a redemptive purpose. A purpose that enhances the lives of human beings if they remain attached to the real source of life: Jesus. They will bear fruit in the process which is the *telos* (final

10. Allen, 287.

11. Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2001), 49.

¹² Anderson, 49.

¹³ Anderson, 49.

product). This remarkable discipleship exhibits transformation in the life of a spiritual man in maturity, character and makes a man who is equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:17).

The brethren of the book of Acts had all things in common (“ἦν αὐτοῖς ἅπαντα κοινά.”)¹⁴ The cause of being compelled will change the thought of the disciple leading to disciples who will not be selfish, but rather, will have “ἅπας (all things)” which translates as “whole, all, everybody, [the totality of a mass or object].”¹⁵ This definition is powerful because all disciples must think as one and move as one body. For this reason, if the Body of Christ is united in the same thought and feeling, it can accomplish more things for the glory of God, but, when these things are not part of an intentional discipleship, the church lacks relevance as one body under the same mind, which is the mind of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 2:16). Therefore, each will have all things in “κοινός,” that translates, “common, in common.”¹⁶ This word is interrelated with the word, “κοινωνία,” which translates to “fellowship, a close mutual relationship; participation, sharing in; partnership; contribution, gift.”¹⁷ As a result, the small group discipleship programs will emphasize practical discipleship in the community, correlating to the praxis of the primitive church, which was compassionate and had all things in common.

The most relevant part learned through discipleship is the heart of believers for sharing their gifts and provisions without looking for any personal return (Col 3:23). The church, through this practical discipleship, learns to reflect unity and compassion within the body of Christ. Therefore, discipleship, amid the church and society, prepares future discipleship educators to no

14. *The Greek New Testament*, Acts 4:32, 410.

15. Allen, 279.

16. Barclay M. Newman, *A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament Revised Edition* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, 2014), 103.

17. *Ibid.*, 103.

longer ignore the problematic realities that, in many cases, most people are not willing to discuss or approach. In the same manner, it is also relevant to examine the Catholic Church's definition of discipleship within the body of Christ.

The Catholic Church's Ecclesiastical Definition of Discipleship

One of the ecclesiastical definitions derived from a Catholic perspective relates the word "discipleship" to educational institutions with the word "discipline." William Welker indicates that "future educators must be taught to view discipline not as an unspeakable topic, but as reality of teaching!"¹⁸ For example, in the specific scenario of a Catholic school that most likely must deal with secular students and parents, the staff is called to "disciple" their students regardless of the belief or unbelief of the student. This praxis is through a teaching, which correlates with another secular definition: "A disciple is a person who receives the teachings of a master or someone who receives studies in a school."¹⁹ The reality is that teaching requires one to be intentional in the process of discipline and, at the same time, part of discipleship intended to unify the teacher and the student.

As Martin affirms, "Discipleship, at its foundation, is a social system that binds at least two persons (but normally more) into a specific hierarchical relationship."²⁰ This rabbinical perspective also asserts that the main purpose of discipleship is relationship. The apostle Paul was a disciple who went through the process of the spiritual disciplines in order to be called the

18. William A. Welker, "Disciple a Reality of Teaching," *Education* 96, no. 3 (1976): 239.

19. *Diccionario Esencial Lengua Española*, ed. Exclusiva para Plaza Mayor, Inc. (Barcelona, España: Litografías Roses), 273.

20. Martin S. Jaffee, "A Rabbinic Ontology of the Written and Spoken Word: On Discipleship, Transformative Knowledge," *Journal of The American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 3 (1997): 529.

apostle of Jesus. In the same order, he was the apostle who intentionally addressed cases of disorder in the Church, and in leadership (Gal 3:3; Acts 11:1, 18).

The Messianic Jewish Definition of Discipleship

The messianic Jews, on the other hand, included in their definition of discipleship two forms that interrelate in the work of discipleship. The first is mimesis of the Jews, and the second is the mimetic discipleship of Jesus, the Jew. These two forms are very relevant to represent or imitate the Jews' practices.²¹ Messianic Jews' discipleship is more of a praxis than a theoretical teaching. They are more focused on imitating the Jews and Jesus' teachings in order to be a good representative or disciple. Hillary Kaell asserted, "Arguing that representation is not merely a shadow of the real: it shares in and takes power from that which it represents because the act of imitating acquires its own density and substance...to imitate mimetically is to become both self and other, or subject and object."²² Following the Messianic theological perspective in reference to the act of imitating, the apostle John declared that they had seen the Father (John 1:14). Jesus, Himself, was His own destiny, substance, and, at the same time, the Father in action. It was as if the Son came to manifest in praxis the divinity of the Father. Jesus imitates the Father in a holistic form. For instance, Jesus worked with the dirt in which he spat and made mud to recreate an eye for a blind man, just as the Father did when He formed man from the dirt of the earth. Likewise, Jesus breathed the Spirit upon his disciples.

Similarly, God breathed the Spirit through the nostrils of Adam. In the same manner, Jesus was subject to the will of the Father as he had to give his own life for the redemption of humanity. In other words, his life not only manifested the image of God, but also his personal

21. Hillary Kaell, "Under the Law of God: Mimesis and Mimetic Discipleship Among Jewish-Affinity Christians," *Journal of The Royal Anthropological Institute* 22, no. 3 (September 2016): 498.

22. *Ibid.*, 498.

essence as a Son. Gonzalez indicates, “Our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same God, ... the same perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man ... and at the same *homoousios* with us as to his manhood.”²³ Now, the Church has the Spirit of the Lord and is subject to the will of the Father, so that now believers are imitators of the Son through the communal praxis. The apostle Paul affirmed the same argument in his letter to the brethren of the Church in Corinth, encouraging them to be imitators of him because he, in his personal praxis, imitated Jesus Christ (“*μιμηταί μου γίνεσθε καθὼς ἐγὼ Χριστοῦ* (1 Cor 11:1)).”²⁴ Therefore, when a believer imitates Christ, he is “*γίνομαι*,” which means, “to become, happen [to come into existence by birth, creation, or circumstance].”²⁵ In other words, the praxis of being a “*μαθητής*” (disciple) is an imperative action that implies that a “*μιμητής*” (follower) must reflect Christ through his/her personal life, which will manifest a spiritual transformation in his/ her personal life.

The Church of England’s Definition of Discipleship

The Church of England’s priority in the 21st century, regarding discipleship, is aimed toward small groups within the community as Walton emphasized:

The value of small groups according to this is in deepening knowledge of God, building meaningful relationships, and accountability for Christian living and outreach, though interestingly these values are set within larger Church values and commitments including commitment to justice and the eradication of poverty.²⁶

The Church of England’s discipleship praxis is basically intentional, not only in reaching their community for Christ, but also in action to alleviate injustice and poverty. A relationship is not

23. Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought in One Volume* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 121.

24. *The Greek New Testament*, 572.

25. Allen, 280.

26. Roger Walton, “Disciples Together: The Small Group as a Vehicle for Discipleship Formation,” *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 8, no. 2 (2011): 103.

built on Sunday services; rather, it develops through qualitative time that each member of the Body of Christ can have with his brother or sister in the faith. Healthy relationships can impact people's lives and will encourage them to grow spiritually lending help when the situations require it.

The Assemblies of God's Definition of Discipleship

The Assemblies of God's definition of discipleship is based on scripture, specifically Matthew 28:19-20; 10:42 and Ephesians 4:11-13. Yong cites one of the articles of this Pentecostal movement:

We believe that the mission of the church is to (1) proclaim the good news of salvation to all humans, (2) build up and train believers for spiritual ministry, (3) praise the Lord through worship, (4) demonstrate Christian compassion to all who suffer, and (5) exhibit unity as the body of Christ.²⁷

Reading the first line of this statement, evangelism appears to be the most important concept, which correlates with Jesus' declaration (preach the Gospel). The second mission listed regards training of believers to make disciples who will grow spiritually seeking God's presence through worship. As a result, every disciple ought to develop and must manifest compassion towards the marginalized, poorest people of the communities.

The statement accounts for several spiritual dynamics. Therefore, if the church does not clarify that discipleship is not evangelism, the body of Christ—the same audience that already received Jesus as their Lord and Savior—may be evangelized repeatedly rather than being built and trained in the faith. For instance, Sunday service spiritual dynamics need not only be evangelistic. They could also include teaching or discipleship if all attendees knows Christ. In contrast, new believers will start drinking from the milk of the Scriptures (1 Pet. 2:2) until they

27. Amos Yong and Jonathan A. Anderson, *Renewing Christian Theology Systematics for a Global Christianity* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2014), 161.

are be ready to begin eating solid food. In this way, we do not allow Sundays services to become inflexibly rooted in tradition. These adaptations will allow new believers to begin learning about the Scriptures while preparing them for growth through discipleship.

In the same manner, if those new believers are not directed in a practical discipleship that is directed towards the heart of the poor, forgotten people who still live in a spiritual darkness of the different communities, how will believers be convicted or compelled by the suffering and pain that others are experiencing? In that order, it is relevant to take into consideration the analysis of this problem that many of the congregations from the Assemblies of God are experiencing.

The Assistant General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God, Alton Garrison, who oversees the discipleship ministry of the General Council, was interviewed by Ken Horn about discipleship. Horn asked the following question, “Why is discipleship an area of current concern for evangelicals?”²⁸ This question goes right to the heart of the problem that people are not being disciplined in the Body of Christ resulting in David Kinnaman’s observation that “Born-again Christians fail to display much attitudinal or behavioral evidence of transformed lives.”²⁹ The Assemblies of God conducted a nationwide survey to understand the problem in respect to this situation. Out of 12,300 churches, only 2,614 responded to the survey.

The results showed some good and bad reports. Garrison admitted that there is a problem regarding discipleship, and the deficit is obviously found in the carelessness of not having an intentional discipleship system in the Church. Thus, he also indicated that “half of Assemblies of God adherents are involved in small groups or Sunday School. These are clearly effective

28. Alton Garrison, interview by Ken Horn, *Evangel*, October 18, 2009, accessed March 10, 2018, http://www.pe.ag.org/2009PDFs/4980_Convo.pdf.

29. *Ibid.*

ministries. Those who attend these groups are more likely to develop into true disciples than those who simply attend the Sunday morning celebration service.”³⁰ In other words, the Assemblies of God knows what the problem in the heart of their affiliate congregations is. Now the objective is to disciple those senior pastors who believe that their mission is only evangelism.

For instance, the AG in South Africa analyzed their communities and found they required a quick revision of their practical theology in order to be effective in the retraining of pastors.³¹ The revision of a curriculum should focus its preparation (pastors’ discipleship) on how to be effective in the reality of the communities, as Malesela recommends:

A good curriculum should meet the needs of the learners and, in particular, prepare them for life beyond the classroom. The curriculum should therefore be open to new ideas and be geared towards social change and community empowerment.³²

This suggestion Malesela is making is an intentional suggestion, that makes a minister primarily pay attention to the community before placing their eye on a structure. Therefore, if someone has been called to disciple, they must understand the perspectives of our society well in order to work with a clear purpose. The curriculum must teach the reality of those who are lost in our communities so that they too may be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, for the same reason, the different presbyteries of AG General Council throughout the USA must re-address its Article Six on discipleship; however, many leaders in their congregations are heading in a different direction, according to the AG statistics.

30. Garrison, 4.

31. Malesela J. Masenya and Johannes J. Booyse, “A Community Needs Responsive Management Training Model: Re-envisioning Management Training for Pastors of the International Assemblies of God Church,” *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 37, no. 1 (2016): 1.

32. *Ibid.*, 4.

An analysis of the passage of Matthew 10:42 used by the AG to justify its statement regarding discipleship shows that this declaration by Jesus is an act (praxis) of a true disciple compelled by a person that is thirsty, “and whoever in the name of a disciple gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.” The Greek words, “καὶ ὃς ἐὰν ποτίσῃ ἓνα τῶν μικρῶν,”³³ denote a practical action “ποτίζω (give to drink)”³⁴ from the “μαθητής (a disciple)” in favor of the “μικρῶν (little ones).”³⁵ Following the opportunity to study some of the secular and ecclesiastical definitions of discipleship, it is relevant to formulate an objective definition of a true discipleship praxis following the different concepts, which will redirect this ministry toward devotion, purity, and social justice.

A Definition of Real Discipleship

The search for a secular definition of discipleship and the definitions of discipleship from different ecclesiastical movements resulted in a new objective definition in favor of one of the most important tasks in the praxis of the Church, which is to make faithful followers of Jesus Christ in the communities. Namely, a disciple is responsibly involved following a teacher. The Church must identify those teachers in the Body of Christ who will make followers. Leaders, who were also followers in their personal process of discipleship, should know and understand that discipleship is an imperative praxis. For this reason, both sides of the teacher-disciple relationship should be equal priorities. Furthermore, discipleship emphasizes the education of teachers to understand the disciplines that will be laid out in the praxis of the communal reality.

33. *The Greek New Testament*, 36.

34. Newman, 151.

35. *Ibid.*, 119.

In other words, if the Church is targeting its community, it also must view discipleship in social realms in which the teacher and the disciple are bound as one.

In addition, disciples should be empowered to represent their teachers in a real way. In the process of representation, disciples will not only imitate the teachers but will also be authentic to themselves in the praxis. Likewise, it is mentioned in the Scriptures that individuals are imitators of Christ (1 Cor 11:1), and, at the same time, the individuals are unique in their practical lives. For this reason, in order to experience a true discipleship, the praxis must be communal, enabling the disciple to experience a family environment with a focus on the teachings of the Scriptures. This emphasis will give birth to strong relationships creating *momentum* of the Spirit in which the individual that is being disciplined will be involved not only in practical activities but also in the outreach activities. The realities of their communities will convict them and prompt them to reflect justice and to help people in need.

The Biblical Model of Discipleship

The advice given by the apostle Paul to the Church in Ephesians 4:11-12 inspires the Church to work as the Body of Christ, with all members working together for the Church to develop spiritually through discipleship. “And He gave some as apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ (Eph 4:11,12).” Therefore, even in these different times in which the Church is presently living, the Word of God remains the same and continues to be counsel for the postmodern Church. Ephesians 4:11 lays the foundation to be able to identify the proper order in which the Church will follow and understand the different dynamics that operate during the Church’s gathering.

On the other hand, the pastor is who unveils or develops God's purpose for growth in the life of the new believer, bringing enlightenment and guidance, which will impact the life of the disciple. West described, "The noun form of pastor is found in Ephesians 4:11 as a distinctive ministry. This indicates a very different role than evangelist for the leader and a new stage of discipleship for the follower."³⁶ Another role that is part of the pastoral task is that of a knowledgeable teacher. Additionally, the pastor should have the skills to relate to others in order to establish spiritual disciplines, as he will be the mentor and the flock protector.³⁷

Therefore, in order to be intentional concerning discipleship, the purpose of the pastor and others who have been called to teach the Word of God must be clear. The energy from a pastor who teaches and practices intentional discipleship creates a relationship where new believers will open their heart to God and be persuaded to align their lives to the Scripture and its commands.³⁸ The spiritual life of a disciple will also benefit from the encouragement of teachers who will open their arms to the new believer with the purpose of encouraging the disciple to be participative, letting them know that they are able to receive God's benefits toward their spiritual growth. This teacher is one who is well-versed in the Scriptures to train and equip new believers, as according to West, "Teachers are mentioned as a specified group (I Cor. 12:28) and teaching as a particular gift (Romans 12:7) Here, the leader provides a high amount of support, advice, and collaboration (relationship)."³⁹ The Scriptures prove that men such as Paul were these types of teachers; prepared other leaders such as Timothy, who also followed the same teachings.

36. Richard C. West, "Situational Discipleship: The Five-Fold Ministry Roles of Ephesians 4:11 and their Relationship to the Situational Leadership Model," *Culture & Religion Review Journal*, no. 3 (2013): 133.

37. *Ibid.*, 133.

38. West, 133.

39. *Ibid.*, 134.

In the case of the apostle, the task was more focused on decentralizing the role of mature believers and mentoring them to fulfill their ministerial mission. Thus, West stated that this is the “fourth stage of high competence in which followers are both willing and able to carry through with ministry functions without much direction from leaders.”⁴⁰ In essence, the apostle is who delegates a certain task to disciples in one of their stages of discipleship in which the disciples feels empowered to exercise their calling in God’s Kingdom.

The Evangelistic Message Won People to Conversion

The Scripture has always presented the model for discipleship, and, in this case, West uses Paul’s “five-fold ministry roles mentioned in Ephesians 4:11-- evangelist, pastor, teacher, apostle, and prophet.”⁴¹ These five roles are relevant in the life of the church; therefore, the settings in the church service should be focused on the right target. For instance, the evangelist, according to Paul in his letter to the church in Ephesus, is in charge of bringing the message of salvation with the purpose of repentance and to bring people to be part of the faith in Christ (Acts 2:37,39).⁴² According to West, the evangelist “is not associated with one who keeps residence in any one place for too long; thereby not suited toward maintaining relationships with followers.”⁴³ In other words, the evangelist is not the member who disciples new believers. By understanding the role of the evangelist, the Church will avoid some issues related to who should be called to accomplish the task of discipleship.

Conversion was Followed by Water Baptism

40. West, 135.

41. Ibid., 126.

42. Ibid., 130.

43. Ibid., 132.

Baptism is a sacrament, the initiation of every believer to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.⁴⁴

The early church baptized immediately after conversion when one repented and confessed his/her sins. John the Baptist announced to the people that they must repent and confess their sins and be baptized (Matt 3:1,6). Similarly, Peter, in his first evangelistic preaching, invited the crowd to repent of their sins and be baptized in the waters in order to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:37, 38). Ferguson believed that “we would do well to emphasize the moral dimension of baptism along with its true doctrinal meaning in our evangelistic preaching, in our teaching to converts before and after baptism, and in our instruction to the church.”⁴⁵

Therefore, baptism did not precede the process of discipleship. Rather, baptism is a prior conviction of the believer to be enlisted in the transformation process of their life through discipleship as Schmalenberger asserts that the believer is “baptized and reminded of his or her baptismal vows and initiated into the community of discipleship.”⁴⁶ The evangelistic ministry is key in the beginning of converted lives in announcing that following requires identifying with Christ going to the baptismal waters. Schmalenberger stated:

Baptism is the basis for Christian education and nurture. . . . The church is to help Christians to live out their baptism, to grow in knowledge, insight, and faithfulness as servants of Christ. Baptized Christians need to be nurtured in lives of faith, hope, and love, grounded in the pattern of death and resurrection. So, we see a common agreement that the process flows out of baptism and is an equipping of the Christian to know and live out baptism’s gracious benefits and responsibilities. There is a certain shaping of discipleship and bringing a new awareness of the mission of the church.⁴⁷

44. Jerry L. Schmalenberger, “Confirmation: The Stewardship of Baptism,” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 41, no. 3 (2002): 184.

45. Everett Ferguson, “Baptism and The Moral Life,” *Christian Studies Journal*, no. 24 (2010): 42.

46. Schmalenberger, 184.

47. Schmalenberger, 186.

The core act of a believer after conversion is water baptism, wherein believers promise their lives to Jesus Christ, the author and consummator of life. In other words, disciples have the faith and hope that Christian education will shape their lives, directing them to the mission and vision of the Church. Therefore, it is relevant to consider spiritual growth as fundamental in the life of the believer. Brosius stipulated that, “The bottom line is that the church should be making disciples; it should witness new birth (conversion) and spiritual growth (discipleship) in the people under its ministry.”⁴⁸ This process initiates the beginning of the new believer’s walk with Jesus. Once they become new believers in Jesus Christ, the next step for the newly converted person is discipleship.

In the same manner, the Church should be prepared for these new converts with leaders (pastors, associate pastors, and teachers) who have been called to work in the areas of teaching, counseling, and coaching. Every leader should flow naturally in the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22, 23) and demonstrate that they also went through the process of discipleship. This practice will move the church toward a new model of discipleship in the millennium.

Discipleship Happened in Relational Communities

The primitive Church’s praxis was according to the vision and the mission of God, as taught by Jesus Christ. The Church, after Jesus ascended to the Father, worked organically because it was directed by the Holy Spirit in all its functions in the community. The disciples passionately sought to gather with the Body of Christ not only in order to the teaching the Scripture and worship but also to supply the needs of the brethren. In the same manner, Johnson provides an explanation in reference to the early Church praxis: Expressing that the early church was devoted to things such as: The apostles’ teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer.

48. Kevin Michael Brosius, “Culture and the Church's Discipleship Strategy,” *Journal of Ministry & Theology* 21, no. 1 (2017): 126.

Luke focuses on three activities of the first believers. First, they prayed and gave praise to God (Acts 2:42, 47). Second, they practiced fellowship (*Koinonia*). Luke seems to have in mind two discrete practices in this respect: They “broke bread” in their houses and ate together (2:46); and they shared their possessions...All who believe were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need (2:44-45).⁴⁹

This Church dynamic was not only present in the temple but also in the homes of believers. By worshipping and praying together, the new believers could experience a more intimate communion. In the beginning of the primitive Church, people were gathering in homes, “And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them” (Acts 4:32). The Church was compelled to help the community through the difficult situations in the brethren’s everyday lives. As a result, these experiences caused each member to move in actions of love and compassion which is pure *ortho-praxis*. Those who believed were of one heart and soul, (“ἓν καρδία καὶ ψυχὴ μία”)⁵⁰ Therefore, practical discipleship involved the heart of the believer, where their thoughts resided, which was necessary in order for their hearts to develop compassion. The Greek word “καρδία” translates as a “causative source of one’s psychological, inner life, especially thoughts.”⁵¹ New Testament discipleship appealed to the heart of the believers, not just in theory, but in practice by having the new Christians touch, see, and feel as they developed new thoughts according to the heart of God. Jesus’ ministry shaped the disciple’s character in a holistic form. For instance, “Soon afterwards He went to a city called Nain; and His disciples were going along with Him, accompanied by a large crowd (Luke 7:11).”

49. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church the Challenge of Luke-Acts to Contemporary Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2011), 110.

50. *The Greek New Testament*, 410.

51. Allen, 287.

The disciples always followed and learned from him. This moment seeks to determine the reaction of all the disciples who were following Jesus. The Scripture stated that there was a crowd of people.

Intentional Discipleship

Many disciples followed Jesus to the city of Nain, and, on their way, they encountered this scenario, “Now as He approached the gate of the city, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow” (Luke 7:12). In other words, the discipleship model continued to move in action through the sorrow and pain of a mother who lost her only son. This scenario was a perfect example of showing compassion toward others in difficult situations. Jesus took practical action in favor of the person who was experiencing grief, “and He came up and touched the coffin; and the bearers came to a halt. And He said, young man, I say to you, arise!” (Luke 7:14).

The feeling of compassion was provoked by the mother's sorrows and pain. This moment provoked a reaction from all the disciples who were following Jesus. Remembering that Jesus also had a widow mother, He was easily related to the mother that had lost her only son. In the same manner Ingrid Kitzberger expresses, “Seeing Jesus’ mother as a widow and Jesus as her only son, an alert and informed reader who is familiar with the Synoptic Gospels will recall one particular story: the widow of Nain and the raising of her only son in Luke 7:11-17.”⁵² In the same manner, many people within the Church can probably identify with this scenario and can, through that identification, bring a peaceful relief to a widow that is in pain in her moments of sorrows. The Scripture stated that there also was a crowd of people present. The event occurring

52. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, “Stabat Mater? Re-Birth at the Foot of the Cross,” *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 3/4 (2003): 484.

before the disciples taught them to see the difficult situations that others were experiencing and to act in compassion by doing something to help them. This situation was not happening behind four walls, but rather in the community, which moved the disciples to compassion and taught them that there is a need for action when seeing the pain people in the community faced.

In the same manner, to work in the community as a disciple of Jesus Christ, it is relevant to learn the social problems of our communities. Doing so will help the Church to identify factors in people's lives that can often lead to poverty. This process will have the Church undertake the mission of becoming involved in the community more seriously. For this reason, Dancer has reported that:

There is good news, but it is at the margins. The margins are the place where people are at once enslaved by social and economic forces and yet strangely free to see things as they really are. There is an apocalyptic quality to marginality; that is one of its gifts to us all. It seems to me that if the church wants to embody an authentic pathway to express its missional and transformative life then it will need to learn to listen more fully to the voices of those it engages through its social service, so that their voice might be the beginning, rather than the end of the matter. Moreover, it will need to re-orientate, relocate and re-engage.⁵³

Going back to Jesus' time, the Scripture states that the Roman Empire afflicted the nation of Israel through the payment of taxes. Jesus challenged Israel by noting that the problem was not the taxes but rather the lack of commitment that Israel had toward the Lord (Luke 20:24,26). As an illustration, Jesus used the denarius to teach, not only his disciples but also the Israelite community. Jesus held up the denarius and asked whose face was on the coin. When the community responded "Caesar," he told the community that they should then give to Caesar what is Caesar's as they should give to God what is God's (Luke 20:24-25).

53. Anthony Dancer, "Welfare, Church and the Pursuit of Justice in the Land of the Long White Cloud," *International Journal of Public Theology* 3, no. 1 (2009): 105.

By listening to the community's concerns and issues, the Church can meditate and re-orient its praxis like Jesus did when a Syrophenician woman appeared in the house where Jesus was to beg him "to cast the demon out of her daughter (Mark 7:26)." When the woman sought Jesus out to attend her daughter, Jesus' response was to reaffirm that his commitment was only with Israel, but not with the Gentiles. The response Jesus gave to the woman could have offended anyone, but this woman took the Jesus' negative answer and responded saying that she identified with the dogs that ate from the scraps that fell from the table at a family's meal. This statement changed Jesus' perspective and caused him to reevaluate his commitment and revise his commitment to include the gentiles (Mark 7:28-29). In the same way, there are people within their communities that need what believers have; and many of them have a response like this Syrophenician woman that will make people's perspectives change and will make Christians re-engage with their communities. The intentional approach of the Church within the community will create opportunities for incredible relationships between the community and the Church.

The systematization of the Church radically changed the natural state of the primitive Church that was focused on sharing the Gospel of Salvation and discipling new believers. The difference between the present and the past is that this process took place in community, including people from all social classes. Therefore, if new believers are not practicing the teachings of Jesus Christ and are not involved in their communities, how are they going to develop what was given to them at conversion? The Scripture provides many examples of the disciples of Jesus being more involved in an *ortho-praxis*, as Manchala stated, "Jesus did not commission his disciples to call people to a belief system but to a covenantal relationship through a vocation of striving for the realization of God's reign."⁵⁴

54. Deenabandhu Manchala, "Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship: Reflections from the Vantage Points of the Marginalized People," *International Review of Mission* 106, no. 2 (2017): 201.

In other words, when people enlist as a disciple of Jesus Christ, it is necessary that the ecclesiastical educators teach community involvement to the new believers to be true disciples of Jesus Christ. The Scripture references a man, John the Baptist, who was set aside by God to prepare the way for the Messiah. He always declared, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Matt 3:2),” in his community messages. This declaration in the Greek language is “*καὶ λέγων, Μετανοεῖτε· ἤγγικεν γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν.*”⁵⁵ This remarkable statement should be declared in church communities by everyone who has been discipled, since Jesus is now governing the Church. It is important to understand that God’s government is not limited to Sunday and the four walls of the Christian congregations that traditionally have been practicing through the years.

Therefore, John the Baptist understood his task as a real disciple in his praxis, marking God’s territory everywhere he went as the word “*βασιλεία*” is defined as “the act of ruling; territory ruled by a king.”⁵⁶ The question is now: How many disciples have been taught this principle in order to understand that their vocation as teachers and disciples ought to be based in the community by marking God’s territory everywhere a believer goes? As Vincent expressed, “the disciples are deliberately mentioned in the first part of the gospel to participate with Jesus in the activity in question and are actively involved in the event described.”⁵⁷ In other words, every disciple that has decided to follow Jesus is also part of the purpose of the Kingdom of God as the chosen twelve experienced in every event of the Gospel in the Scripture. The Holy Spirit will allow the Church to enter in believers’ communities and manifest the glory of the Lord.

55. *The Greek New Testament*, 6.

56. Allen, 280.

57. Vincent. B. Muderhwa, “The Blind Man of John 9 as a Paradigmatic Figure of the Disciple in the Fourth Gospel,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 68, no. 1 (2012): 2.

Disciples Learned Through Action and Teaching (Orthopraxy and Orthodoxy)

In the Old Testament, the Scriptures also emphasize that social justice was one of God’s priorities in the conduct of every individual in Israel. In other words, the fruit of their action was measured in their piety as Michael Barram explained through the book of the prophet Isaiah chapter 58:2:

The people pursue God as if they were committed to God, but the evidence of their behavior exposes their falsehood. The message here is that without righteousness and justice in the social sphere, their piety is worthless. In verse 2, the Hebrew wordplay involving forms of *mišpāt* (often rendered “justice,” but translated in the NRSV first as “ordinance” and a second time as “judgments” [in the plural]) and *šedāqâ/ sedeq* (“righteousness” / “righteous”) is noteworthy: The people seek “righteous judgments” (*mišpētê sedeq*) from God, though they themselves have not acted with “righteousness” (*šedāqâ*), as they have failed to obey the “ordinance” (*mišpāt*) of God. In short, they have not acted toward others as they hope God will act toward them.⁵⁸

The prophetic Word of Isaiah can address many of the issues that the post-Christendom Church is having regarding discipleship. The believer by nature, in many cases, will seek the blessings of God; however, to access to the blessings of God, a believer must understand that it is better to give than receive (Acts 20:35). This principle is part of discipleship, and in order to be able to meet the needs of the needy, the body of Christ must apply their time, talents, and resources to the communal work of the Church. Therefore, the believers should not be seeking a blessing if they are not acting justly towards others in the community. In addition, Barram asserted, “Isaiah 58:1–12 testifies to a purposeful God who does not remain neutral in the face of injustice, instead God is swift to meet out justice and righteousness. This purposiveness of God—this *missio Dei*—defines the mission into which God’s people have been called.”⁵⁹

58. Michael Barram, “Isaiah 58:1–12,” *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology* 69, no. 4 (2015): 460.

59. Barram, 462.

Therefore, the prior Scriptural passages are a point of reference to a *priori* and define the theological perspectives that relate more to the practical life than a mere theoretical narrative recount. As such, the introduction to a theology-based, Church-supported *ortho-praxis* in the community is found in Woodbridge's description of practical discipleship.

These definitions come close to capturing the biblical approach to theology. It can therefore be concluded that the only theology that is truly Christian is theology that is applied. This implies that what we really know in the fully biblical and Hebraic sense is what we live. This close relationship between theology and life is also reflected in the fact that the Bible always moves from the indicative to the imperative, from theology to ethics, from exposition to application.⁶⁰

Failure to practice what the Scriptures declare does not show real faith on the part of the individual, as faith is best seen in action (Jas 2:14,17). Not practicing what the Scriptures say also demonstrates that the individual does not have biblical ethics, which should be part of the moral values of every individual who belongs to a community of Christian believers. The Church must understand that works for the community do not save a person; instead, the Church must be the light of the world, and the lamp must be taken to the darkest places of this earth. Throughout history, several followers of Jesus Christ were already living in *orthopraxis*. For instance, Francis of Assisi, during the 11th century, naturally recognized that his vocation was to live and interact with those who were poor, sick, and hungry.

Francis did not waste his time arguing a theological point in reference to this matter; rather, the *orthopraxis* started to flow naturally in his vocational ministry as Martin portrays that Francis had a dream in which Jesus said to him, "serve the master and not the men" and

60. Noel B. Woodbridge, "Living Theologically - Towards a Theology of Christian Practice in Terms of the Theological Triad of Orthodoxy, Orthopraxy and Orthopathy as Portrayed in Isaiah 6:1-8: A Narrative Approach," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 66, no. 2 (2010): 1.

“Franchesco go and repair my Church.”⁶¹ For Francis Assisi, favoring people in need is what developed his devotion to not only share the Gospel of Salvation but also to take care of the people in the darkest corners of the community as he affirmed through his statement, “Preach the Gospel, use words when necessary.”⁶²

The government and the traditional ecclesiastical institutions (the Catholic church), in general, oppressed the marginalized people because they had forgotten that Jesus’ ministry was in favor of the oppressed. Nowadays, one who is taking a divine direction for the righteousness of God is the founder of liberal theology: Gustavo Gutierrez. Gutierrez re-introduced an intentional praxis as Mehmet indicates that Gutierrez exemplified the following:

The Church contributes . . . to giving a kind of sacred character to a situation which is not only alienating but is the worst kind of violence – a situation which pits the powerful against the weak. By casting our lot with the oppressed and the exploited in the struggle for a more just society he argues that the Church must make the prophetic denunciation of every dehumanizing situation, which is contrary to fellowship, justice and liberty.⁶³

The oriented philosophy of many Christians, who lack preparation and discipleship, believes that the pastoral ministry, the Church mission, and vision must be focused on buildings. Therefore, it is impossible for the Body of Christ lacking an intentional discipleship to recognize its wrong-praxis. This failure to recognize contributes to the self-righteousness of a congregational name enclosed between the four walls rather than sharing the name of Jesus in the community, learning, and practicing as a good follower of Jesus Christ. The difficult but critical proof for the church is that a true disciple of God’s Kingdom must be willing to go

61. Loyola Productions, *St. Francis from “Who Cares About the Saints?”* (video file), directed by Fr. James Martin S.J., posted September 7, 2012, accessed March 9, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kw1LDSV23zA>.

62. Ibid.

63. Mehmet Ciftci, “Liberation Theology: A Comparative Study of Christian and Islamic Approaches,” *New Black Friars* 96, no. 1064 (July 2015): 495.

against principalities and powers. Those powers and principalities are even present within the ecclesiastical spheres, and many people are not willing to denounce injustice and indifference towards the marginalized people of society. The Church selfishly keeps the blessings of God for itself and misses the chance for true fellowship among its community by neglecting to share the deliverance and righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship Happened Outside of the Church Building

The systematization of the Church radically changed what was natural in the primitive Church whose initial focus was to share the Gospel of Salvation and to disciple new believers. For instance, the Church of the book of Acts opened their arms to the Gentile community. They were marginalized by the Jews supporting Johnson's affirmation that the purpose of the Church is to enable "the prophetic of the embrace of the marginal by bringing the good news to those ethnically marginal to the people of God."⁶⁴ Therefore, new disciples should practice the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Church of the book of Acts who were involved in their communities rather than focusing on a building. The Scripture gives many examples of Jesus' disciples involved more in *ortho-praxis*. For example, Manchala stated, "Jesus did not commission his disciples to call people to a belief system, but to a covenantal relationship through a vocation of striving for the realization of God's reign."⁶⁵ When people enlist as a disciple of Jesus Christ, it is necessary that the ecclesiastical educators teach this relevant point to the new believers to have true disciples of Jesus Christ.

64. Johnson, *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church the Challenge of Luke-Acts to Contemporary Christians*, 151.

65. Manchala, 201.

Discipleship was a Process and a Practical Experience in the Daily Life

During Jesus' ministry, the Scriptures reveal the empirical form in which Jesus related to the people in the community—He introduced himself and established an intentional dialogue to supply the spiritual needs of the individual. In the same manner, Pratt also affirmed that a “Dialogue begins when people meet each other.”⁶⁶

Therefore, dialogue must be intentional, not only during service days at Church, but also in believers' daily lives in their communities as in Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman where He used a normal illustration from their practical living to establish a dialogue with her at a well where women used to go to get water (John 4:6,7). The Greek N.T. clarifies how Jesus intentionally related to this woman:

(“*Ἐρχεται γυνή ἐκ τῆς Σαμαρείας ἀντλήσαι ὕδωρ λέγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς δόξοι πεῖν.*”)⁶⁷

This text had several empirical priorities, but, in order to align to the intentional dialogue, it must first start with three Greek words that demand a communicative action in which the first word that Jesus practiced was “λέγω,” which is defined as, “I say, speak, tell, express with words [to express oneself orally or in written form].”⁶⁸ This communication is not limited only to an oral communication but can include written communication. The second Greek word is “φημί,” which is defined as, “I say affirm [to state something orally].”⁶⁹ In order to declare something, one must affirm what is being declared, and Jesus, during his dialogue with this Samaritan woman, always affirmed the promise of God (John 4:10). Finally, the last Greek word, related to

66. Douglas Pratt, “Christian Discipleship and Interfaith Engagement,” *Pacifica* 22, no. 3 (2009): 317.

67. *The Greek New Testament*, 318.

68. Allen, 287.

69. *Ibid.*, 295.

an intentional communication, is the word “ῥῆμα,” which is defined as, “word, saying [a spoken communication].”⁷⁰ For this reason, the Church ought to express itself through the Scriptures affirming the spiritual message that God is giving to the church (believer) in order to establish a communication relevant to what people are currently practicing.

These are natural encounters where some religious people will learn the dialogue to be disciples and will begin to understand that this relationship happens naturally within community opening the door to comprehend Pratt’s stipulation that a “dialogue depends upon mutual understanding and mutual trust.”⁷¹ Therefore, Jesus’ dialogue with the Samaritan woman accomplished its purpose following their conversation regarding service (Give me a drink), eternal life, a word of knowledge, and worship (John 4:1, 26). This profound conversation opened the door to this woman to believe and comprehend that a relationship with God was not about race or religion but rather about God’s purpose in her personal life. In the same manner, Pratt indicates that “dialogue becomes the medium of authentic witness,”⁷² describing how the Samaritan woman came to be an authentic witness of Christ to the Samaritan community who also believed in Jesus (John 4:39, 42). The Samaritan woman aligned her life to the spoken word of Jesus as should be done by post-Christendom disciples.

Disciples Gained Hearts of Compassion for the Needs Around Them

70. Ibid., 293.

71. Pratt, 317.

72. Ibid., 317.

In many passages of the Scripture, the reader can appreciate the intentional work of Jesus in social justice scenarios where his disciples were exposed to living, understanding, and learning. When Jesus' disciples were exposed to the social justice scenarios, He always prioritized salvation and compassion throughout the community, which Henderson describes stating, "For the historical Jesus, any interest in his own messiahship must have related organically both to the reign of God he heralded and to the messianic community he both ideally represented and sought to establish."⁷³ Another point Henderson seeks to make is that discipleship is not about being a grandiose leader but rather of being a servant or a humble disciple. Tanner also supported Henderson stating, "The Jewish people and the twelve observed his many miracles and heard his teachings."⁷⁴ The communal scenarios are detrimental, where homeless inhabit the streets, and women are exploited in human trafficking. For this reason, it is important to revalue the praxis of the Church of the Book of Acts.

The Book of Acts confirms the beginning of the communal work of the Church in an intentional form. For this reason, the post-Christendom Church has a natural resource in the Book of Acts, which can rescue the empirical life of the Primitive Church where the guidance and purpose of the Spirit is obvious in the souls in the communities.

The Current State of Discipleship in Some of the Western Churches

Although many churches are implementing many of these components, many Western churches are not characterized by these traits. The culture is changing and affecting this new

73. Suzanne Watts Henderson, "Jesus' Messianic Self-Consciousness Revisited: Christology and Community in Context," *Journal for The Study of The Historical Jesus* 7, no. 2 (2009): 178.

74. Paul Tanner, "The Cost of Discipleship: Losing One's Life for Jesus' Sake," *Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 1 (2013): 44.

generation that needs to have a holistic transformation. People are being disciplined by the media and millennial philosophical thoughts. The spiritual war is very intense in the times that the church is living. Therefore, the church needs to have an effective discipleship formula to obtain victory against the enemy's weapons. It is unfortunate that some people inside the Body of Christ are replacing the true meaning of discipleship, which Niemandt described as "the prevailing rhetoric of religious and secular prosperity gospels, consumerism and individualism,"⁷⁵ floodlighting the gospel of Jesus Christ and violating Scriptural discipleship. James described "the expectation of some believers that the Christian life will be a "bed of roses."⁷⁶ New believers can be disciplined to learn and strengthen their spiritual disciplines, and the Church can identify sources of current limitations in discipleship.

Focus on Sunday Services

The reality is that throughout the years the Church has been gathering on Sundays as a Body of Christ to worship God. The purpose of this gathering is to worship and to hear the Word of God preached by the pastor of the congregation. The Church can move from standalone Sunday services to a communal service in which the believers can be disciplined in the practical realities of our communities. A Sunday service is not enough for spiritual growth, but a life lived in community through intentional discipleship will give the Church a different perspective of what changes individuals must make in their personal life. According to Banks, "We could enumerate lay leaders of small groups and congregations who required informal and nonformal

75. C. J. P. N. Niemandt, "Rediscovering Joy in Costly and Radical Discipleship in Mission," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1.

76. James A. Lang and David J. Bochman, "Positive Outcomes of a Discipleship Process," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 10, no. 1 (2017): 55.

modes of learning.”⁷⁷ These types of congregations are not limited to a building nor to a Sunday service and rather look for informal or nonformal praxis to disciple the brethren in the community. The incrementation of programs has made the church become traditional during its Sunday services, as Michael Brosius stated, “Over time churches seem to acquire committees, meetings, programs, and traditions, none of which may be wrong in themselves, but which cumulatively move the church from mission to maintenance mode.”⁷⁸ The spiritual education of the brethren is not a program during Sunday service; rather, it is a one-on-one relationship between the teacher and the disciple.

Sunday services in Christian congregations can focus their praxis on a socialization approach. Most people who visit a Christian congregation feel welcomed and cared for when the congregational leadership honestly approaches them and shows them their love and compassion. According to Mark Cartledge, “Socialization refers to the process through which individuals become members of a particular social group and adopt certain roles and behavior. They become active members of particular cultures and adopt specifically recognized social roles and public behavior.”⁷⁹

This intended approach will result in love, care, and compassion toward the souls that God is adding to the Church. The new believers will feel a part of a family atmosphere hungry for both the Word of God and spiritual impartation over their lives. Thus, Cartledge’s stipulation is relevant when he proclaims, “Most research on religious socialization has focused on the

77. Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 134.

78. Kevin Michael Brosius, “Culture and the Church's Discipleship Strategy,” *Journal of Ministry & Theology* 21, no. 1 (2017): 125-126.

79. Mark J. Cartledge, “Pentecostal Healing as an Expression of Godly Love: An Empirical Study,” *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 16, no. 5 (2013): 506.

influence of three agents: family, peers and the institution of the church.”⁸⁰ When a family or a peer member feels as though they belong to a place, in this case to the Body of Christ, they find their place in the Body because the Holy Spirit confirms in the believer his/her spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:6, 7). Therefore, a group of solid believers who intentionally approach everyone new in the congregation according to Cartledge will focus on the following:

First, a “reference group” is a key influence in the process of acceptance and integration of an individual within a social group The reference group can also act to reinforce behavioral norms and function as a retention mechanism. Second, within social organizations there are individuals who stand out from the crowd in some way. Members look up to them as exemplars and role models....Third, people create environments, events and artefacts as expressions of their beliefs and values, through which religious and cultural identity is enhanced and maintained. They can be buildings, festivals, literature, websites, music and art.... Fourth, despite these very real socialization influences, it is always the case that individuals make choices based on individual differences and personal commitments. In other words, they exercise personal agency.⁸¹

These purposeful steps may be promoted during Sunday services in order to see people begin to enlist themselves in a journey of discipleship, wherein discipleship leaders reinforce a scriptural code of conduct in a practical form during their interactions. Therefore, discipleship leaders must have the heart and passion to model Jesus in their walk, as they will lead these new believers in their journey. The environment of discipleship can vary according to the brethren as there are multiple forms of discipleship, and there will be an incentive to be creative. On the other hand, these new believers have a free will, and, through discipleship, they must be taught that their commitment is should be to God.

Limited to Doctrinal Teaching Without Praxis

80. Ibid., 506.

81. Ibid., 507.

In general, basic discipleship calls the churches that are involved, as a traditional ecclesiastical institution to redefine their theology of discipleship, and return to the communal praxis Jesus modeled in his ministry. A ministry modeled after Jesus will walk the streets of the communities, full of the presence of the Spirit of the Lord, proclaiming and teaching the good news of the Gospel. It is for this reason Luther Smith also expressed, “Our religious identity and convictions are asserted most persuasively not just in doctrine and sermons, but in the quality and character of our fellowship and outreach.”⁸² In other words, Smith is not dismissing sermons and doctrines in the regular praxis of the Church; rather, he is inviting the leaders to be more intentional in the quality time needed in discipling relationships understand different spiritual experiences. For instance, Jesus was followed by the people to the desert where they were hearing his teachings, but, as the night started to approach, his disciples were worried that the people had to go back to their homes and eat something (Luke 9:12). There were the discipleship dynamics that occurred which compelled the heart of the disciples to be compassionate toward the hungry multitude. The second thing that happened is that the disciples put into practice their given gift in which they gave the five loaves of bread, the two fishes, and their faith. (Luke 9:15). The principal part of the miracle was how Jesus told the disciples to group the people in groups of fifty (Luke 9:14). That dinner in the desert (for them a dinner under the results of a miracle after having heard Jesus preaching) became a time of fellowship. This example demonstrates that discipleship is learning and developing in the praxis as Smith stated, “We are as individuals of faith, it is also defined by who we are as a community of faith. Becoming Christian is more than

82. Luther E. Smith, *Intimacy & Mission: Intentional Community as Crucible for Radical Discipleship*. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994), 17.

being personally transformed; It is also participation in a transforming fellowship. Essential to Christian identity is membership.”⁸³

Passive Reception Rather Than Relational

A holistic model of disciple making will provide more intentional intervention instead of a passive salute during Sunday services. People beginning their first walk in the ways of the Lord cannot do it alone. In the same manner, no one in leadership can expect spiritual growth from these believers when the discipleship system in the Church is not focused on a real praxis (interactive relationship) as Nelson reports:

At issue is the distance between expectations and reality in Christian experience. For example, in church ministry pastors typically expect parishioners to do “the right thing” (e.g., to seek the Lord, love their neighbors, and faithfully support the work of the church), and thus they are distressed when this fails to happen—though it may fail to happen over and over. Similarly, parishioners typically expect their pastors and leaders to do what is right and act in God-honoring ways in all things, and they too become distressed when their leaders let them down.⁸⁴

Leaders cannot expect to see reverence toward the presence of the Lord if no one has taken the time to model and teach what reverence towards God means. The leaders (teachers) are not modeling consecration. This issue is one that requires retraining leaders using a holistic discipleship program before being named teacher or a leader in charge of the praxis of intentional discipleship. The high spheres of the Jews’ teachers were accustomed to teaching the traditions of the laws in the synagogues, in contrast to Jesus, whose teachings reached all of Israel increasing the number of his disciples. Jesus was not against the structure of the temple; rather, he identified that the spiritual dynamics that took place in the Temple were more

83. Smith, 18.

84. Peter K. Nelson, “Discipleship Dissonance: Toward a Theology of Imperfection Amidst the Pursuit of Holiness,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 4, no. 1 (2011): 63.

concerned with praise, prayer, honor, reverence, offering, and sacrifice to God. In other words, for Jesus to be inside the Temple is to contemplate the beauty of Jehovah as David mentioned in the Psalm 27:4 and to be disciplined outside the temple is to be transformed through the teachings put into practice in our daily lives.

It is important to recognize that believers in Christ are still part of their corruptible body which is selfish and prideful. In other words, emotional disorders always will incite the spiritual man to give up on their spiritual growth. Without intentional discipleship, it would be impossible for man to stand firm in the Scripture (Gal 5:17). Therefore, there will not be a transformation in their personal lives, nor involvement in serving their local community. Why are believers not developing the *agape* love of God? The simple answer is: few people are talking about the love for our neighbors (Matt 22:36, 40) resulting from their personal encounters with Jesus. They have experienced the love of God, but they need someone to explain to them that the love of God must be expressed to others as well. Thus, it is relevant to mention Linnane's statement in which he shared Rahner's thought that "such unselfish cross bearing becomes the one necessary: obedient self-surrendering love directed toward God and made concrete in the unstinting love of neighbor."⁸⁵

The Scriptures reference that God loved the world so much that the action taken was a giver action. The love of God transforms the human being, and the first thing it does is make them a giver just as Jesus modeled with Zacchaeus in his community by encouraging him to restore all that his neighbors lost (Luke 19:8,9). God gave his Son Jesus which left his Kingdom in favor of the souls (Phil 2:7). This action requires church evangelism and discipleship through

85. Brian F. Linnane, "Dying with Christ: Rahner's Ethics of Discipleship," *Journal of Religion* 81, no. 2 (2001): 241.

the regular praxis by fostering dynamics to engage sinners, feed the hungry, and clothe the naked.

Individualistic Rather than Communal

Commonly, new believers who were not properly disciple have walked away with an individualistic perspective of the faith and Christ in the manner Hong indicated that:

Many Christians today view their faith as a private matter— something between the individual and God. People are often invited to receive Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, starting them immediately on a road that will possibly lead to a hyper-individualistic Christian existence. As one person said, “It's not religion or the church that's going to save you. Rather it is your personal relationship with God. Christ will come into your heart if you ask, without any church at all.” As Christians focus excessively on personal growth, they develop an attitude that the church exists to help me live out my personal relationship with my Lord.⁸⁶

In examining this individualistic concept, one of the things to notice is that those believers model an independent life that is not aligned with the discipleship process that every single believer must navigate. On the other hand, this concept may be a trap, as they conform to live an isolated spiritual life rather than being an active member of the Body of Christ (1 Co 12:12,27).

Likewise, a public editorial mentioned Jordan’s statement that “Discipleship is not something doled out by the clergy to the receptive laity, but the task of the whole church of God, and drives all the people therefore to join together.”⁸⁷ Consequently, this message is relevant for Church leaders who have been called to teach and disciple.

Nevertheless, the issue presented in most cases results from a lack of intentional discipleship that could have broken with subjectivism paradigms that have led many Christians to live a life without discipleship and spiritual guidance. In addition, those Christians may

86. Stephen A. Hong, “Reversing a Downward Spiral: Strengthening the Church's Community, Holiness and Unity Through Intentional Discipleship,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 15, no. 1 (2012): 92.

87. “Editorial,” *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 12, no. 2 (2015): 91-93.

develop a sense that the Church must resolve their personal problems when really the Church's responsibility is to equip the believer to confront those hard situations that at any given time arrive in their personal lives. As such, it is relevant to define the different dynamics at play during discipleship and fellowship gatherings with the intention of understanding when the gatherings should be evangelistic in nature and when they should focus on discipleship.

Ignorance of Social Needs in the Greater Community

Consequently, the Church should focus on intentional praxis rather than self-centered interests as Israel did in the time of the prophet Isaiah. In comparison, disciples must be involved in visitations to nursing homes, feeding the homeless, and visiting the sick in the hospitals. In doing so, "Then your light will break out like the dawn, and your recovery will speedily spring forth; and your righteousness will go before you; the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard (Isa 58:8)."

Those descriptions were reflected by the empirical life of Jesus and the Church of Acts' ministry in which their prayer was accompanied by actions as Damon also indicated that the "focus on prayer and action is the heart of Christian spirituality, the spirituality of the kingdom of God and his justice.' Spiritual activism that arises from ethics should lead to deeds, though these deeds should not be an end goal."⁸⁸ For this reason, it is relevant to teach disciples the definition of ethics and their function in the spiritual formation of the believer.

When the Church notices the difference and purpose of the true definition of a disciple, then they will be able to identify that the praxis which defines a disciple, as the Church of Christ

88. Malcolm Damon, "Economic Globalization and Economic Justice: Covenanting for Action Between the Reformed Churches of South Africa and Germany," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 65, no. 1 (2009): 616.

commands that disciples be doers. Simon declares that this is the “hardest saying of Jesus because it demands that Jesus’ disciples actually do what he says.”⁸⁹ Action also defines the character of the believer as a disciple of Christ as Rollin described, “the character of Jesus’ disciples in Matthew’s Gospel ... it follows throughout the Gospel as a theme on becoming and being little for ministry.”⁹⁰

Regarding ethics, many new believers may mistakenly think that the moral values that govern in this pluralistic world are the same moral values that the scriptures point to. It is important to define what are ethical values in all its branches. Ethics has a holistic definition that must be explained in its systematic form as its fundamental principles suggest it.⁹¹ For instance, ethics has three relevant branches: 1) The first is *axiology* which focus its praxis on a system of values, 2) the second is *deontology* where the will of God is its foundation which in the same manner, is divided in a series of laws, and the principle of love,⁹² and 3) the third is *teleology* focusing on the final purpose of the human being for which they were created.⁹³ In a world that is very complex and pluralistic and the post-millennial generation has a difficult task in differentiating between bad and good values, Banks suggests that:

To give moral formation its proper place in theological education, we also need to define *habitus* more broadly than Farley. For him, *theologia* includes reflection on virtues integral to the Christian faith as well as attention to symbols, beliefs, and practices. Such basic intellectual qualities as honesty, fairness, and respect also overlap with certain moral qualities. But these are not the only moral or spiritual qualities, and the cultivation

89. Simon J. Joseph, “Why Do You Call Me ‘Master’? Q 6:46, the Inaugural Sermon, and the Demands of Discipleship,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 132, no. 4 (2013): 955.

90. Rollin G. Grams, “Not ‘Leaders’ but ‘Little Ones’ in the Father’s Kingdom: The Character of Discipleship in Matthew’s Gospel,” *Transformation (02653788)* 21, no. 2 (2004): 115.

91. Gonzalez, 55.

92. *Ibid.*, 55.

93. *Ibid.*, 56.

of intellectual virtues does not necessarily result in their wider application. The virtues cultivated by *theologia* are clarity more than charity, honesty more than friendliness, devotion to a calling in general more than loyalty to specific communities of learning.⁹⁴

In fact, the Church is one of the institutions that receives people from the community every Sunday service, and it is relevant to relate to the people to know their values. This intentional approach will be a great opportunity to share God's will and purpose for their lives; by sharing with them, a law that if they still live under the flesh that will appoint every faultiness in the process of their lives (Gal 5:18,23). But, beyond the law, there remains God's love and mercy upon their lives that is manifested in its fullness when people walk in the Spirit. In addition, the Scripture will be the source that the church must model to them throughout their praxis. The Church ethically is extending the bridges of communication and relationship with the souls, and God will extend His wings of protection upon their lives. New believers will be confident in trusting the Lord that they will not be alone in the process of spiritual growth and sacrifice.

Additionally, they will learn that discipleship is a commitment of sacrifice. According to Damon, "Bonhoeffer's commitment and deliberations on the cost of discipleship informed his actions. Action, after much ethical deliberation, cost him his life."⁹⁵ Involvement in the cause of salvation and discipleship, amid ethical convictions, will point disciples to consider giving their lives in the praxis as the Lord Jesus did on the cross at Calvary. Therefore, the Church must be willing to be disciples rather than followers only. Anyone can follow someone and be just a spectator, but the Greek word "*ἀκολουθέω*" is also defined as, "to be a disciple"⁹⁶ which in the

94. Robert Banks, *Revisioning Theological Education Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1999), 25.

95. Damon, 616.

96. Newman, 7.

same manner, Damon challenged the Church with this following statement: “The question is whether Christian believers are willing to be disciples, to make the sacrifice, to pay the price when they set their faith in motion, when they put it into action.”⁹⁷ This declaration goes beyond a simple theoretical structure of being a disciple of Jesus Christ to social justice scenarios.

Elements of Healthy Discipleship Around the World

It is relevant to examine what churches are doing around the world in reference to discipleship. For instance, Africa is one of the continents that is taking a serious approach regarding discipleship. Afrane affirms, “The corporate world is searching for people with strong Christian virtues such as moral integrity, honesty and hard work.”⁹⁸ They understood that even secular corporations placed their eyes on the ecclesiastical institutions because of the absence of moral values in secular people. According to Afrane, these corporations had accepted that “these virtues can only be acquired when faith is integrated in the academic lives of students.”⁹⁹ This is a great example of why church leadership should have a new thought regarding discipleship. Not only are our communities in need of disciples of Jesus, secular corporations need the disciples of Jesus, as well.

For this reason, if ecclesiastical leadership is not intentional in a discipleship ministry, why is the world interested in God? On the other hand, the ecclesiastical leadership of the African nation of Ghana is implementing Christian values in their universities, as White reports that they are “focus[ing] their agenda to integrate Christian principles into the academic lives of

97. Damon, 616.

98. Peter White and Samuel K. Afrane, “Maintaining Christian Virtues and Ethos in Christian Universities in Ghana: The Reality, Challenges and the Way Forward,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 73, no. 3 (2017): 1.

99. Afrane, 1.

their students.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, the real impact on the African community will be holistic, discipling lives not only inside the ecclesiastical structures, but within communities, corporations, and secular universities.

On the other hand, the Anglican Church in the United Kingdom (UK) emphasizes its discipleship by focusing on theological education in management and leadership.¹⁰¹ Their ecclesiastical perspective is rooted in the belief that education, in reference to theology, should be developed with the understanding and the practice of leadership.¹⁰² Luckcock comments, “Helpful recommendations...encourage head teachers to review their spiritual practice of school leadership in relation to models of servant, invitational and transformational leadership.”¹⁰³ The ministerial function of discipleship in which teachers play a relevant part focuses its attention in providing servant models as well as on the countercultural approach of the community.

Luckcock further describes this function stating the following:

The humanistic dimension is potentially a strong feature of countercultural theology in relation to the vocation of Christian head teachers who can be encouraged to draw on their own spiritual experience and the narrative of the accumulated wisdom of the Christian community. A countercultural approach creates an important space for experiential professional learning and thus includes an intrapersonal level of human inquiry in which practitioners may gather and theorize from our own experience and biographies as one source of data.¹⁰⁴

Narratives from discipleship leaders (teachers/facilitators) about their own testimony are a powerful source which will invite people to taste, feel, and learn about God. Scott Dill explains

100. White, 2.

101. Tim Luckcock, “Managing Managerialism in Church School Leadership: A Practitioner Inquiry in the Theology of Education,” *British Journal of Religious Education* 28, no. 3 (2006): 261.

102. Luckcock, 262.

103. *Ibid.*, 263.

104. *Ibid.*, 271.

that “taste, as an embodied, experiential quality, develops through repetition and variety more than refinement, speculation, or critique.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, taste has nothing to do with a specific flavor or subject rather deals with the theological purpose of who God is in the life of person. Therefore, Scott Dill also emphasized, “Updike’s version of taste discerningly appreciates the infinite goodness of creation. In his decisively theological construal, aesthetic taste is the creature’s way of learning to receive the Creator’s gifts.”¹⁰⁶ The Scripture narrates how David testified in how God saved him from the Lion and the bear attack. This is a salvific demonstration shared by David but not to glorify himself but rather to glorify God amid the audience that were listening David’s testimony (1 Sam 17:37).

Therefore, discipleship leadership is relevant in the midst of the Church as “leadership is about shaping the organizational environment so that the Church as a whole, and various configurations of groups within the church, are learning how to discern the initiatives of the Holy Spirit in their midst and in their neighborhoods.”¹⁰⁷ This natural invitation will not force or judge the secularist community but will unite the secularist community to enter into the Kingdom of God. For Luckcock, “countercultural theology also has an important contribution to make to conceptual research.”¹⁰⁸ Many of these people had the wrong information regarding soteriology and the Christendom life.

105. Scott Dill, “Toward a Theology of Taste: John Updike’s Creaturely Aesthetics,” *Religion & Literature* 48, no. 3 (2016): 114.

106. *Ibid.*, 114.

107. Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership a Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 225.

108. Luckcock, 271.

The AG Church in the Asian nation of the Philippines focuses its discipleship praxis on the power of the Holy Spirit in which the miracles and wonders are manifesting amid the Philippine community. The Church also provides an apologetic form of answers to the questions of the Philippines about their cultural and spiritual roots. Johnson mentions that:

The data reveals the need for a three-point model of discipleship that focuses on power encounter through miracles, truth encounter through confrontation between the word of God and the Filipino's animistic worldview and a love encounter with God and his people for which animism provides no answer. Since Filipinos have a holistic view of life, every aspect of this model must be in operation in our local churches. A full description of this model and how the various points interact with each other is well beyond the limits of this article but power, truth and love encounters and are necessary to bring permanent change at the worldview level.¹⁰⁹

The communal worldview of a nation should be a relevant part of preparation for every leader who is involved in discipleship since discipleship environments can easily change and be converted in a deliverance atmosphere or a worship atmosphere. Interaction can vary according to the spiritual need of the community, given that this process, as Johnson stated, "This will not happen overnight. Biblical discipleship is a life-long process of discovering who God is and who we can become and must be thorough, requiring time, love and patience,"¹¹⁰ referencing the fruit of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22, 23 that must be developed in the inner life of every believer in the community especially when done in a small group setting as occurred in the House of Freedom in Brisbane and the House of the Gentle Bunyip in Melbourne, Australia. Those places were open for the poorest people, homeless, elderly, people with mental illness, and children. This praxis is an example of a group of disciples who were convicted by the Holy Spirit to attend to the needs of a disadvantaged community. The reality is that when the church looks through the

109. Dave Johnson, "Healing in the Lowland Philippines: Some Considerations for Discipleship," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 17, no. 2 (August 2014): 183.

110. *Ibid.*, 183.

eyes of Jesus at its communal world, something happens within it, something that will lead to swift action (Acts 2:45,47).

A New Model of Real Discipleship

During an interview with the Superintendent of the Florida Multicultural District Dr. Nino Gonzalez, he shared his concern about the need for intentional discipleship in Hispanic churches. He stated, “We are in need of a new thought in regard of discipleship for these last times.”¹¹¹ The most effective model of discipleship must include coaching done in small group settings. All these things are not simply about knowledge but applying it in the community; in this way, this model will give the church the understanding of who they are in Christ Jesus.

The Church Must Adjust the Vision and Mission and Make Discipleship Intentional and Holistic

The Church is experiencing many congregations who are aiming their vision and mission toward a structure (megachurch) forgetting that the Spirit of the Lord also resides in the lives of believers and that Christ died for people rather than for a structure. The *ecclesia* understands that the Body of Christ must gather together to worship God as a whole, but the same should not be included in the dynamics of discipleship. Many times, congregations are looking to become splendid structures instead of focusing on becoming a place of refuge, as Gerardo explains in his critique of the Neo-Pentecostalism churches in which Arturo stated that:

The religious field has become pressured by the idolatry of the church growth and the megalomania ambitions... In this scheme, the “true” churches are the big churches, those that have parking places and they work with big financial budgets, although their grandeur in number and space will be equipped with the irrelevance of the Christian message they offer, in the face of contemporary demands and Bible requirements.¹¹²

111. Nino González, Interview by Omar Rojas, FMD Hispanic Council, December 15, 2017.

112. Gerardo Corpeño, “Neopentecostalismo Emergente: Pistas para el Futuro de Iglesias Neopentecostales jóvenes,” *Kairós* no. 48 (2011): 62.

The situation criticized is in reference to the flawed mission and vision of churches in which personal desires for prosperity make congregations blind to the fact that new construction should be directed to serve as an intentional investment in discipleship and refuge.

Some studies find as an issue regarding discipleship in the faith formation of believers. In addition to this problem, Michael asserted, “The loss of pneumatologically consciousness in the life of our churches. If we are to help our youth toward holistic discipleship, whereby they are properly situated in subjective connection to an objective reality, we must help them recover a sense of God as Holy Spirit.”¹¹³ In this direction, the postmodern church can position its emphasis on the fullness of the Holy Spirit as without the Holy Spirit the Church will not be effective in discipleship within the body of Christ.

The book of Acts references the acts of the Holy Spirit in lifting, restoring, transforming, and teaching every new believer. Therefore, Johnson asserts, “In order to appreciate the way in which Luke continues to show Jesus’ disciples as embodying the prophetic word in Acts, we need to shift the question from the individual to the community,”¹¹⁴ because it was in the community where Jesus realized most of His miracles and teachings. Thus, Johnson indicates that “Luke shows the reader a Church that has a radical character.”¹¹⁵ Why is it that the post-Christendom Church has a character without faith formation and without a pneumatological intervention? If the prophetic Word of God is taught and practiced, the results will be the

113. Michael D. Langford, “Spirit-Driven Discipleship A Pneumatology of Youth Ministry,” *Theology Today* 71, no. 3 (2014): 323.

114. Luke Timothy Johnson, 108.

115. *Ibid.*, 108.

embodiment of the Scripture in the disciple through practical living in the community like the results for the believers in the book of Acts.

For instance, in South Africa, the Church identified some of the issues that had restricted the spiritual growth of the Church due to the deficiency of an intentional discipleship. In the same manner Nelus revealed that:

It showed that the gospel message of joy, good news and life in fullness serves as a counterculture against the prevailing rhetoric of religious and secular prosperity gospels, consumerism and individualism. It also warned that discipleship in mission is costly and radical. Discipleship is a life of generosity and service, where the true disciple delights in justice, gives generously and cares for the weak.¹¹⁶

The issues that are injuring the Body of Christ in regard to discipleship are the lack of vision and mission where new believers learn that the mission and vision of discipleship revolves around service. As disciples of Jesus Christ, the Church can naturally show its compassion in caring for the weak. The absence of practical discipleship curricula in some form is another factor that could influence the life of a believer, as Nicholls reports, “The shortage of frameworks, curricula or discipleship journey maps likewise suggests that many church traditions have given a low priority to helping believers grow in the knowledge, understanding and practice of their faith.”¹¹⁷ Without a curriculum that orient disciples, it would be impossible to follow a systematic order in teaching. This lack of curriculum would bring problems of comprehension regarding the spiritual and practical things in discipleship. The Church has the Scriptures, but it is also important to develop curricula from the Scriptures in a systematic form supported by a good exegetical

116. Nelus Niemandt, “Rediscovering Joy in Costly and Radical Discipleship in Mission,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 1.

117. Peter Nicholls, “Connected Community Learning: An Experiment in Education for Discipleship by Elearning,” *British Journal of Theological Education* 14, no. 1 (2003): 27.

platform offering the spiritual knowledge that must be put in action in a very expositive and objective form. In that order, the believer will grow spiritually with the addition that every believer, as Nichols describes, will “be empowered, envisioned, and equipped.”¹¹⁸ The post-Christendom Church should do a deep revision of its mission and vision as the Church in South Africa did to stop deficiencies in the Body of Christ.

The priority in ecclesiastical spheres is evangelism focusing its attention on the lost souls which is relevant; however, there are few practical discipleships for these new believers who will be involved in the same evangelism-focused Sunday pattern. Augsburg concludes that the Church must develop an intentional discipleship vision and mission focused on “a spirituality of self-surrender, love of God and love of neighbor.”¹¹⁹ The essence of this statement recognizes that, without self-surrender, it is impossible for believers to achieve sanctification. Therefore, if the Church does not take its praxis seriously, then it is taking a detour in the aim of its discipleship. How will believers be transformed and sanctified in the process of their lives? This question that many believers want their leaders to answer.

The Real Praxis of Discipleship will Shape Believers' Understanding of Who They are in Jesus Christ

The only way in which the Church can be identified with Christ is by practicing what He did during His ministry. The living Word was latent in the community, as Vincent indicates about the book of Mark 2, in which:

118. *Ibid.*, 28.

119. Andrew D. Rowell, “Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbor,” *Christian Scholar's Review* 36, no. 2 (2007): 236.

The community practices of early church disciple's consequent upon Jesus' practice were identified as a sequence of policies or customary activities and attitudes. These are related to a series of images of Disciple Practice, in which the earthly disciples are seen in specific and striking roles ...I suggested that these images indicate a significant elevation of the disciples, through their imitative or symbolic practice, into roles and titles which are messianic and Son-of-man-like, derivatively from the roles and titles of Jesus.¹²⁰

Communal practice will identify the Church with Jesus; a Church without communal practice will lack Jesus' image and will not elevate His name among the community. On the other hand, the Church can also be identified with Jesus Christ through the sacrifice He did on the cross. Through understanding or embodying the meaning of the cross, believers will not only be faithful followers but also be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ (Matt 10:38), as Stassen stipulates:

The incarnation is not merely about a general truth, or only about a subjective experience. It is about God doing something new in Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, we are confronted by God, who enters into our place of evasion, our place of distrust and deception, our place of shame, and our practice of domination with power and evasion of responsibility. God takes us with our sin into community. By this invasive work, God transforms us in Christ. The cross is God's demonstration of the injustice of authoritarians who crucify, disciples who betray and deny, and the shameful who evade and hide. It is God's taking all of us into God's compassion and deliverance and inviting us into community with faith.¹²¹

Theory can probably explain God's truth. However, the incarnation of the cross is a radical decision resulting from the believer's understanding that everything that happened to Jesus did not occur through isolation from the community, but rather through direct involvement within the community. In other words, followers can follow Jesus and be simple spectators or they can be hearers of God's truth. In contrast, a disciple allows God to confront their fears, pride, and conscientiousness. This empirical form allows God to transform believers into disciples who practice Jesus' steps in their communal calling.

120. John J. Vincent, "Outworkings: Disciple Practice Today," *Expository Times* 118, no. 8 (2007): 326.

121. Stassen, Glen. "Solid Ground VI: Incarnational Discipleship and Recovery of a Historically Realistic Jesus," *Baptistic Theologies*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2012): 68.

Disciples Will Be Taught and Led by Effective Coaches

The community has a high percentage of people with multiple disabilities; therefore, a systematic assessment by the Church is required to determine the problematic and the emotional disability of the new believers in the community to provide relevant assistance. The first member or ministry of the body of Christ that will be in the front line or having the first contact with new believers will be the pastor and the teacher, operating also as coaches. In fact, this intentional assessment of a person's spiritual life will open the door to identify the different physical or biological disabilities that may be present in the individual's life so that the church may personalize the discipleship model while developing a praxis that corresponds with a given problem.

Baggerman's study with regard to disabilities inside the Church shares Kleinert's survey, in which "surveyed teachers of students with moderate and severe intellectual disability (MSD) and found that 65.5% of the teachers surveyed reported that they had students who regularly participated in social activities at their place of worship."¹²² These survey examples open a holistic perspective concerning how important it is to acknowledge the different disabilities inside the body of Christ, and to act in love and compassion. In the same manner, the discipleship team should receive the right training to be effective with those who have disabilities, as Baggerman indicates:

As most community activity leaders, including religious education teachers, are volunteers and may not have expertise in facilitating the inclusion of individuals with developmental disability, it is important to provide training for volunteers.... This training should consist of more than one-time professional development sessions.... however, training that includes coaching with a performance feedback component has

122. Melanie A. Baggerman, et al, "The Effect of Coaching on a Faith Community Volunteer's Use of Effective Teaching Behaviors," *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities* 40, no. 4 (2015): 295.

increased generalization and maintenance of effects... One way to accomplish this is to use coaching procedures, developed for use in academic settings, to teach volunteers in community settings. Including individuals with disabilities goes beyond the mere physical presence of people with developmental disabilities in a place of worship but also must provide increased opportunities for them to play an active part there.¹²³

The emphasis is that those who will be in charge of discipleship must be able to apply the right coaching procedures for the inclusion of people with disabilities. These individuals also have the *imago Dei* and their participative role in the body of Christ will reflect that for God there is nothing impossible. This implemented procedure is reflected in Baggerman's coaching report affirming that a discipleship teacher by the name of "Barb not only learned what the behaviors were, but also how to implement them in her church school classroom to teach Hope, a child with MSD. As a result of the coaching intervention, Barb more effectively involved Hope in a class with her peers without disabilities."¹²⁴

Observing this scenario in which coaching not only evaluates the spiritual health of believers, but will make them encounter new resources to cope with their personal issues as Thompson indicated in his personal testimony interviewing a female person with schizophrenia in which:

She answered every question with clear and clearly insane logic, and I was utterly defeated. I turned to my psychiatrist teacher and asked how she could be so logical, operating in an insane world. He said, "Well, logic is not what establishes us as sane. Insanity resides in our imagination, not our logic." That's when I got my start as an effective coach. As a coach, I now understand the lesson from this experience as "Everyone lives in their own imaginary symbolic world." Alice, you, and I dwell in private worlds we mostly create. My job as a coach is to help people with their imaginations.¹²⁵

123. Baggerman, 295.

124. *Ibid.*, 302.

125. Clarence Thomson, "Enneagram Styles, Coaching, and The Use of Metaphor," *Enneagram Journal* 2, no. 1 (2009): 138.

The Scripture declares that the mind or the heart of the human being must be renewed every day through the Word of God (Phil 4:8). The work of the discipleship teacher as a coach is to remind the person what the Scripture says about their thought which may direct their imagination in the wrong direction (2 Cor 10:5). For this reason, discipleship through coaching will build structures to obtain effective results.

The discipleship interactions through coaching will provide a structure that serves as a map for every believer. In other words, the praxis of coaching will serve as Qing described, “It has been found that these models provide a comprehensive template or pervasive structure of effective coaching practice.”¹²⁶ Furthermore, the practice of an effective coaching will enable the disciple to reach out the following goals as Qing points out:

(1) the ability to unlock people’s potential to maximize their own performance; (2) a facilitative approach that helps people to learn, as opposed to teaching them; (3) an instructional approach that is directly concerned with the immediate improvement of performance and development of skills by a form of tutoring or instruction; and (4) the potential to enhance performance in work and personal life domains, underpinned by models of coaching grounded in established psychological approaches.

Although some believers are still in the process of their spiritual transformation, the structure set by the believer itself, with the help of a coach (teacher/facilitator) through essential questions, will produce good performance in the practice as Hulbert describes, “It is encouraging to see the theoretical insights and intervention strategies comprised by Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) making the transition into coaching practice.”¹²⁷ Therefore, relational communication is essential in this approach in order for disciples to develop new abilities which

126. Qing Wang, “Structure and characteristics of effective coaching practice,” *Coaching Psychologist* 9, no. 1 (2013): 7.

127. Williams Lee Hulbert, et al. “Contextual Behavioral Coaching: An Evidence-Based Model for Supporting Behavior Change,” *International Coaching Psychology Review* 11, no. 2 (2016): 143.

will help them to find spiritual and emotional stability. On the other hand, Qing shares the following structure of effective coaching.

Table 1: Elements in a pervasive structure of effective coaching practices and key considerations.

Element	Key considerations for the element
Individuals and relationships in coaching	Building trust, communication, commitment, support and collaboration
The coaching cycle and learning process	Understanding coaching as a goal-oriented and person-centered, non-linear learning process
Feedback and evaluation of outcomes	Using multiple methods to assess the effectiveness of coaching
Context and environment	Paying attention to the whole context that influences external and internal factors
Essential coaching skills and techniques	Developing coaching expertise through a combination of techniques, skills and capacities
Qualities and attitudes of an effective coach	Regarding effective coaching as a dispositional aspect integrating being, thinking and feeling
Ethics in coaching practice	Addressing confidentiality, consent and boundary in coaching contracts

Source: Coaching Psychologist, Jun 2013, Vol. 9 Issue 1, p7-17, 11p, 1 Diagram, 1 Chart; found on p9.

A structural system presented along with the Scripture will be a powerful source in which disciples will identify their weaknesses, strengths, and virtues to act upon their spiritual issues.

People who assist with the communal churches need a spiritual leader. Therefore, it is necessary to define effective coaching.¹²⁸ An effective coach is a person who can lead and facilitate the spiritual basis of the teachings in practical theology directing them to meditate and discover their own mistakes, as Barr indicates:

A one-to-one conversation focused on the enhancement of learning and development through increasing self-awareness and a sense of personal responsibility, where the coach facilitates the self-directed learning of the coachee through questioning, active listening, and appropriate challenge in a supportive and encouraging climate.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Marie Edwards, “An Introduction to Coaching Skills. A Practical Guide (2nd Edition).” *Coaching Psychologist* 13, no. 2 (2017): 101.

¹²⁹ Margaret Barr, and Christian van Nieuwerburgh, “Teachers' experiences of an introductory coaching training workshop in Scotland: An interpretative phenomenological analysis.” *International Coaching*

The encouragement climate is very much related to what Jesus used to do in his regular encounters with people during his ministry, as Searle stated, “Jesus’ teachings can be individually applied to specific circumstances in terms of transforming initiatives; he does not explain how the separate practices cohere to create a vision of kingdom life.”¹³⁰ The relevant one-on-one conversations that Jesus had in the past was real coaching in praxis which opened the door for a real transformation. All believers should receive a coaching direction in reference to their practical life using a method in which they can identify their common mistakes, as Pienaar suggests:

It has been argued that various helping relationships, amongst which the author refers to coaching, facilitation, and therapy has more in common than what differentiates them if epistemology is viewed as a unifying concept. As such the scope of practical theology in terms of the contexts and themes in which it might be involved is said to widen. The public dimension of the organizational context, more so than the congregational context, has been put forward as an important habitus of practical-theological facilitation. The organizational involvement of the practical-theological facilitator in terms of professional-vocational skilled helping takes on an actual role through facilitation and other helping modalities.¹³¹

People, during their childhood, had been taught or have the wrong information regarding themes like forgiveness and soteriology. A conversation about those themes in light of the Scriptures will be the appropriate means to invite them to a confident atmosphere occurring in a congregational structure and in the public atmosphere. The pastoral and teacher’s ministry required an intentional preparation in coaching. Why? According to Schaller, “coaching offers

Psychology Review 10, no. 2 (2015): 191.

130. Joshua Thomas Searle, “Is the Sermon on the Mount too unrealistic to Serve as a Resource for Christian Discipleship and Spiritual Formation?” *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 9, no. 2 (2009): 43.

131. Elmo Pienaar, “Practical-Theological Facilitation as Skilled Helping,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 69, no. 2 (2013): 1-9.

breakthroughs in a Christ follower's transformation and growth."¹³² The intentional interaction (normal conversation) will open barriers that oftentimes people close unless they were forced to open it. Furthermore, coaching has different functions that will foster effective discipleship.

Jaesook shares Killion's perspective about the different functions of coaching asserting:

Effective coaching in the field of education requires balancing of 10 different roles or functions for coaches, and these consist of: data coach, resource provider, mentor, curriculum specialist, instructional specialist, classroom supporter, learning facilitator, school leader, catalyst for change, and learner.¹³³

Looking at the amplitude defining the characteristics of a coach in the discipleship spheres brings a clear conviction that these roles are required inside the life of a disciple. New converts need a mentor who imparts spiritual instruction along with learning supports that will bring transformation in the life of the disciple. Moreover, these ten roles will help disciplers differentiate what is severe spiritual and emotional infirmity in the people from the involved communities. A discipleship model must be taken from the Scriptural narratives where the laity can reflect and intentionally relate with their leadership. Thus, West alluded that:

A common assumption of biblical discipleship calls for a leader-follower relationship to exist in order for mature disciples to reproduce their efforts in others... it is assumed that specific leadership behaviors are needed in order to serve within these ministry roles. Attention then must be given toward understanding discipleship as a developmental process for both leaders and followers.¹³⁴

Discipleship will develop new things in both the lives of the leader and the follower.

Discipleship is based on relationship rather than just mere information; building relationships is

132. Greg Schaller, "Transformational Coaching: Empowering Leaders in a Changing Ministry World," *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 5, no. 2 (2011): 113.

133. Jaesook Lee Gilbert and Helene Arbouet Harte, "Coaching to Quality: Increasing Quality in Early Care and Education Programs through Community-University Partnership," *Child Care in Practice* 19, no. 4 (2013): 399.

134. West, 125.

modeling the teachings of the Master, Jesus, in which a disciple is not focused on the position of power. Rather, the disciple is focused on servicing the church and their community; as Petersen stated, “Jesus’ teachings were perceived by his disciples as countercultural and by the authorities as subversive and revolutionary. The disciple who followed Jesus was not to act anything like the religious and political authorities.”¹³⁵

It must also be considered that a leader’s behavior is a fundamental part of modeling Jesus. It is important for a leader to model Jesus as new believers will follow and learn not only the Scriptural teachings, but also the personal praxis of the leader during the leader-follower relationship (discipleship). West asserted, “Effectiveness is not only in numerical growth but in quality of life in disciples and effectiveness of leadership.”¹³⁶ Therefore, the emphasis is not numbers; rather, it is the quality of life that the disciples are reflecting in the community.

Small Group Setting for Discipleship

Education in small group settings has been evaluated by several scholarly assessments that show it results in positive outcomes. For instance, one of the assessment results worked by Moussaïd declared the following:

In many domains of life, complex problems can be successfully addressed by pooling the knowledge of several individuals. When making decisions, forming judgments, or solving multidimensional problems, groups of people can outperform the best individual in the group, and sometimes even the experts in the problem domain. In everyday life, this collective achievement is commonly accomplished by means of face-to-face group discussions, during which the exchange of information and ideas between people results in the emergence of accurate collective solutions.¹³⁷

135. Douglas Petersen, “Kingdom Rules: Upside-Down Discipleship,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 16, no. 1 (2013): 38.

136. West, 129.

137. Mehdi Moussaïd, Alejandro Noriega Campero and Abdullah Almaatouq, “Dynamical Networks of Influence in Small Group Discussions,” *Plus One* 13, no. 1 (2018): 1.

Taking a note of the following results, those individuals who attend small group interactions will gain some knowledge from other experiences that can be used as a lasting resource their personal lives. The individual will be open to reflect and participate as Hölzer indicates in his assessment in which the individual will, “ensure active participation and learner engagement and finally reflection.”¹³⁸ On the other hand, knowledge-based experiences aligned to Scriptural wisdom will bring conviction and confirmation in the life of the disciple.

The Church in South Africa wants to be radically intentional in its local communities in the ecclesiology praxis regarding discipleship. This intentional praxis will direct the ecclesiastical institutions to learn from and understand the life of the believers.¹³⁹ The small group discipleship setting is perfect for the creation of a confident atmosphere where the pastor and the leadership team will have the opportunity to interact in a different setting with the believers. The intention, apart from the interaction and teaching, is discussed by Guillaume:

as descriptive-empirical practice it enables the pastoral counsellor to gather information that will help him or her discern the particular episodes, situations or patterns in the narrative of the counselee...being normative it also enables the counselor to interpret the stories presented from a hermeneutical perspective, whilst drawing on the biblical narrative to construct ethical norms and paradigms to provide perspective on the existential questions¹⁴⁰

The pastor will have the opportunity to identify the spiritual problems in the believer to relate to the Biblical narrative, which will open the understanding of the disciple. Cahalan expresses that the “confidence that wise biblical interpretation can and does produces sufficient and objective

138. Henrike Hölzer, Julia Freytag and Ulrike Sonntag, “Faculty Development for Small-Group-Teaching with Simulated Patients (SP) - Design and Evaluation of a Competency-based Workshop,” *GMS Journal for Medical Education* 34, no. 4 (2017): 2.

139. Guillaume H. Smit, “Pastoral Ministry in a Missional Age: Towards a Practical Theological Understanding of Missional Pastoral Care,” *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 36, no. 1 (2015): 1.

140. *Ibid.*, 2-3.

knowledge of God and the human situation...the work of practical theology is to translate biblical grounded truths to human situations.”¹⁴¹ The natural interaction will open the scenario for questions, and it is relevant for the pastor or the teacher/facilitator to listen closely to those questions. The answer must be a scriptural answer, knowing that only the Word of God has the power to unveil what is in the heart of the believer (Heb 4:12). The believer will also identify with the biblical narrative as Guillaume explains that, “Christians tell the story of God’s actions in human history through their testimony.”¹⁴² Discipleship in small groups will pave the way for growth or development in every believer.

The life of new believers requires an intentional alignment through the Scriptures to begin experiencing transformation, and this empirical process is better when it takes place in small discipleship groups as Lang proposes in his overview of the immersion experience group process where the topics involved during this interactive discipleship are:

1. Understanding the impact of spiritual and cultural origins
2. Understanding the impact of family background
3. Understanding the good news about your new family / relating to your heavenly father
4. Understanding your identity
5. Understanding and managing your emotions
6. Understanding pain / managing your pain
7. Understanding your relationships / communication skills
8. Developing life skills: Forgiveness, trust, boundaries, living loved & loving in community, outreach.¹⁴³

The spiritual and emotional sides of new believers has to be addressed together in order to overcome emotional frustrations from the past. Lang shares Scazzero’s recommendation, “Christian spirituality, without an integration of emotional health, can be deadly to yourself, your

141. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski, eds., *Opening the Field of Practical Theology an Introduction* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 122.

142. Smit, 3.

143. James A. Lang and David J. Bochman, “Positive Outcomes of a Discipleship Process,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 10, no. 1 (2017): 52.

relationship with God, and the people around you.”¹⁴⁴ The social degradation of families results from sin in the human being which has also infiltrated the cultural teaching of every individual that has pluralistic ideas that have nothing to do with the moral values that the Scripture teaches. As a result, individuals in society have adopted bad habits and erroneous information that influence their emotional life leading to a timebomb if not treated during an intentional discipleship session. Non-Christian people may be bound in a series of emotional and spiritual problems resulting from dysfunctional families According to John Riddle, “The key players in a dysfunctional family are, of course, the parents or parent. Dysfunctional parents come in all sizes and shapes, with the most obvious being the alcoholic, the abuser, and the mentally disturbed.”¹⁴⁵ All their frustration and the sinful patterns acquired in their lives are practiced in society. For example, these sinful patterns can be illustrated by activities such as stealing, drug use, gang violence, or prostitution.

In contrast, leadership that has an intentional engagement through discipleship should be focused on helping those believers to identify mature believers. Thus, Walton recommends asking “people to express in some form what mature discipleship looks like,”¹⁴⁶ stating, “A mature disciple in this view is one who lives out the qualities of the beatitudes or exhibits the fruits of the spirit in Galatians 5, who loves and supports other Christians.”¹⁴⁷ Therefore, asking

144. Ibid., 53.

145. John Riddle, “The Dysfunctional Family: Cause and Effect,” *Journal of Community Psychology* 19, no. 3 (1991): 244.

146. Walton, Roger, “Disciples Together: The Small Group as a Vehicle for Discipleship Formation,” *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 8, no. 2 (2011): 111.

147. Ibid., 112.

questions referencing what is a mature believer is relevant in the process of a disciple as Walton's reference in the following chart reveals.

Being a mature Christian means....	Strongly Agree	Agree	Total
Showing qualities such as kindness and forgiveness	64.4%	29.2%	93.6%
Supporting other Christians	40.4%	52.5%	92.9%
Having a better grasp of Christian belief	50.8%	40.8%	91.6%
Trying to shape my workplace and home life in a Christian way	41.2%	42.1%	83.3%
Witnessing to your faith to your non-Christian friends	36.3%	45.4%	81.7%
Sharing in the suffering of others	34%	44.9%	78.9%
Inviting others to become Christian	32.9%	44.9%	78.9%
Tackling local issues e.g. crime, poverty and loneliness	18.1%	43.8%	61.9%
Being involved in campaigns for justice and peace	11.9%	31.5%	43.4%

Fig.1. Disciples Together: The Small Group as a Vehicle for Discipleship Formation.

Source: *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, Vol. 8 Issue 2, 2011, p99-114, 16p, 1 Chart; found on p.111.

Becoming Through Both Knowing and Doing

When analyzing the purpose of communal discipleship, it is relevant to define the emphasis of these small groups so as to not lose focus and be more effective. For instance, a small group must be influential, relational, and purpose-driven with a clear vision of its task to impact the life of the believer and impact the lives of the people in the community. According to Gangel, there are three types of emphasis that must be addressed by every small group (discipleship/interactions). They are:

The influence group is composed of people who admit the need for change in their lives. They voluntarily gather and request that others exhort them and have an impact on their behavior and attitudes. The relation group ... the real purpose of the group is fellowship... prayer meetings. These groups serve a vital function. The task group form

to accomplish a job which can't be done by one person alone. The goal of the group can be to arrive at a decision, solve a problem, or reach a joint understanding of new material... Bible studies that concentrate on historical information or Scriptural content fall into this category.¹⁴⁸

Discipleship in small groups has a defined purpose: the spiritual transformation of the people who have given their lives to Jesus. In other words, to accomplish this objective Gangel stated, "Leaders must model the life their followers seek."¹⁴⁹ To be influential in the life of the people that God is adding to the family of the Church, the members of the Body of Christ must live a testimony that demonstrates Jesus' presence in their lives. The connection that every believer will have during the small group interactions will strengthen the relationship of every believer who belongs to the Body of Christ. Furthermore, discipleship leaders should be prepared to have relational interactions in every small group, as Wood indicates in his argument:

Likewise, charisma is said ... to be the product of the relationship between a leader who has certain charismatic qualities and followers' personal identification with that charisma within certain contexts and situations.¹⁵⁰

In other words, the followers of Jesus will be able to identify and be attracted to this type of relational leadership. These influential and relational discipleship interactions will unveil the needs of the flock, as Papachristou affirms:

Needs are seen as finite, few, and classifiable, changing only at a very slow pace along with the evolution of our kind. They can be satisfied according to many criteria. In this case, the axiological needs were used, with categories corresponding to subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity, and freedom. Protection was changed by security, as per Costanza et al. (2007), and subsistence was considered within reproduction, the latter being understood as a part of the former. Spirituality was also included as a study category, because of its importance in the assessment as a need.¹⁵¹

148. Gangel, 231.

149. Ibid., 232.

150. Martin Wood and Dibben Mark, "Leadership as Relational Process," *Process Studies* 44, no. 1 (2015): 27.

151. Ioanna Anna Papachristou and Martí Rosas-Casals, "Unveiling Connectivity Patterns of

The needs of the flocks will trace the map for the Church by directing the discipleship leaders to focus on a theological and practical task elaboration model. The following diagram will provide a scenario in which Mwangi shares Banks' template of theological training.¹⁵²

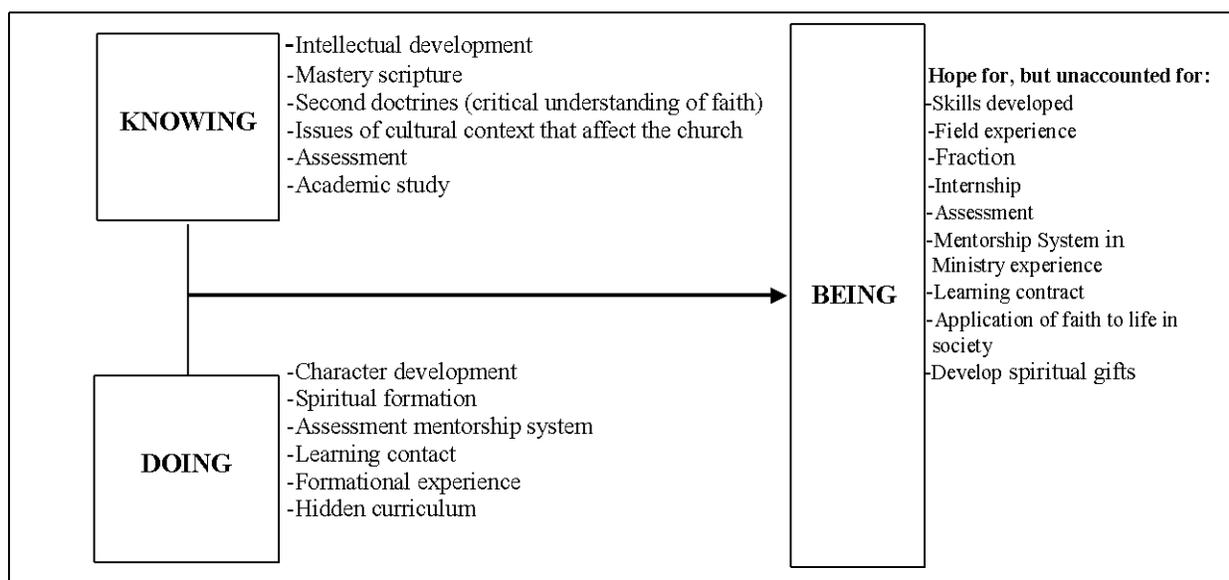


Fig.2 An integrated Competency-Based Training Model for theological training.

Source: *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 2011, Vol. 67 Issue 2, p 123-132, 10p, 2 Diagrams; found on p.124.

Bank's theological model offers a structural direction for effective discipleship focusing on three relevant factors. The first relevant factor is the *knowing* which is based on the intellectual development of every believer because the knowledge or the information from the secularist world wreaks havoc within the spiritual life of new believers who lack knowledge of

Categories in Complex Systems: An Application to Human Needs in Urban Places," *Journal of Mathematical Sociology* 40, no. 4 (2016): 219-238.

152. James K. Mwangi and Ben J. de Klerk, "An Integrated Competency-Based Training Model for Theological Training," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 67, no. 2 (June 2011): 124.

the Scripture. Therefore, it is relevant for disciples to not only receive didactic teaching but also to discover new things regarding their spiritual life throughout the process. Wringe writes:

For present purposes we may regard even so-called ‘guided discovery,’ in which situation and context are set up so that the learner will ‘discover’ what the teacher expects him or her to discover, as a method of teaching rather than an example of learning.¹⁵³

In the same manner, all disciples should assess their feelings about participation and identify not only as a disciple but also as part of the family of the Body of Christ relating to their teachers in some occasions as father, mother, or an older sibling. Jaffee stated, “In a system of discipleship the teacher bears for each student a responsibility appropriate to that of kin—particularly the father or mother—or even replacing it.”¹⁵⁴ In addition, the knowing process during this discipleship interaction must focus on the realities that are happening in our society in order to make the disciple aware of the differences between the Gospel and the secularist world. Wringe describes that the “subject matter implied by our modern view of teaching and learning, that involved in the notion of discipleship is problematic, morally ambivalent and capable of raising a number of philosophical questions.”¹⁵⁵

Knowledge also has a transformative side in the life of a disciple illustrated by the Scriptural narrative describing that King Solomon’s request for wisdom from God, but before making his request Solomon recapitulated the greatness of God’s mercies during the rule of his father David (2 Chr 1:7,10). King David’s life was not only a teaching experience for Solomon as seen in the book of 1 Kings 2:2-10 which gives an example of how David communicates his

153. Colin Wringe, “Teaching Learning and Discipleship: Education Beyond Knowledge Transfer,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 43, no. 2 (2009): 240.

154. Martin S. Jaffee, “A Rabbinic Ontology of the Written and Spoken Word: On discipleship, Transformative Knowledge, and the Living Text of Oral Torah,” *Journal of The American Academy of Religion* 65, no. 3 (1997): 530.

155. Wringe, 239.

last words to Solomon stating that the most important thing that stands out in a king's reign is remembering and obeying God's mandates. David was clearly expressing to Solomon that following God's mandates would sustain his kingdom and set it apart; but Solomon's kingdom was also transmitted to him, as Dan Liroy shares, "In accordance with the social and cultural norms prevalent throughout the ancient Near East, Israel's first king was a male sovereign ruler who exercised the right to transmit the royal power to his descendants."¹⁵⁶ Jaffee adds, "The transmission of transformative knowledge thus lies at the very center of the discipleship-community. This knowledge invariably is conceptualized as a kind of text."¹⁵⁷ The knowledge experiences acquired by disciples will not only influence their life but will be recorded in the spirit of the disciple as the written text is recorded in a book.

The second emphasis requires attention to apply everything that the disciple has acquired in knowledge. The *doing* is the second phase in which the disciple will acquire experience serving their communal places in which they will develop their spiritual gifts.¹⁵⁸ This model, put in action, will form the *being*, character, the spiritual men to be what God truly created. Therefore, it is relevant to emphasize that without knowledge, doing, and being who God created, it is impossible for every believer to deal with life circumstances and accomplish the purpose for which the Church has been called to achieve in this world – reaching souls for Christ. The reality is, however, that the method that opens the bridge between the teacher and the disciple is through the coaching praxis.

156. Dan Liroy, "From Zenith to Zero: A Historical-Theological Analysis of the Demise of the Kingdom of David and Solomon," *Conspectus (South African Theological Seminary)* 9 (March 2010): 74.

157. Jaffee, 531.

158. Mwangi, 130.

Working in the Community Together to Meet Real Needs

The Scripture states that Jesus' ministry developed in community within a small group with his selection of only twelve men to be his disciples. In other words, this is nothing new in front of the eye of the Church. Gangel accepts, "The Bible elevates the concept of a small group (consider the disciples). The book of Mark barely gets underway before Jesus selects the twelve and commences the leadership process of working with people in groups."¹⁵⁹

Working in small groups not only requires focus in discipleship, but the mission must also be intentional in its relations with people so that they can see and express that the Church cares for the flock. Kinnaman shares the new generation report with reference to the Church. "Christians are engaged, informed, and offer sophisticated responses to the issues people face."¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, it is also relevant to mention that communal discipleship is not only for the believer but also unbelievers. This informal interactions in both households and public areas, attract not only the converted but also the unconverted and is another form used to evangelize people who are not attending Church, but with the intention of being an influence for them maintaining a balance. Kinnaman suggests through Metzger? the following recommendation:

Being the salt and the light demands two things: We practice purity in the midst of a fallen world and yet we live in proximity to this fallen world. If you don't hold up both truths in tension, you invariably become useless and separated from the world God loves. For example, if you only practice purity apart from proximity to the culture, you inevitably become pietistic, separatist, and conceited. If you live in close proximity to the culture without also living in a holy manner, you become indistinguishable from fallen culture and useless in God's kingdom.¹⁶¹

159. Kenneth O. Gangel, *Feeding & Leading a Practical Handbook on Administration in Churches and Christian Organizations* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1989), 227.

160. David Kinnaman, and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2007), 119.

161. *Ibid.*, 131.

Therefore, the communal discipleship mission will be the face of Jesus Christ, as it will reflect the love of God and it will also reflect the holy life that there is in the life of someone who has been transformed by the power of God. Practicing love and holiness through relational discipleship in the community is to practice what Jesus did in the streets of Israel. In fact, the emphasis in small group discipleship interactions should be defined to achieve its objective.

An example of intentional discipleship from the 1900s in Australia was the life of Athol Gill who, according to Blythe, was the “founder and leader of two intentional communities: The House of Freedom in Brisbane and then the House of the Gentle Bunyip in Melbourne.”¹⁶² Those places were open for the poorest people, including the homeless, elderly, people with mental illness, and children. During his academic preparation in the Baptist Theological College of Queensland, Gill learned and understood that service in the community should be a radical commitment.¹⁶³ Therefore, his work is described by Blythe as “reflected in their range of activities Gill’s understanding that the pursuit of justice and peace were integral to the mission of the Church.”¹⁶⁴ This radical commitment represented an incarnational discipleship in which Gill reflected his passion “not only with his head but also with his flesh and blood. His theology was incarnate.”¹⁶⁵ The life of this man, who prepared for community service has served as an example of what this praxis discipleship research paper reflects. Gill is also an example for the ecclesiastical world, and the secular governmental institutions so they may understand that their

162. Stuart Blythe, “Athol Gill (1937-1992): Incarnational Disciple,” *Baptistic Theologies* 6, no. 1 (2014): 100.

163. *Ibid.*, 100.

164. *Ibid.*, 101.

165. *Ibid.*, 105.

purpose should be alongside the Body of Christ. Liberation theology has played a relevant part amid the post-Christendom Church forcing the Church to rethink its theological praxis toward an education (discipleship) in which Banks indicates that:

In accordance with the action/reflection model of liberation theology, this acts as a reminder that theory is formulated in the midst of practice. Our thinking should be embodied, experiential, and contextual, not abstract, objective, and universal. The principal characteristics of such a praxis are accountability to minority groups, collaborative reflection, lives-in-relation as an epistemological starting point, cultural diversity, and shared commitment to the work of justice.¹⁶⁶

The Church will operate or embody its theory in the communal praxis just as Jesus did during His ministry. To operate in the community, the Church will feel and hear the context of the human being in all capacities to be able to discern the objective scenario. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the disciples will learn the importance of reaching minority groups and understanding that their epistemological perspective will be impacted by the Word of Truth (Scripture), thereby aligning the communal culture with a focus on social justice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper was to prove the hypothesis that discipleship: 1) is done in community and not in a weekend service; 2) develops a heart of compassion, 3) meets a community's social needs, 4) is led by a skilled coach, 5) follows evangelism and baptism, 6) is doctrinal teaching hand in hand with praxis. Along with those characteristics, discipleship around the world will demonstrate that these elements ensure the church's healthy in its spiritual growth and sets a new model of real discipleship.

The applications of the model of real discipleship shape the believers' understanding of who they are in Jesus Christ. Small group settings for discipleship (if possible) are another way

166. Banks, 29.

in which this model can be put into practice as positive results come from individuals participating in interactions. The individuals also come to understand what is being taught of the Word and the experiences of other individuals within the group. The third application is to become disciples through both learning and doing, which means working in the community together to meet real needs. It is relevant to say that this is not simply the work of the believer but also includes the community, non-believers and believers alike, this demonstrates the model of Jesus' ministry.

This real discipleship model prioritizes the understanding of what is the real definition of being a disciple of Jesus Christ beyond the secular and the religious spheres. It will be an imperative model following the example of the primitive church in the book of Acts. Which states that after people receive salvation they can and should proceed to identifying in public with Jesus Christ publicly by getting baptized. This model will embrace every believer as part of the faith family can learn through solid relationships and intentional discipleship that *orthopraxy and orthodoxy* go hand in hand and improves the community.

These new disciples will be guided not only by leaders but also by coaches that will teach and shape believers to understand who they are in Jesus Christ. Through the learning process of knowing the Scripture, there will be opportunities to apply what the Scriptures teach about meeting the social needs of a greater community and to be personally transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. This model will inspire believers to not be individualistic but rather to be a heart compassionate for the needs of the people in the communities opening centers to rescue people from the street. As a result, disciples will have a systematic structure that will help them to learn and develop their potential so that they may serve their community.

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