

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Toward Transformative Christian Education that Facilitates Spiritual Formation at
Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ**

Submitted to Dr. Jeffrey Cockrell

In fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of
the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The discipleship or Christian education ministry at Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ (COGIC) is not fostering intentional spiritual formation within its congregants. Spiritual formation intentionality is missing within the congregation. The lack of spiritual formation intentionally naturally leads to a discipleship deficit. And this deficit is seen and felt within this project's context. Yet the call to return to deep and transformative disciple-making, which produces Christlikeness is vital and commonplace. This thesis project attempts to examine and address the struggle of discipleship and spiritual formation intentionality at Miracle Temple COGIC. To address the problem the researcher implements a four-phase project intervention, which consists of (1) a focus group comprised of current Sunday school teachers; (2) an assessment of the congregation's present discipleship status; (3) a three-day spiritual formation Bible study; and (4) a final participant survey; all to determine if the congregation experienced an increase in discipleship and spiritual formation intentionality.

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Abbreviations

COGIC	<i>Church of God in Christ, Inc.</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
ESV	<i>English Standard Version</i>
LURSOD	<i>Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity</i>
MTCOGIC	<i>Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ of Norwalk, CT</i>
SONO	<i>South Norwalk</i>
UCC	<i>United Church of Christ</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Spiritual formation and discipleship represent the church's need for Christlikeness. The goal of the church is to manifest the life of Jesus Christ to the world.¹ To be like Christ should be the pursuit of the church, individually and corporately. There is no shortage of literature about spiritual formation and discipleship. But even more critical to this discussion is the church's role in assisting believers in reaching these biblical objectives, namely, spiritual formation and discipleship. The church exists in the world to make disciples and to support the spiritual development of its congregants. C.S. Lewis wrote, "The Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time."²

Every believer is formed by their choices. Richard Foster explains that the former pattern of living, which was shaped by engrained habits of sin, are the very things that gave us a sense of identity.³ The Christians life before salvation was identified as dead in trespasses and sins and their conduct was motivated by the inner movements of the heart, which was dictated by sinful

¹ Many Bible scholars and practitioners contend that the goal of the church is evangelism. This researcher does not disagree with this assertion. Evangelism is explicitly included in the Great commission in Matthew 28:18-20. However, the NT does not put forth one theme as the single purpose and goal for the church. For instance, MacArthur and Mayhue asserts that the purpose of the church is threefold: Exalting God, Edifying Believers, and Evangelizing the Lost. See John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2017), 751-753. Conversely, Rick Warren notes that the Christ-centered congregation is equally committed to the five purposes of the NT church which are evangelism, worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service. See Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).

² C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2001), 199.

³ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1998), 4.

passions and desires. But now that Christians have been made alive by the Spirit of Christ, even God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, are now on the path to inner transformation (Eph. 2:1-5). This inner transformation of the heart is the sacred enterprise of the church. It is the calling of God's people. To be formed and transformed in Christ. The church's greatest need is to be spiritually formed into the image of Jesus Christ. The new creation of Christ has been the plan of God before the foundation of the world (Eph. 2:10). As Siang-Yang Tan stated, "We need to return to the simplicity of making spiritual formation in Christ the primary and exclusive goal of the local church and therefore to realize the crucial role of the local church in helping people become more like Jesus."⁴

Discipleship and spiritual formation reveal the desire of Christians, through the centuries, to grow in the grace and knowledge of God and to draw closer to Him who has revealed Himself in Christ.⁵ Living for and with God falls under the subjects of discipleship and spiritual formation, which are predominant features in the church's spiritual development. As we consider the transforming nature of discipleship and spiritual formation within the local context under consideration, we must examine, even if it is in a small way, the experiences and collective memory of the congregation, as these factors influence spiritual maturity. Spiritual formation and discipleship are grounded in the Scriptures, yet they must be aimed at the needs of those who compose the congregation to assist in Christlike growth.

The implications of spiritual formation shape and influence every aspect of the believer's life. The need for spiritually grounded believers is paramount today, as churches are located

⁴ Ruth Haley Barton et al., "Spiritual Formation in the Church," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 2 (2014): 294.

⁵ On God revealing Himself in His son, Jesus Christ, see John 1:18; 3:16; 14:9; 15:24; Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 4:4, 6; Philippians 2:6; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:3.

within communities and neighborhoods plagued by the effects and consequences of sin.

Discipleship and spiritual formation are the two sides of a coin. Both are equally necessary for developing believers who are bearing fruit for God, corporately and individually. Christ charged his followers to go, make disciples, baptize, and to teach believers of all nations to obey the word of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20). The great commission is, therefore, the mission of the church and reminds us that the church's pressing need for spiritually forming discipleship processes is critical. Every local church conceptualizes and lives out the great commission in various ways. A healthy church must identify itself considering Christ's mission, measure itself by the mission, and create strategies to execute the mission, grounded deeply in the gospel.

In a 2021 study, the Barna Group produced ground-breaking research exploring current trends in historically Black denominations and other majority-Black, Black-led congregations. The study's conclusion was both optimistic and ominous. The study revealed signs of regression related to broader societal trends of religious decline. The report stated: "The truth is that Black churchgoers are the bellwether of resilient U.S. Christianity. Though not immune to broader trends of religious decline, Black Americans stand out as faithful, prayerful, and intimately acquainted with the Bible."⁶ On another note, there is a drop in Christian identity and an increase among Black Americans who regard themselves as atheist, agnostic, or having no faith affiliation. Barna's study reveals that overall church health is deeply tied to biblical grounding and knowledge, but many question if the Bible is a firm foundation.⁷

This DMIN project will assess the current approach to Christian education or teaching ministry at Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ (COGIC) in Norwalk, Connecticut

⁶ Barna Group, *Trends in the Black Church: Celebrating Its Legacy and Investing in a Hopeful Future* (Barna Group, 2021), 7, accessed September 14, 2021.

⁷ Ibid., 28-35.

(MTCOGIC).⁸ The existing model for Christian education and discipleship at Miracle Temple COGIC must be assessed and modified to facilitate spiritual formation in its congregants. Indeed, every lay ministry within the congregation exists to make disciples, but this project focuses solely on the teaching ministry at MTCOGIC. The Christian education ministry was developed to teach believers fundamental doctrine so that they may grow in the light of the Bible and embody the life of Christ incarnationally in our modern culture. The societal decline of religious commitment affects and influences the spiritual vitality of the local congregation; and demands that the church re-engage and renew its commitment to effective growth strategies grounded in Scripture.

Making disciples involves edifying the church. Every generation brings with it an obligation to re-engage biblical discipleship and spiritual formation. This re-engagement is necessary as the church seeks to glorify God and make disciples in a broken and ever-evolving world. Congregants are daily contending with inner desires that seek to overtake them and to remove Christ from the center of their lives (1 Cor. 10:13; Heb. 12:3-4). The struggle of the church is to be constantly shaped by the gospel. This study will conduct a four-phase project implementation process. It will encourage dialogue among congregants, gather vital information, and thereby assess current approaches to teaching ministry at MTCOGIC, in an effort, to

⁸ The Church of God in Christ (COGIC) is a 6-million-member Holiness-Pentecostal denomination. It is also one of the historic Black denominations in the United States. In their seminal and classic work on the Black church in North America titled *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya use the term “Black Church” as a sociological and theological shorthand reference to the pluralism of Christian Black churches in the United States. The Black Church is comprised of and understood in light of the seven historic Black denominations, which are the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church; the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (A.M.E.Z.) Church; the Christian Methodist Episcopal (C.M.E.) Church; the National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Incorporated (NBC); the National Baptist Convention of America, Unincorporated (NBCA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC); and the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). Excerpt adapted from Eric C. Lincoln, and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 1.

discover ways that the teaching ministry can modify existing practices to provide biblical solutions for spiritual growth within the congregation.

The following chapters will examine the discipleship ministry at MTCOGIC to encourage church leaders and congregants to make discipleship and spiritual formation its chief priority. Biblical engagement promotes spiritual growth. Chapter 1 deals primarily with the context of this project. This project is a discourse in contextual and practical theology; understanding the ministry context is essential to comprehending God's movement in the church. This chapter describes the problem, gives a purpose directly related to the problem, makes basic assumptions and commitments that are foremost to this writer's argument, defines and clarifies essential terms, and concludes with the overarching thesis. In respect to the context, this project primarily confines its study to MTCOGIC. Still, to further clarify the cultural identity of the church, the discussion may be offered at points on its more extensive relationship to the Church of God in Christ and the United Church of Christ. This study cannot provide an exhaustive treatment of how the Church of God in Christ has influenced biblical engagement, discipleship, and spiritual formation within its context.

Chapter 2 integrates the insights of Christian thinkers, theologians, and practical scholars with those of this researcher to ground the theological argument of this project into an interconnected and solid development. Theology for the church is never performed in a vacuum. Practical theology that builds discipleship ministry pulls on the thinking of the universal and timeless community of Christ. Engagement with biblical principles becomes the basis upon which the proposed ministry adjustment is justified and made necessary.

Chapter 3 describes how the problem presented in the previous chapter will be addressed. This project does not seek to immediately resolve the problem, as congregational transformation

takes time and consistent vision casting, confidence, and esteem-building within its congregants. The goal is to address the problem, initiate transformative developments, and provide possible alternatives for consideration. It will give a step-by-step explanation of the approach this researcher will use to achieve the desired result. Once the intervention plan has been outlined, this chapter will also offer a narrative of the implementation and collection of data. In Chapter 4, the results of the intervention plan posed by the data collected in chapter 3 will be examined. This chapter would address if the intervention yielded the desired results or if there were unexpected results. Chapter 5 will conclude this study and provide some important observations gleaned from this study and consider next steps.

Ministry Context

Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ (COGIC) exists, in part, because of the worldwide influence of the Church of God in Christ. One cannot truly comprehend the origins of MTCOGIC without understanding how the biblical doctrine of holiness was recovered to ignite true spiritual growth in the church, as it was found, in the lives of C.P. Jones and C.H. Mason, two Baptist ministers, who began to preach the Wesleyan doctrine of holiness in the late 1890s. In 1907, Mason attended the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, CA, and experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues. Mason and Jones separated due to disagreement over this practice. Mason, however, continued to preach the doctrine of holiness and the baptism of the Holy Spirit, thereby initiating a significant Holiness-Pentecostal movement among southern Blacks.

The Church of God in Christ spread across the country as men and women received the baptism of the Holy Spirit and was deepened in their practical understanding of holiness. This brief historical backdrop must be stated at the outset to give the reader a larger historical

framework of MTCOGIC. Holiness, sanctification, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the manifestation of spiritual gifts are the distinctive doctrines of the Church of God in Christ and serve as the core measurement for grasping what it means to make disciples and to be formed in Christ. Within this context, making and becoming disciples is closely related to being filled with the Holy Spirit and living a life of holiness in one's day-to-day life. The denomination has conceptualized disciple-making as a biblical mandate for Spirit-filled, empowered, and baptized believers to fulfill.⁹

Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ was established on June 25, 1973, by Reverend Dr. Joseph D. Clemmons, Sr. Rev. Clemmons arrived in the Norwalk area in 1960 at the direction of the late Bishop Charles Brewer, Sr. and was assigned to pastor the Holy Temple COGIC until he was inspired to plant MTCOGIC. Rev. Clemmons began Miracle Temple with sixty charter members. Despite the obstacles, Rev. Clemmons and the growing congregation set out to do a great work for God, build up its community in which it was located, and make disciples that were grounded in the word of God. In the initial phases of the church's development, the congregation envisioned the creation of a social service center, which would offer community resources through counseling, child-care, a senior-citizen program, and a post-prison reintegration program.

In these early days of the congregation's existence, Rev. Clemmons closely aligned himself and his ministry efforts with the United Church of Christ (UCC), thus giving the congregation a dual membership status within both the Church of God in Christ and the United

⁹ For a more detailed analysis on understanding the Holiness tradition as a way of engaging and motivating spiritual formation read Richard Foster's *Streams of Living Water: Essential Practices from the Six Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2001), 87-135.

Church of Christ.¹⁰ The congregation held its worship services for a brief time at the Rowayton United Church of Christ, First Congregational Church on the Green, and South Norwalk Congregational Church. Later Trinity Episcopal Church extended an invitation to the congregation to hold services in its parish hall.

Rev. Clemmons was pursuing his Doctor of Ministry degree at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, and in 1974, Trinity Episcopal Church was destroyed by a devastating fire. Due to the challenging circumstances, Rev. Clemmons was faced with the decision to suspend his doctoral studies but Rev. Henry Yordon, the pastor of the First Congregational Church on the Green, encouraged Rev. Clemmons to continue his studies and subsequently invited him and his congregation to hold services at their facility until a permanent location was secured. In 1975, with the assistance of the United Church of Christ, Miracle Temple purchased, for its home, the former Trinity Episcopal Church. The congregation began renovating the facility immediately, and in 1979, held its services in the lower-level until renovations were completed in the upper-level main sanctuary.

Rev. Clemmons served the greater Norwalk community in a variety of ways. While pastoring MTCOGIC, he simultaneously pastored the Historic First COGIC of Brooklyn, NY for twenty years. He co-founded PIVOT Ministries, a faith-based residential recovery program based in Bridgeport, CT. Rev. Clemmons, a pastor-scholar, worked as a Spanish Teacher at Harding High School in Bridgeport; a Connecticut State Representative for the 140th district; and an original board member at the Norwalk Economic Opportunity Now.¹¹ After forty-years of pastoral leadership and godly service, Rev. Clemmons retired at the age of eighty-three and was

¹⁰ Ann Ferris, "Our Houses of Worship: Miracle Church," *Norwalk Weekly Trader* May 18, 1978.

¹¹ Steve Kobak, "Longest Serving Pastor in Norwalk to Step Down," *The Hour* May 26, 2013, <https://www.thehour.com/norwalk/article/Longest-serving-pastor-in-Norwalk-to-step-down-8193636.php>.

also consecrated an Auxiliary Bishop in the Church of God in Christ, in 2013. After an extensive search process, Reverend Dr. Jacob Kelly, of Harlem, NY, was selected to succeed Bishop Clemmons as the pastor of MTCOGIC. Dr. Kelly worked tirelessly to expand the various ministries of the church.

Dr. Kelly served as the pastor until 2020 when he was assigned to the pastorate of Kelly Temple COGIC in Harlem, NY. Once again, the congregation conducted an extensive search process and prayerfully inquired of God's direction. In 2021, Rev. Devale Hodge was selected and appointed to the senior pastorate of MTCOGIC and was officially installed on Saturday, May 22, 2021, by Bishop James Pullings, the Prelate of the Eastern New York First Diocese of the Church of God in Christ. Miracle Temple COGIC is in South Norwalk (SONO), an eclectic and bustling town in the heart of Fairfield County, CT.

The congregation has a membership of about eighty-five people. More than fifty per cent of the congregation is aged fifty and above. The church has a very small number of young persons aged thirty and below, which represents a growing concern and need for the preservation and advancement of the congregation. About sixty per cent of the congregation is of African American descent and about forty per cent is of Jamaican descent. Sunday school is the only Christian education ministry the church is offering currently. Sunday school occurs every Sunday morning in the main sanctuary, comprised of men and women, and consistently maintains an attendance of about twenty-five people. The church offers Sunday school as its primary discipleship and teaching program.

Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ is a Black Holiness-Pentecostal Church, which fundamentally believes that God is holy and desires to take unto Himself a holy people; affirms the power and indwelling presence of God the Holy Spirit, who is responsible for the spiritual

formation of the church, and thereby, dispenses spiritual empowerment, gifts, and liberation into the body of Christ; and firmly believes that Jesus Christ is God and redeems humanity from sin through His sacrificial death and resurrection from the dead, so that humanity may experience the fellowship of God, and the inner renovation of the spiritual life.¹²

Problem Presented

The problem is that the Christian education ministry at MTCOGIC is not intentionally fostering spiritual formation within congregants. The congregation has forgotten, and must again become aware, that it exists primarily to spiritually form believers to become Christ's faithful apprentices. Dallas Willard rightly noted that most local congregations are now characterized by simple distraction. "The simple distractions," according to Leith Anderson, are "architecture, pulpits, sermons, rules, style of music, order of worship, times of church gatherings, denominations, camps, conferences, or board meetings."¹³ Willard continues, "to fail to put the focus on those principles and absolutes [of the NT church], on the other hand, is to wander off into a state of distraction, which is where most of our local congregations are. They wind up majoring on minors and allowing the majors, from the NT point of view, to disappear."¹⁴

Intentional spiritual practices that produce Christian maturity is missing. There is an unending battle for the spirituality of the church. And the church is constantly caught up in this

¹² This project's ministry context section provides a brief historical sketch of how the Holiness, and later Pentecostal, (now known as Holiness-Pentecostal) movement spread first among Southern Blacks and extended to the specific context of this project. This section is not intended to be an exhaustive account. To read more on the Holiness-Pentecostal movement and its influence on and through the Church of God in Christ, see Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997); Ithiel C. Clemmons, *Bishop C.H. Mason and the Roots of the Church of God in Christ* (Mitchellville, MD: Christian Living Books, Inc., 2020); and Ovell Hamilton, *Sanctified Revolution: The Church God in Christ: A History of African-American Holiness* (Itapira, SP, BR: UP Books, 2021).

¹³ Quoted in Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 235.

¹⁴ Ibid.

spiritually intense confrontation. As Paul says, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, authorities, cosmic powers over this present darkness, the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). It is these dark spiritual forces that oppose the church, namely, its calling to be the foci of spiritual formation – making disciples that are bearing fruit in Christ. The forces of darkness distract the church from spiritual formation by using its own preoccupation with minor things, subtle temptations, covetousness, busy work, the pursuit of power, prestige, and status.

It is not enough to know theological truths about Christ, attend weekly church gatherings, and do Christian like things, although all these things are important. The aim must be to become like Christ. When believers become like Jesus, everything else in their lives are radically changed by the spiritual transformation that occurs. The overall objective, as Willard says, is not to get people into heaven but to get heaven into people.¹⁵ Transformative discipleship that fosters spiritual formation is deficient, within a local congregation, when there is a decline in or indifference toward church attendance, cultivating spiritual disciplines, engaging koinonia fellowship, serving others, participating in missions, and intentionally making disciples.

Motivating and encouraging spiritual formation within its congregants is the church’s God-given responsibility. Willard postulates that the local congregation will naturally produce “children of the light” as it obeys Christ’s commission to go into the world and make apprentices of all people; primarily by adopting the principles and absolutes of the New Testament.¹⁶ M. Robert Mulholland shares an illustration about Dwight L. Moody, as it relates, to the centrality of the church and its role in spiritual formation:

¹⁵ Ibid., 238.

¹⁶ Ibid., 239.

It is said that one cold and gloomy day, Dwight L. Moody visited a man who had expressed some interest at one of Moody's meetings. Moody was ushered into a comfortable room with a fire blazing on the hearth. After some gracious preliminary conversation, the man began to argue that it was possible for a person to be a Christian without participating in the life of the church. As he made his elaborate and detailed arguments, Moody leaned forward in his chair, took the poker and pulled a flaming coal from the fire out onto the stone hearth. Moody watched as the coal slowly dimmed and went out. He then turned and looked at the man, without saying anything. After a long pause, the man said, 'Mr. Moody, you have made your point!'

Mulholland concludes, "We can no more be formed in the image of Christ outside of corporate spirituality than a coal can continue to burn bright outside of the fire."¹⁷ The lack of transformative Christian education which fosters intentional spiritual formation is a pervasive problem at Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ. Diane J. Chandler, whose words resonate with this researcher said, "While I view the church's anemia as indicative of the lack of spiritual formation intentionality through a biblically supported process, I also resonated with great hope that God is moving in and through the local church, albeit in weakness and in inconspicuous ways like leaven infiltrating yeast. May the church awaken out of slumber."¹⁸

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to address the lack of spiritual formation intentionality within this local congregation's Christian education program. Steven L. Porter noted that there is a resurgence of interest in "spirituality" within our Western culture, and in particular, an interest in "Christian spirituality."¹⁹ The concept, "spiritual but not religious" has become a growing trend and predominant worldview among contemporary people. It has

¹⁷ M. Robert Mulholland Jr., and Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 181.

¹⁸ Barton et al., "Spiritual Formation in the Church," 298.

¹⁹ Steven L. Porter, "On the Renewal of Interest in the Doctrine of Sanctification: A Methodological Reminder," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45, no. 3 (2002): 415.

been argued that religion has become and is continuously becoming a thing of the past. But the research is showing signs that point in the opposite direction. Contemporary people, generally, do not view the world through a Christian lens, yet the question of spirituality and growth are commonplace. Books, the internet, libraries, and public bookstores are filled with numerous resources on spirituality, emotional and holistic growth, and self-actualization.

What modern psychology calls self-actualization is called sanctification in the Bible.²⁰ As COVID-19 quarantine mandates circulated across America, people were locked away, mostly alone, at home. People were pondering the big questions, that is, the meaning of life, human destiny, the existence of God and evil, and the nature of reality; seeking to emerge as stronger, wiser, and better human beings. Christian practitioners and scholars must offer a reasonable and biblically sound account of the doctrine of sanctification (spiritual formation) and why it matters for the thinking person. Porter states, “Hence, in the midst of the flurry of popular writing, and teaching on spiritual formation, evangelical theologians have a duty to offer a biblical presentation of the doctrine of sanctification in a clear, coherent, and comprehensive manner that is at the same time relevant to the lives of contemporary Christian believers.”²¹

Sanctification is a significant biblical doctrine that runs through the Old and New Testaments. Spiritual formation is a new terminology for sanctification. Discipleship is a considerable area of study as well. This researcher selected this problem focus because the congregation's need for renewed interest in spiritual formation and making disciples is vital. To be set apart for and by God is the positional state of God's people. And yet, it is also the

²⁰ For a more extensive deliberation on how self-actualization intersects with the biblical doctrine of sanctification see James A. Oakland, “Self-Actualization and Sanctification,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 2, no. 3 (1974): 202-209.

²¹ Ibid.

progressive process of God's people. Willard commented, "Spiritual formation is an orderly process."²² Congregants need to learn more about sanctification and discipleship. As congregants confront the attacks of the world, the flesh, and the devil,²³ they need to know what the Bible teaches about these essential doctrines, how they affect every dimension of life, and empower them to triumph over spiritual defeat.

To address the lack of spiritual formation intentionality that fosters mature disciples at Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ, this project will employ a four-phase intervention process. The four phases will be as follows: (1) a focus group that will consist of current Sunday school teachers; (2) a congregational assessment that will evaluate the current state of discipleship and biblical knowledge within congregants; (3) a three-day spiritual formation Bible study, which will assist congregants in developing a personal plan for spiritual formation; and (4) a survey that will glean from congregants what they learned and if the overall intervention initiated a desire for or strengthened their spiritual growth.

Congregants will benefit from this research because they will have the opportunity to share their perspectives on the congregation's state in spiritual formation and discipleship; they will assist this researcher in brainstorming on what transformative Christian education can look like within the church; they will be able to offer explanations concerning why the congregation's spiritual formation efforts are languishing; they will have the opportunity to participate in a focus group, an assessment, a Bible study, a survey, and to create a personal spiritual formation plan. This will provide this researcher with data for congregational analysis and future vision casting. Congregants must feel as if they have a voice and are a part of the spiritual development of their

²² Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 10.

²³ 1 John 2:16

congregation. Congregants want their ideas to be integrated into the congregation's unfolding identity.

This project will provide every congregant that desires to be a part, an opportunity to share their perspective in a safe space. Discipleship and spiritual formation are mostly achieved in congregations that are missionally and relationally based. One of the goals of discipleship and spiritual formation is evangelism (disciples making disciples through gospel witness); however, the most effective way to reach this ideal is through nurturing intentional relationships among congregants. If congregants do not feel safe, secure, and enabled to be vulnerable within the life of the church, then shifting the cultural reality toward intentional spiritual formation will prove challenging. Intentional spiritual formation requires that congregants possess healthy relationships among themselves because disciple-making and Christlike growth are essentially communal.

Congregants will again possess an appreciation for and understanding of the central importance of sanctification. Among all the reasons this research may benefit its participants is recovering the importance of sanctification. Congregants cannot afford to lose sight of what it means to be sanctified – progressively becoming more and more like Jesus Christ through the indwelling presence of the Spirit and the application of biblical principles and precepts.

Basic Assumptions

This research, first and foremost, seeks to present an accurate assessment of the culture at MTCOGIC and how it shapes the congregation's vision of discipleship and spiritual formation. Sunday school, as the predominant discipleship-based program within the congregation, has positively affected those who frequently participate in it. However, the program has not been far-reaching into shaping and influencing the entire congregation's spiritual formation due to a lack

of engagement. The steady decline of attendance and engagement in Sunday school is just one symptom of the congregation's deficiency in spiritual formation intentionality which fosters disciple-making.

This research assumes that both church leadership and congregants will participate in this study. There is a sense that congregants feel a need for spiritual renewal within the ministries of the church, primarily within the nexus of the church's life. The assumption is that congregants may be unable to fully articulate their perception of the church's spiritual formation gap. As COVID-19 has further circulated across America and modified in-person church gatherings, the notion of this spiritual formation gap has become more apparent. COVID-19 has exposed many of the latent practices that has, in many ways, contributed to the spiritual formation gap within the congregation.

It may be assumed that not everyone within the congregation is deficient in spiritual formation and discipleship. Every congregation has persons who are mature and growing in their spiritual formation. This is not to isolate those who may be considered as spiritually weak or to cause those who are more spiritually equipped to become proud of their so-called achievements. However, this is to say that it should be assumed that every congregation will have a combination of both mature and immature believers. Both kinds of believers require additional intentional spiritual formation as Christian growth is a process, and not entirely perfected in this life.

An important assumption is that the aging of the congregants may contribute to the congregation's inability to imagine a broader or divergent vision of spiritual formation and discipleship. Some may find change difficult. Whereas a disparate picture for spiritual formation and discipleship would be refreshing and welcomed to others. Casting a vision for intentional

spiritual formation within the congregation is primarily a work of God's Spirit within the hearts of God's people. On the other hand, the congregation is generally willing to adapt and adjust to a clear vision for the future.

Finally, as COVID-19 continues to mutate and spread across the U.S., it may be assumed that this project is being conducted amid this rapidly changing pandemic. The pandemic has had an enormous effect on the congregation's ministries: the level of engagement and participation among congregants waned; fluctuating attendance and reduced financial support of the Church's ministries; and moving the worship experience to the digital world. Amidst these concerns, the pandemic aroused a positive wakeup call and alerted church leaders and congregants of the need for new spiritual patterns that fosters spiritual formation. It is suspected that the desired result and level of participation in this project's intervention may be slightly altered because of the pandemic.

Definitions

Throughout this project, some terms are used interchangeably to capture the essence of what is meant by Christian education and spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is a term largely used to refer to the doctrine of sanctification in general and progressive sanctification in particular. Other terms that will be used to refer to spiritual formation in this project are Christlikeness, spiritual maturity, spiritual growth, and so on. Christian education will be referred to as discipleship, teaching ministry, and Sunday school. It is evident that each of these terms have some overlap between them and are being used to show the scope of these terminologies.

Christian education. Scholars and congregations have defined Christian education in various ways over the years. This project utilizes this term to summarize the biblical teaching program offered at Miracle Temple COGIC. From a COGIC context, Christian education is

generally understood to mean Sunday school. This project employs the definition of Christian education by Lora-Ellen McKinney: “It is an educational process that produces Christians. Christian education seeks to develop in its learners a strong belief in, dedication to, and knowledge of Jesus Christ so they can better know him, reflect his image in the world, and bring others to him.”²⁴

Discipleship. At the conclusion of every service at Miracle Temple COGIC, the call to discipleship is given to those who would like to receive the gift of salvation or become members of the church. Once a person comes to the altar to receive salvation or consents to church membership, there are practically no discipleship programs in place to guide them into spiritual formation. The problem is that there is an evident discipleship deficit in our church.²⁵

‘Discipleship,’ ‘disciple-making,’ ‘discipling’ are all used interchangeably to refer to the same process of becoming a committed learner of Jesus. Greg Ogden defines discipleship as: “an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples to encourage, equip, and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well.”²⁶

Sanctification. At the core of Miracle Temple COGIC’s self-understanding is a strong commitment to the biblical doctrine of sanctification. Sanctification is an extensive theological term. For the believer, sanctification includes three aspects. The first aspect is called positional sanctification (given to every believer at regeneration based on Christ’s work on the cross). The

²⁴ Lora-Ellen McKinney, *Christian Education in the African American Church: A Guide for Teaching Truth* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 4.

²⁵ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 15.

²⁶ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 17.

second aspect is called progressive sanctification (the ongoing process of becoming formed in Christ). The third aspect is called glorification (the believer's complete and eternal sanctification in heaven).²⁷ This project concerns itself with the second aspect of sanctification, namely, progressive sanctification (spiritual formation). Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* defines sanctification as a "progressive work of God and believers that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives."²⁸

Spiritual Formation. As we have seen in the definition of sanctification, spiritual formation is another way to think about progressive sanctification in the believer's life—well-rounded spiritual formation results in disciple-makers. There are many definitions of spiritual formation, as it is a prevalent topic today. This project will utilize the definition found in *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, which is "the ongoing process of the believer's actions and habits being continually transformed into the image of Jesus Christ."²⁹ Spiritual formation should be understood as a change process in the believer that is initiated at conversion/justification.

Limitations

This study will be limited to the context of Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ, an African American Holiness-Pentecostal church in the inner city of Norwalk, Connecticut. At this present time, this researcher will only utilize congregants from Miracle Temple COGIC to assess and implement this study. This study will be limited by the effects of the ongoing Coronavirus

²⁷ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1999), 442.

²⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Bible Doctrine* 2ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 924.

²⁹ Richard Averbeck et al., *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregal Publications, 2008), 21.

(COVID-19) pandemic.³⁰ The virus could hamper the ability of the researcher to implement the study in-person. If the research is executed in person, several processes may be applied to ensure participants' safety and well-being. For instance, social distancing will be a factor that would prohibit participants from close contact or engage in one-to-one person formation. If the project study is implemented through online means, this could also affect the study results due to the loss of interpersonal engagement. Potential participants may not want to engage in this study if it is implemented in person because of COVID-19.

Delimitations

Miracle Temple COGIC is a small church comprised of about one-hundred and twenty-five members. Most of the members are age fifty-five and up. Therefore, this study will be delimited to allow persons, representative of every age group within the congregation, to participate in this study. This research may also be delimited by having only online or in-person sessions. At present, the researcher has not decided how the research will be executed yet. The findings concluded in this project may apply to other COGIC and non-COGIC local churches, but the reader would have to create and apply their own interventions.

Thesis Statement

This project argues that the Christian education ministry at Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ is not intentionally facilitating spiritual formation in its congregants. Spiritually formed people are effective disciple-makers. Obeying the great commission and cultivating mature believers in Christ should be the aim of the Christian education ministry at Miracle

³⁰ At the present time in the United States of America, more than 28.2 million (CT: 275,334) cases have been confirmed and more than 499,00 (CT: 7,562) fatalities have occurred due to the effects of COVID-19, according to the New York Times. Accessed on February 22, 2021
<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/connecticut-coronavirus-cases.html>

Temple COGIC. It is an unfortunate truth that the great commission and discipleship are rarely discussed in the church. They are two biblical themes that are automatically assumed in the church. They are known as biblical ideals, but they are not lived out in the church's culture, its values, or part of its mission in a deeply transformative way. Sunday school is the major discipleship or Christian education program offered by the church.

If this project succeeds in implementing a three-day Bible study at Miracle Temple COGIC, then the outcome will be the engendering of spiritual formation in congregants. It is the hope that this project will motivate congregants to become intentional about personal and corporate discipleship and spiritual formation. This project is slightly different from others because it marries discipleship and spiritual formation, while at the same time understanding spiritual formation as the result of and aim of discipleship. Both are equally needed in the church, both are equally important to the church, and both are largely diminished in the church. Paul would not stop until the Christ was formed in the believers (Gal. 4:19). Church leadership and the congregation must not stop until Christ is formed in every congregant, prospective members, and unbelievers.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

Several theological experts, past and present, have written extensively about Christian education and spiritual formation such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Wesley, J.I. Packer, Eugene Peterson, Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, Bill Hull, Wayne Grudem, Greg Ogden, Anne E. Streaty Wimberly, M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., and Barbara L. Peacock, to name a few. Each of these scholars' writing has shaped this writer's framework on what the Bible teaches about spiritual formation and discipleship.

Christian education exists to transform congregants into faithful bearers of the divine image, develop committed followers of Jesus Christ, strengthen their knowledge in the Christian faith's tenets, and offer believers a space to grow in community graciously. Christian education and spiritual formation are virtually inseparable, as it pertains to the equipping of the Body of Christ to do the work of ministry. The literature on Christian education and spiritual formation, respectively, is too vast to investigate. Yet, this project's literature review aspires to critically engage the most pertinent literature and biblical data on the topics at hand.

The Great Commission

A common theme in almost all literature on Christian education is the resurrected Christ's Great Commission given to his disciples in Matthew's Gospel.³¹ At the heart of Christian education is a profound understanding of the Great Commission, which naturally suggests that believers are to be taught the message of Jesus. As a result, they will be spiritually formed into obedient followers of Christ. In his book *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered*, James Wilhoit states that spiritual formation is the task of the church. The church exists to bring sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the truth and to walk with them as they become mature believers; teaching them to, in turn, make disciples of others. The church was formed to form. This is a major part of the great commission Jesus gave to his disciples and subsequently to the church today.³²

Wilhoit defines spiritual formation as "the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy

³¹ Matt. 28:18-20.

³² James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 15-16.

Spirit.”³³ Wilhoit's process of spiritual formation is understood primarily within the context of Christian education or discipleship, which calls believers into a life-long journey of transformation and learning. Yet, one aspect of the Church's life is not entirely responsible for forming its congregants. All the Church's activities, programs, and endeavors have in mind the spiritual formation and Christian education of the saints. Many scholars contend that Christian education cannot be merely a church program or event, it must be a radical call to becoming and making disciples.

Although Wilhoit links Christian education and spiritual formation in his pursuit of understanding the objective of the Great Commission, George Hillman, Jr. and Sue G. Edwards essentially agrees with Wilhoit and clarifies that the modern Church's task remains the same as the first disciples to “turn converts into obedient students.”³⁴ The authors of *Christian Education: Foundations for the Future* coincides with the writing of Hillman, Edwards, and Wilhoit when they explain that the Great Commission was not given only to the apostles, a particular sect of elites, or those who filled to domestic and foreign missions. Jesus claims complete authority and Lordship and promises to be with his disciples as they preach His gospel to make disciples. Christian education is Great Commission driven because it seeks to fulfill Christ's mission of teaching and disciple-making.³⁵

The African American church has always prioritized the Great Commission's engagement and explication within its varying contexts. Christian education and spiritual formation are two

³³ Ibid., 23.

³⁴ George M. Hillman, and Sue G. Edwards, *Invitation to Educational Ministry: Foundations of Transformative Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregal Publications, 2018), 55.

³⁵ Robert E. Clark et al., *Christian Education: Foundations for the Future* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1991), 20.

facets of Christian theology, which has facilitated how the Black Church carries out its mission globally. Christian education permeates every aspect of the Church's life and witness. Lora-Ellen McKinney demonstrates that excellent Christian education enhances our ability to obey the Great Commission. From a personal standpoint, Christian education encourages one's faith commitment to Christ, promotes sanctification, and creates a desire for corporate worship.³⁶

Anne E. Streaty Wimberly states, "Historically, teaching and learning the Christian story and its meaning for Christian life were central to the worshiping congregation's task of continuing to shape the lives of new believers, who began preparation for it in formal instructional settings."³⁷

McKinney seeks to empower Christian education and teaching ministries within congregations of any African American denomination to provide biblically based programs, resources, and support that meet needs and transform lives. McKinney notes, "In the African American context, Christian education has the capacity to teach us about Christ through meaningful connection with our heritage, to debunk myths about our faith, and to teach values that apply to our lives as Africans in America."³⁸

The Great Commission is heavily teaching driven and makes as its focus the maturity of believers. Michael Estep and Greg Allison make this point clear when they stated, "Perhaps even more evident is the Great Commission of the New Testament (Matt 28:18–20). Jesus' commission to his disciples to continue his disciple-making endeavors explicitly included

³⁶ McKinney, *Christian Education*, 122.

³⁷ Anne Streaty Wimberly, *Nurturing Faith & Hope: Black Worship as a Model for Christian Education* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), xi.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

teaching. Christian education must maintain the focus on making disciples of Christ, which does not simply end with conversion but requires continual instruction for maturing in the faith."³⁹

The Role of the Bible in Christian Education and Spiritual Formation

"A true philosophy of Christian education draws its lifeblood from the Bible,"⁴⁰ says George Hillman. This project cannot overstate the role of the Bible in Christian education. The content of education is derived from the pages of the Bible. Some scholars, pastors, and teachers use the Bible as a secondary source. The Bible is our primary source for Bible teaching and education within the local Church. It is alive and active. It has the power to transform peoples' lives as they learn about God, his actions, and his redemptive plan in the world. Anthony states,

The Bible serves as the primary textbook of Christian Education. Not only does it supply the content of Christian education, but it also provides direction, models of education, methodology, and a rationale for Christian education. It serves as the cornerstone of theological foundations and the prolegomena of the historical foundations for Christian education. As such, Scripture is the primary lens through which the Christian educator perceives and prescribes the character of education in the Church.⁴¹

Wilhoit demonstrates that the Bible shapes believers' lives, their education in the story of Scripture, and inform their spiritual formation. Maintaining a high view of Scripture is vital to the overall goal and process of Christian education. Christian educators and practitioners must be people of the book. Biblical illiteracy continues to be a significant challenge in modern society. Believers must have a working knowledge of the general flow of the Old and New Testaments, understand how the Testaments relate to one another, reveal how the Christian story unfolds and

³⁹ Michael Anthony et al., *A Theology for Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2008), 59.

⁴⁰ Hillman and Edwards, *Invitation to Educational Ministry*, 55.

⁴¹ Anthony et al., *A Theology for Christian Education*, 41.

is fully captured in Jesus, and equip people to read and study the Bible thoughtfully and spiritually.⁴²

Christians hold the Bible as their basis for teaching.⁴³ The universal Church agrees on the sixty-six books as the written revelation of God.⁴⁴ It is God revealing himself, his acts, and eternal-redemptive plan to the world through Jesus. God reveals himself in numerous ways to the authors of Scripture. Talking animals, miracles, preaching, writing, burning bushes, the prophets, and apostles. Of course, Jesus Christ is the fullest and most complete revelation of God the Father.⁴⁵ Some teachers, theologians, and scholars contend that the Bible is not inspired by God the Holy Spirit. They do not believe that the sixty-six books are God's very speech. When this is taken into consideration, the results of Christian education are sharply different.

Mark Maddix, James R. Estep, Edward Hammett, and Anne Streaty Wimberly rightly describe the Bible as God's story. But even more, it is the record of the people of God experiencing the reality of God, living out their stories considering His divine revelation and work. Christian education leads believers into reflection and study of this story so that they are enabled to live out the truths of God in their daily lives. Edward Hammett explains that the Church must major in guiding searching adults to a living encounter with Christ and his word. God's grand story of redemption must be found in our individual stories. We can see the intersection of how God redeems us when we become partakers in his salvation. The Holy

⁴² Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 140.

⁴³ Hillman and Edwards, *Invitation to Educational Ministry*, 57.

⁴⁴ 2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:19-21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 65.

Spirit's work points us to the word of God, and we become energized to study, reflect upon, and be guided by his truth daily.⁴⁶

The idea that the Bible is God's story has great significance for Black people. The culture of people of African descent is heavily dependent upon oral tradition and storytelling. For instance, narrative preaching tends to be very popular and widely utilized among African American preachers. In her article titled *An African American Pathway to Hope: Belief Formation through uses of Narrative in Christian Education*, Anne Streaty Wimberly contends that things like storytelling, songs, and cultural proverbs accentuate hope, shapes beliefs, and bolster Christian education in African American adults and young people.

Historically, Scripture provided stories and texts with which African Americans identified and through which they struggled to hear, interpret, find hope and obey God in the midst of the times and circumstances of their lives. The role of Scripture remains a pivotal one today. Our linkage with Bible stories and texts today is to enable us now, as in the time of our fore-parents, to envision ourselves in an unfolding story that is undertaken on faith and hope and in faithful and hope-filled cooperation with God's direction.⁴⁷

Because the Bible is God's very speech, it has transforming power through the work of the Holy Spirit. This is what makes Christian education so unique, powerful, and life-changing. The curriculum and content of Christian education are centered on the Bible. Evan B. Howard demonstrates that personal transformation occurs through the proclamation of the word. Faith comes by hearing the word of God. The early Church in the Book of Acts reveals the place of

⁴⁶ Edward H. Hammett, "Updating Adult Christian Education in Today's Southern Baptist Convention Church," *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 2 (1993): 13, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0000862747&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁴⁷ Anne Streaty Wimberly, "An African-American Pathway to Hope: Belief Formation through Uses of Narrative in Christian Education," *Religious Education* 91, no. 3 (1996): 327, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001015272&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

God's word in its life and ministry.⁴⁸ Christian formation occurs in a dynamic and life-changing community. In this case, the community of believers becomes the means of grace for each believer's formation. Subsequently, the believers' community is equipped to live out and practice the Christian faith's teachings.⁴⁹

This project is focused on the Christian education ministry within Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ, which is a Black Holiness-Pentecostal church in the inner city of Norwalk, Connecticut. Considering its context, Miracle Temple COGIC requires that this project acknowledge the significance of the more extensive African American church history, sociology, and theological understandings of the Bible. The Black Church has always been devoted to biblical foundations in Christian education, spiritual formation, and how these topics transform local congregations and individuals. In his work *Religious Education in the African American tradition*, Kenneth Hill makes the case that the Bible permeates every aspect of the Black Church's life, ministry, formation, and education endeavors.

Biblical foundations have always been a commitment at the bottom in Black church contexts. The Black Church was born out of a commitment to the Bible's teaching on God's liberating activity in the world. The Bible is regarded as holy, sacred, and the center of religious belief and practice. The Bible is the Holy Spirit's tool to shape the Church's teaching, preaching, worship, music, membership systems for retention, communion, fellowship, and discipleship. Everything is saturated with the word of God.⁵⁰ In her book *Basics of Christian Education*,

⁴⁸ See Acts 4:31; 6:2, 7; 8:14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5, 7, 46; 15:7; 17:13; 18:11; 20:32.

⁴⁹ Evan B. Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape Our Souls* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 101-02.

⁵⁰ Kenneth H. Hill, *Religious Education in the African American Tradition: A Comprehensive Introduction* (Saint Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2012), 27-28.

Karen Tye says, "Teaching the Bible, learning to apply the Bible to life, providing nurture and support for people's spiritual journeys, and transmitting the faith heritage to the next generations are worthy purposes for our Christian education."⁵¹ Biblical teaching and instruction strengthen the congregation and aids in its Christlike formation.

Discipleship and Christian Education within the Local Church

Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley stated, "The Church of Jesus Christ needs to have specific plans in place to help everyone grow and develop to reach their full potential in Christ."⁵² Pamela Mitchell Legg notes, "For most of our churches, Sunday School continues to be the dominant form and location for Christian Education. Sunday School classes for children, youth, and adults are still listed as key components in Christian Education by most churches."⁵³ It has been noted that "Christian education is the church's response to the need for a growing, vibrant, practical faith."⁵⁴ If Sunday school classes are considered the dominant form of educating adults and children, then this method must be updated and revised in order to pass on the beliefs, values, and confessions of faith, which the Black Church has always focused on.⁵⁵

Christian education, which has historically taken Sunday school's title within the Church of God in Christ, has always been a vital part of believers' growth and development. Kenneth Hill efficiently summarizes the history of the Sunday school department when he says,

In the Church of God in Christ, the Sunday school program was started in Lexington, Mississippi, in 1908. In 1924, Bishop Mason appointed Elder F.C. Christmas

⁵¹ Karen Tye, *Basics of Christian Education* (Saint Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 22.

⁵² Dave Earley, and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 38.

⁵³ Pamela Mitchell Legg, "The Work of Christian Education in the Seminary and the Church: Then (1812) and Now (2012)," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 66, no. 4 (2012): 430.

⁵⁴ Maddix and Estep, *Practicing Christian Education*, 10.

⁵⁵ Hill, *Religious Education*, 13.

as National Superintendent of the Sunday school program. In 1951, the denomination's first National Sunday School Convention convened in Kansas City, Missouri. In 1968, under the direction of Roy Winbush, the Publishing House in Memphis, Tennessee, was established.⁵⁶

Sunday school has long been considered the primary form of discipleship and Christian education within local churches. Sunday school continues to be a communal space for formation and education. Historically, Sunday school emerged as a solution to illiteracy among the oppressed and disadvantaged. Nam Soon Song wrote, "Sunday School provided a moral education that involved teaching Scriptures concerning morality. It taught religious practice. Education and religion were not separated but worked as one."⁵⁷ Local churches are strengthened when parishioners understand rightly the Christian faith, clear in their commitment to live for Christ, dedicated to fulfilling the Great Commission, and are equally proud of their heritage as Black Christians.⁵⁸

Spiritual Formation

Wilhoit defines spiritual formation as the "intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit."⁵⁹ Within the context of African American formation, Hill defines spiritual formation similarly to Wilhoit. Hill refers to spiritual formation as conformation to Christ or transformation. His definition is, "Being conformed to Christ implies such transformation.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁷ Nam Soon Song, "Sunday School Revisited: An Alternative to Christian Education of the Church Today?," *Religious Education* 108, no. 2 (2013): 185, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001974537&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁵⁸ McKinney, *Christian Education*, 7-8.

⁵⁹ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation*, 23.

Transformation is a changing of persons. For Blacks, transformation is the slow and painful process by which they have experienced the liberation of mind, body, and soul.”⁶⁰ As was noted earlier, Christian education and spiritual formation go hand in hand. Effective spiritual formation is the desired result of vibrant Christian education and teaching ministry.

African American Christian identity is a matter of spiritual formation, of becoming what we sing, the story we tell. We become the living texts of Christianity. Becoming Black and Christian involves a change; a spiritual and cultural conversion takes place in the believer. The Black Church provides an organized community that aids in the spiritual/cultural development of those who are in the Church. The Church has fostered and nourished the self-concept of African Americans.⁶¹

Gary A. Parrett and Steve Kang note, “The mature body is stable, truthful, loving, laboring and united (see Eph 4:14-16). It grows 'up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”⁶² “We serve people through the education ministry of the church, which is committed to the transformation of individuals to the likeness of Christ— Christian formation.”⁶³ Biblical instruction aims to transform both believers and the wider believing community into the image of Christ. The goal of Christian education is the maturity of individuals and the community. Therefore, Christian education and spiritual formation are communal enterprises.

The teaching ministry is vitally important to the formation of God’s people. Our mission is clear: To see Christ formed in every believer.⁶⁴ Believers come alongside one another, provoking one another toward good works, humbly and gently correcting sinful patterns, and

⁶⁰ Hill, *Religious Education*, 13.

⁶¹ Ibid., 45.

⁶² Gary A. Parrett, and S. Steve Kang, *Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 41.

⁶³ Maddix and Estep, *Practicing Christian Education*, 51.

⁶⁴ See Gal. 4:19.

ardently becoming more like Jesus Christ.⁶⁵ A robust teaching ministry is the backbone of all that a Church is, seeks to be, and accomplishes in the world for Christ.⁶⁶ Spiritual formation is intricately related to Christian education. Christian education (teaching ministry) exists to shape, inform, and cultivate spiritually formed men and women to the glory of God. The literature on Christian education and spiritual formation is extensive. Therefore, it proves to be a useful area of research.

Theological Foundations

Old Testament Foundations for Discipleship and Spiritual Formation

The Hebrew root term *לָמַד* (*lāmad*) means to learn; to teach; to be instructed in, be skillful. Israel is about to enter the promised land; the land that was promised to their forefather Abraham. Jehovah gives Moses the law and commands that the people of Israel abide by and obey the statutes and rules found therein. Paul, the Apostle, states that the law was given as a schoolmaster to guide people toward Christ (Gal. 3:24). The Hebrew word *לָמַד* (*lāmad*) is used several times throughout the OT to convey the significance of teaching in the life of Israel. This teaching would form the collective reality of God's people. The Mosaic law would serve as the source of teaching and instruction. Before Israel could occupy the land that was promised to them, they had to subscribe to God's law whole heartedly (Deut. 4:1).

Parents were instructed to teach their children to learn and obey the law of God. This teaching was priority and was to always occur to produce generations of holy people toward God (Deut. 6:7; 11:19). Biblical instruction that motivated obedience was to shape the very life and practice of God's people, even their children. The goal of this instruction was to form a

⁶⁵ Hammett, "Updating Adult Christian Education," 149-150.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 143.

“kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6); a people that were morally different from the surrounding peoples and nations of the world.⁶⁷

Loving God with one’s entire being would be closely related to following God’s law. Deuteronomy 6:4-5 has been known as the Shema in the Jewish tradition. Tony Evans noted: “Jesus would later call this ‘the greatest and most important command’ (Matt. 22:37-39).”⁶⁸ The Shema distills the very essence of God’s covenant with Israel. To love God and others as you love yourself. True love for God would extend to loving others. Teaching and learning God’s law, therefore, is an act of love. Peter C. Craigie comments, “The all-encompassing love for God was to find his expression in a willing and joyful obedience of the commandments of God...”⁶⁹ Obedience to God’s teaching was not to become a matter of legalism but rather a response of love based upon an understanding of God’s precepts and statutes.

God’s people were to concentrate on learning His law and directly commanded not learn the practices of the pagan nations around them (Deut. 18:9; 20:18). The people were instructed to put away or to get rid of anything that undermined complete loyalty to God. The first commandment was to have no other gods before Him (Ex. 20:3). God was intentionally forming His people into His image of holiness by instructing them to refrain from acting and conforming to the pagan nations surrounding them.

Moses, the spiritual leader of God’s people, was given the responsibility of teaching the Israelites the law of God (Deut. 6:1). Before Israel could possess the land that God promised

⁶⁷ God’s desire for Israel to be formed into a holy people is an OT ideal that is continued in the NT. See Ex. 19:5-6; 23:22; Deut. 4:20; 7:6; 14:2; Is. 43:20-21; 61:6; Mal. 3:17; 1 Pet. 2:9.

⁶⁸ Tony Evans, *The Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2019).

⁶⁹ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 17.

them, they would have to follow the true way of life: the way of obedience to God's commandments. Spiritual formation for the Israelites involved obedience to God's law. Certainly, this was the way of a disciple or pupil. In a sense, the law would serve as the formative tool of God to bring blessing and prosperity to his people. For Israel, formation and prosperity in God would not be based on mere knowledge; rather, it would be about doing and being. Nearing toward his death, Moses commissioned Joshua with the task of leading Israel into the promised land, but he reiterated the law of God saying that they must be careful to obey all of God's word (Deut. 31:10-13). The posture of obedience runs through the OT powerfully.

Teaching is a theme within the Hymn book of Israel. A constant request was to be taught and led by the ways of God. The psalmist prayed that God would teach Him to know His ways (Ps. 25:4). The psalmist wanted to be led in the ways of truth. For the ways of truth is the law of God, and God was the source of salvation (Ps. 25:5). The writer was taught the ways of God from his youth and his life was given to proclaiming Jehovah's wonderful deeds (Ps. 71:17). Teaching is the way of discipline. Being a learner is to be disciplined by one's master. Hence, the psalmist wrote, "Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O Lord, and whom you teach out of your law" (Ps. 94:12). Psalm 119 is dedicated to the love and blessing of God's law. The psalmist regards the law of God as his most trusted companion. Repeatedly the author asks God: "teach me your statutes" (Ps. 119:12, 26, 64, 68, 108, 124, 135). The psalmist understood what we call *lectio divina* (divine reading) the Bible. Spiritual formation and discipleship are a combination of both divine actions toward living for and with God.

Teaching and learning the ways of God were an important theme within the prophetic books of the OT. The prophets were teachers of God's counsel. God raised up prophetic witnesses to speak into the sinful disposition of His people. The people of Israel fell away from

God at various times, sought after godlessness, and did what was right in their own eyes. The major prophet Isaiah wrote that discipleship toward God was compatible with works of justice, righteousness, and concern for the oppressed and downtrodden (Is. 1:17). Performing just deeds was related to learning to do good and doing good was correcting societal injustices toward the least of these. God taught Jerusalem and Judah persistently, but they turned their back to Him and did not listen and receive His instruction (Jer. 32:33). Yet, performing good deeds was not the full measure of spiritual formation and discipleship; rather, they were the byproduct of them.

The OT people of God were spiritually formed through the teaching and reception of God's law. However, the OT promise of inner spiritual transformation, which would be fulfilled through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and sealed by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, is found in Ezekiel 36:26-27. Through the prophet, God promises the regeneration of the human heart through spiritual formation. Ezekiel says, "And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

New Testament Foundations for Discipleship and Spiritual Formation

Christians need the whole Bible for spiritual formation and discipleship. Kevin Vanhoozer notes, "What the Triune God does in, with, and through the Bible is cultivate mature disciples who come to resemble Jesus Christ."⁷⁰ The NT writers understood the OT to be inspired (GK *theopneustos*) by God and "*useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and training for righteousness*" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The NT writers did not omit the writings of the OT from

⁷⁰ Kevin Vanhoozer, "Putting on Christ: Spiritual Formation and the Drama of Discipleship," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 8, no. 2 (2015): 151.

their formation efforts in Jesus Christ. The discipleship crisis which now exists in Christianity and in most congregations is, to a large extent, due to a “reduced canon – reduced to the New Testament, perhaps with the addition of certain portions of the OT,”⁷¹ says Richard E. Averbach.

The NT corpus relies heavily on the OT. The NT writers and their respective audiences were saturated with the teachings of the OT. Spiritual formation and discipleship are only possible when the whole Bible’s teachings on the subjects are consulted. Willard proclaims concerning the NT that, “The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ.”⁷² The NT introduces its reader to Jesus Christ, the long-awaited and promised Messiah, who comes preaching a bold invitation to living life in the kingdom of God (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:14; Luke 8:1; see also Acts 20:25; 28:31).

Jesus’ preaching was a call to repentance (Gk *metanoēō*) meaning a change of one’s mind. Jesus was regarded as a revolutionist. His revolution extended beyond the political and economic strictures of His day. Dallas Willard and Don Simpson stated that, “the revolution of Jesus is first and always a revolution of the human heart.”⁷³ This revolution of the human heart took shape by “changing people from the inside through ongoing personal relationship with God and others. It is a revolution that changes people’s ideas, beliefs, feelings, and habits of choice, as well as their bodily tendencies and social relations.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Alan Andrews ed, *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 279.

⁷² Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2006), 3.

⁷³ Dallas Willard, and Don Simpson, *Revolution of Character: Discovering Christ’s Pattern for Spiritual Transformation* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), 13.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

To perpetuate this revolution of the human heart, Jesus commissioned twelve disciples and gave them authority to act in His behalf and to preach the good news of His kingdom (Matt. 10:1-4; Mark 3:14-19). The Greek word *mathētēs* is translated in modern Bible versions as disciple. The word is used 261 times primarily in the four gospels and the Book of Acts. Other variations of the term are used elsewhere such as *mathēteuō* (Matt. 27:57), *symmathētēs* (John 11:16), *ekeinos* (John 13:25), and *mathētria* (Acts 9:36). Disciples are persons who have submitted themselves to the way of life and teachings of another. This submission is not passive, however. The disciple became an active participant in learning from their teacher. They took the posture of an apprentice, student, or pupil.

An example of this active discipleship is illustrated in Luke 10:38-42, where Mary, the sister of Martha, sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to His teaching. Martha, on the other hand, was distracted by serving duties, and asked Jesus to tell her sister Mary to help. The one thing that is necessary, the good portion is the “privilege of sitting at Jesus’ feet as a faithful disciple.”⁷⁵ Faithful disciples sit at the feet of Jesus to be molded into something other worldly. They are citizens of the heavenly kingdom, living life in and under the kingdom of God’s reign and sovereignty.

Jesus called his twelve disciples away from their normal walks of life and careers so that they would be His followers (Mark 1:17-20). Following Jesus meant complete abandonment of the world and its goods. Peter said that he and the other disciples left everything to follow Jesus (Mark 10:28). But Jesus explained that those who left family, land, and possessions, for His sake

⁷⁵ Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 416.

and for the gospel, would receive a hundredfold in this life and in the age to come eternal life (vv. 29-30).

Jesus took an active role in teaching His disciples. He taught them by modeling what it meant to be a person living in and under the authority of the kingdom of God. The Sermon on the Mount, spoken by Jesus is one of three major discourses recorded in Matthew 5:3-7:27, and paralleled with the Sermon on the Plain recorded in Luke 6:20-49, provides an abbreviated, yet comprehensive, description of how a citizen of God's kingdom should live. Many have postulated that Jesus' mountainside sermon was identical to Moses on Mt. Sinai to receive the ten commandments and was therefore a new Moses. Craig L. Blomberg comments, "Jesus is not proclaiming a new law but announcing what he believes is the legitimate interpretation of God's will as contained in the already-existing Torah."⁷⁶

What has been traditionally known as the Beatitudes are a series of divine pronouncements upon Christ's disciples who are formed and being formed in the kingdom (Matt. 5:2-12). Christ's disciples are to be salt and light in the world (Matt. 5:13-16). For Christians to be salt means to be a preservative to arrest corruption and prevent moral decay in the world; and to be light is to illuminate the path to God's truth and His way, making God's glory and presence manifestly visible in the world by good works, which are motivated by love for God and others. Spiritual formation and discipleship within God's kingdom have significant implications on how the believer responds to anger (vv. 21-26); lust (vv. 27-30); divorce (vv. 31-32); making vows (vv.33-37); retaliating against one's enemies (vv. 38-48); giving to the needy (Matt. 6:1-4); prayer (vv. 5-15); fasting (vv. 16-18); and handling anxiety (vv. 25-34).

⁷⁶ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew* The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 97.

After the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, He appeared to His disciples by many proofs, for forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). His sacrificial task has come to its culmination. He promised His disciples that their spiritual formation would come full circle when the Holy Spirit would come upon them, and they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). The OT promises of God's Spirit dwelling within believers was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Averbach says, "From a biblical point of view, however, spiritual formation focuses our attention on the dynamics of how the Holy Spirit works in us, among us, and through us."⁷⁷ The Book of Acts is essentially a discourse in how the Holy Spirit worked in, among, and through the early Christians.

Jesus promised His disciples that He (and God the Father) would send the Holy Spirit to dwell in them and teach them all things He said (John 14:15-26). The Holy Spirit completely transformed the early Christians. The revolution of heart transformation is proliferated as the church spreads through the known world. Acts 2:42-47 serves as a portrait of what the church became once the power of God transformed hearts. Acts 9:1-30 narrates the spiritual transformation of Saul, who was a staunch Jewish Pharisee and persecutor of Christians (Acts 8:3; 23:6; 2 Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:5-7). The conversion of Saul, who later is called Paul, is a turning point in Acts, and subsequently Christian history. Saul encounters Jesus on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians. Paul becomes a bold witness for Christ and is given an evangelistic and apostolic ministry, beyond the house of Israel, to the Gentiles (Acts 26:23; Rom. 15:16; Gal. 2:9).

⁷⁷ Richard E. Averbach, "Spirit, Community, and Mission: A Biblical Theology for Spiritual Formation," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 1, no. 1 (2008): 28.

The Pauline corpus is filled with references to the interrelatedness of spiritual formation and discipleship. N.T. Wright stated, “The thirteen letters attributed to Paul make up twenty-four per cent of the New Testament canon and constitute a theological center to the apostolic testimony of Jesus.”⁷⁸ Paul’s letters are integral in forming our conceptualization of Christian theology, and especially the discussion on sanctification. Paul explains to the Romans that all people, “Jews and Gentiles alike, are under sin” (Rom. 3:9). Douglas Moo comments, “To be ‘under sin’ means not only ‘to be a sinner’; it means to be a helpless slave to the power of sin.”⁷⁹ One cannot truly comprehend the extent of being and becoming sanctified without grasping the magnitude of Christ’s power over sin. As Charles H. Spurgeon once said in one of his sermons: “sin is exceedingly sinful.”⁸⁰

Sanctification is therefore the ongoing transformation of the human heart’s love for sin to a growing love for holiness. Spiritual formation is the human heart’s response to God’s love; obedience from the heart, slaves of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). And the result of this inner transformation is the bearing of fruit which leads to righteousness and true holiness (Rom. 6:22). The Christian has a “new mode or quality of life which results from the impartation of Christ’s risen power,”⁸¹ says, F.F. Bruce. The Christians life is no longer characterized or patterned by gossip, slander, hatred, insolence, boasting, disobedience, faithlessness, envy, covetousness, murder, deceit, and sexual immorality (Rom. 1:28-32). This is Christian spiritual formation.

⁷⁸ N.T. Wright, and Michael F. Bird, *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic 2019), 337.

⁷⁹ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, vol. 4, *The New Bible Commentary* ed. D.A. Carson et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1127.

⁸⁰ Charles H. Spurgeon, "Sin's True Quality," *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons* 59 (1913): 473.

⁸¹ F.F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary* vol. 6, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 142.

Rather, the Christian has “*the mind of Christ*” (1 Cor. 2:16). In its basic meaning, spiritual formation is what Paul calls: “Putting off” and “Putting on” (Eph. 5:24; Col. 3:9). This language of putting off and putting runs through the Pauline corpus. Christians are imitators of God (Eph. 5:1). Mature Christian disciples are those who have learned Christ (Eph. 4:20) by taking his yoke upon themselves and learning from Him (Matt. 11:29), “*so that you might follow in his steps*” (1 Pet. 2:21). To be an imitator of God is to be a disciple – an apprentice who is being conformed into the image of his master teacher (2 Cor. 3:18). Paul Barnett notes, “the gospel of Christ not only illuminates our darkened lives; equally remarkably, it transforms them little by little so that they increasingly resemble the moral and spiritual character of the Lord Jesus.”⁸²

Progressive Sanctification as Spiritual Formation

Sanctification remains a fundamental component in the spiritual development of the church, both corporately and individually. The concept of sanctification is based on the events laid out in the creation account of the Old Testament (Gen 1:26-3:24). The Triune God created humanity in His image and after His likeness. Humankind had no need for sanctification, in principle, because they enjoyed complete fellowship with God until the fall of Genesis 3. Humanity’s fall into sin and disobedience resulted in the distortion and defect of the divine image in humanity.⁸³ Thus, Rolland McCune says in his systematic theology: “Sanctification is

⁸² Paul W. Barnett, *The Message of 2 Corinthians: Power in Weakness, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 76.

⁸³ Some Bible scholars contend that the fall completely erased the divine image in humankind, but this project does not espouse this view and regards it as a major biblical misstep.

the incremental restoration of that image.”⁸⁴ Hence, Paul, the Apostle, writes that believers have been “predestined to be conformed into the image of God’s Son” (Rom. 8:29).

The concept of God’s people being “holy” or “sanctified” is directly associated with the Triune God: “Be ye holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2; See also 1 Pet. 1:15-16). The believers’ holiness is authenticated in the holiness of God. God demands that his people reflect his holy character (Lev. 20:7-8). In the OT, God set Israel apart from other nations, gave them his law to demonstrate His perfect character, and set forth his expectation of them (Ex. 19:5-6; Lev. 11:44-45). Paul’s New Testament (NT) teaching on practical holiness is grounded in the OT (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1). Paul tells the Corinthians that because their position and status was in Jesus Christ, they became the recipients of who he is: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

Both the Old and New Testament’s use a variety of terms to refer to those who follow the Lord God. The NT frequently addresses God’s people as “saints” (Gk. *Hagios*). This term is often used in the Epistles of the apostle Paul. The term reveals that God’s people, especially in relation to their being set apart from the world, are called upon to lead lives that are worthy of their calling.⁸⁵ The holiness of God empowers believers to walk in loving obedience to God. The saints are called to live a life pleasing to God. Commentator D. Michael Martin writes, “A positive response to God’s calling requires a commitment to live in a manner consistent with the

⁸⁴ Rolland D. McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things*, vol. 3 (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 122.

⁸⁵ See also Rom. 16:2; Eph. 4:1-3; 5:3-4; 2 Pet. 3:11; Rev. 13:10; 14:12.

character and commands of God. The reality of such a commitment is seen in a sanctified life, a life obedient to the commands of God and empowered by the Spirit of God.”⁸⁶

An accurate understanding of sanctification assumes that one has rightly grasped the meaning and implications of salvific doctrines such as regeneration, adoption, justification, and redemption. The application of redemption, in the life of the believer, is a progressive work that continues throughout their earthly lives.⁸⁷ The NT encourages believers to actively pursue this progressive work of God in their lives. For sanctification is the will of God for the people of God (1 Thess. 4:3). Sanctification is a process that has been initiated at conversion; hence, the apostle Paul was able to refer to the church at Corinth as “*those sanctified in Christ Jesus*” (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11). The Ephesian elders were commended to God who was able to give them an “*inheritance among all those who are sanctified*” (Acts 20:32). “*Those who are sanctified have one source*” (Heb. 2:11). Jesus perfectly offered himself once “*for all time those who are being sanctified*” (Heb. 10:14).

Spiritual formation begins when the believer is declared sanctified or holy by God (justification). The apostle Paul sets forth the language of spiritual formation when he says, “*my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!*” (Gal. 4:19). Paul’s ministry of teaching and exhortation was aimed at seeing the Galatians grow up into Christlikeness in every way. Donald Campbell expounds on the expression ‘until Christ is formed in you’ when he writes, “Paul longed for these believers to be transformed into (*morphōthē*, lit., ‘take on the form of’; cf. *morphē* in Phil. 2:6–7) the image of Christ. This expression describes the Christian life as a kind of reincarnation of Christ in a believer’s life.

⁸⁶ D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 33, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 131.

⁸⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 926.

This is in fact God’s ideal and purpose—for Christ to live His life in and then through each believer (cf. Gal. 2:20).”⁸⁸

Spiritual formation or progressive sanctification is a biblical reality. The task of helping congregants to grow up into Christ must be taken seriously considering the biblical evidence. If Christianity will experience Christlike growth, then it must return to a biblical definition of sanctification. Sanctification’s fundamental meaning is to be set apart to God. In His high priestly prayer recorded in John’s Gospel, Jesus prayed that his followers would be sanctified in the truth because His word is truth (John 17:17). Paul commanded the Roman Christians, who once presented their members to impurity, to now present their members to righteousness leading to sanctification (Rom 6:19). Now that these Roman believers had been set free from sin, they were now slaves of God, bearing fruit leading to sanctification and eternal life (Rom 6:22).

Christians were “*predestined, according to the foreknowledge of God, to be conformed into the image of His Son*” (Rom 8:29). Conformity to the system of the world’s thinking is inimical to spiritual formation and maturity. Paul makes this point clear when he tells the Romans: “*Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect*” (Rom 12:2). Abiding in the presence of God results in the continued transformation “*into the same image from one degree of glory to another*” (2 Cor 3:18). Paul commended the Thessalonian believers for their faithful living toward God but showed deep concern for their continued growth in sanctification. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul highlighted three specific areas. First, God’s will is that they avoid sexual sin and learn to control their bodies in a way that is

⁸⁸ Donald K. Campbell, *Galatians* ed. J.F Walvoord and R.B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 603.

holy and honorable (4:3-8). Second, instead of lust, the believers should make love the priority among them (4:9-10). Third, he challenged them to live productive lives that demonstrated trust in God (4:11-12).⁸⁹

Discipleship as a Process Toward Spiritual Formation

Discipleship is the task of training believers to become mature followers of Christ and making others into disciples. Like sanctification, discipleship is rooted into the soil of God's calling. In the OT, the ideal of discipleship is seen in the covenant between God and Israel. God's calling of Israel was directed to the entire offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God alone held preeminence among his people. God called his people to love and learn of him. The OT theme of God with his people was culminated in Jesus Christ, who would be called "Immanuel," which means 'God with us' (Matt. 1:23). In Jesus, God has come to his people to fulfill the deepest meaning of covenant.

In the NT, mostly in the Gospels and Acts, the term disciple (GK. *Mathētēs*) is used more than 20 times to convey the idea of someone who takes up knowledge or beliefs from a teacher (pupil). A disciple is simply a person who takes the disposition of a student or learner. As has been shown, learning was not only an NT ideal. Several OT references show that learning was a community activity that involved both adults and youth.⁹⁰ The call to being a disciple is essentially a call to follow Jesus and learn of him: "*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*" (Matt. 11:29).

⁸⁹ J. Daniel Hays, and J. Scott Duvall, *The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 872.

⁹⁰ See Deut. 4:10; 6:7; 11:19; 32:46; Is. 54:13; Prov. 22:6

To be a disciple is to be called by Jesus to follow him. Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, James, and his brother John, who were all fishermen, were called by Jesus to follow him. They all dropped their nets and followed him with the promise that Jesus would make them into fishers of men. (Matt. 4:18-22). John records the calling of Phillip and Nathanael and shows that they, too, were instructed to follow Jesus (John 1:43-51). Matthew, the tax collector, was called and told to follow Jesus (Matt. 9:9).

To be a disciple is to be made into something other than what they are. When Jesus told his disciples to follow him, he always said, “follow me and I will make you...” Jesus would make them into fishers of men, apostles, and teachers of the gospel. However, he could see them as someone other than what they were. Jesus’s vision for his disciples was that they would become like Himself. The idea of discipleship, as being transformed by a relationship with God through Christ, is a process of spiritual formation.⁹¹ Change occurs as believers engage in collective learning, mission, worship, and spiritual disciplines (the means of grace).

The importance of discipleship in the church cannot be stated enough. An essential aspect of the NT church was making and becoming disciples: “*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth*” (Acts 1:8). As it has been said, “Discipleship apart from Jesus is non-transformational.”⁹² Jesus is the only teacher who can bring lasting and transformative change into the lives of those who follow him. At present, Miracle Temple COGIC is experiencing a discipleship deficiency. The apostle Paul wrote to the church at

⁹¹ Roger L. Walton, *Disciples Together: Discipleship, Formation, and Small Groups* (Norwich, NR: SMC Press, 2014), 8.

⁹² Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Phillip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 9.

Colossae a stirring statement about the aim of his ministry: *“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me”* (Col. 1:28-29)

Paul’s desire to “present everyone mature in Christ” is the call to radical disciple-making. If the church is deficient in discipleship, then it is deficient in its fundamental reason for existence.⁹³ Often, transformation is absent from the church because biblical discipleship is neglected. Most times, biblical discipleship is neglected because of the high cost of following Jesus. The Gospel’s demonstrate several times that many people walked away from the call to follow Jesus because the cost was to give up the very things they idolized (Matt. 19:16-26). Biblical discipleship is not the mere acquisition of knowledge. The Christian education ministry at MTCOGIC cannot become a space that seeks to fill minds with knowledge alone. The aim is to, like Paul, present everyone mature in Christ. Knowledge of Jesus should lead to transformation.

Theoretical Foundations

So much has been written on the topics of discipleship and spiritual formation, and yet it seems that it is not enough. As our culture plunges deeper into secularism and the wide acceptance of postmodern philosophies of life, the need for authentic Christian discipleship and spiritual formation become more apparent. A predominantly African American church like Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ is faced with a special set of contextual challenges that are directly related to how it discipled its congregants toward spiritual formation. Spiritual formation and discipleship are both of broad and current interest. The numerous problems that

⁹³ Ibid., 11.

plague the church today can only be resolved if we return to the vital core of biblical instruction in Christian experience and spiritual vitality.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Christian spirituality classic *The Cost of Discipleship* continues to be a relevant work in contemporary church circles. Bonhoeffer was convinced that a new and fresh way of being the church had to come about to counter the corroding lure of popular ideologies that appealed to the lower nature of humanity. Bonhoeffer argued that the church must pursue costly grace, which was true discipleship, sanctification, and obedience toward God. He writes, "Cheap grace is the mortal enemy of our church. Our struggle today is for costly grace."⁹⁴ Bonhoeffer offers a concise definition of what cheap grace is when he says, "Cheap grace is preaching forgiveness without repentance; it is baptism without the discipline of community; it is the Lord's Supper without confession of sin; it is absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ."⁹⁵

This research is established on the principle that the church needs true discipleship fueled by the grace of Jesus Christ, targeted at authentic transformation by the Holy Spirit, and grounded in Christian community. In his classic book *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, Richard Lovelace formulates a general theory of individual and corporate spiritual health through study of Catholic and Protestant reformation and renewal in the Christian church. In chapter 7, Lovelace discusses what he calls the sanctification gap. First, Lovelace states that modern Protestant evangelicalism (including Pentecostalism) must accept that there is a sanctification gap. To resolve the problem, we must restudy the Bible and forge the late twentieth century

⁹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* ed. Martin Kuske, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss, vol. 4 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 43.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

biblical models of the spiritual life together. And finally, modern Evangelicals must reclaim the explosive power of spiritual renewal.⁹⁶

Bonhoeffer's discipleship ideology along with Lovelace's understanding of spiritual renewal can be useful in framing the church's understanding of transforming the Christian education ministry at Miracle Temple COGIC. Perhaps the sanctification gap exists in most modern church contexts because the doctrines of the Bible have been cheapened and regarded as myths and oppressive teachings. John Wesley's *Christian Perfection* is another theological system that exists to bridge the sanctification gap and bring believers into committed discipleship. Wesley believed that Christians should be aflame with the love of God. This love would express itself as obedience in practical Christian living.

Bill Hull provides a comprehensive guide to discipleship. Much of what Hull writes about discipleship will be used in this project. The church as a disciplined community is at the heart of Hull's writing. "Living in unity and love with our brothers and sisters in Christ might seem to be an obvious element in basic discipleship," writes Hull, "it's at this very point that many disciples falter."⁹⁷ Our discipleship is judged according to how we love others within the community of faith. Alton Garrison states, "the twenty-first century church will be challenged to demonstrate love in an increasingly hateful and hurtful world. Our visible love for each other and the world will identify us as the church of Jesus Christ."⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* Expanded ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979), 229-38.

⁹⁷ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), chap. 3 para. 13.

⁹⁸ Alton Garrison, *The 360 Disciple: Discipleship Going Full Circle* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2009), 118.

Spiritual formation is the byproduct of effective, Christ-honoring discipleship. The aim of this research is to see the congregants at Miracle Temple COGIC motivated and encouraged to follow the plan of God for their lives – becoming more like Jesus Christ. This researcher believes that becoming like Christ should be the goal of each individual believer, which has long lasting impact on the corporate life of the church. This research will incorporate the insights of various theories and ideologies on discipleship and spiritual formation to positively spur congregants on to faithfully following Jesus and becoming like him.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Spiritual maturity does not happen by accident. Growth in Christ requires intentionality. The church cannot afford to hold an indifferent or apathetic attitude regarding its discipleship process. The Bible admonishes the church to assimilate both new and mature believers into further Christlike development. The Christian education ministry at Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ is primarily responsible for the biblical formation of its congregants. This chapter will expound upon the selected intervention design and how this researcher plans to organize its communal activity.

Intervention Design

The purpose of this research intervention is to address the lack of intentional spiritual formation within the congregation's Christian education ministry. To begin we will first examine the objectives or aims of this project's intervention and show how the intervention relates to the problem/purpose statements and the theological foundations of this thesis. This researcher hopes to affect congregational change through the specific plans of action laid out in this chapter. Figure 1.1 lists the objectives that shape this intervention's direction and purpose (in no specific order):

Intervention Objectives	
1.	To assess the state of the congregation's discipleship process for maturity in Christlikeness.
2.	To develop congregational awareness around personal discipleship and spiritual formation.
3.	To foster spiritual formation within congregants.
4.	To promote honest and transformative dialogue among congregants.
5.	To encourage congregational revitalization.
6.	To implement a three-Day spiritual formation Bible study.
7.	To assist intervention participants in creating their own spiritual formation plan.

Figure 1.1 Intervention Objectives

It must first be said that the congregation needs change. The thing is that change is so subjective and defining what “change” means can be a hard task. Everyone has varying definitions of change, which is what makes it so subjective and hard to define. The theological foundations section of this thesis should have helped to create a working definition of what congregational change looks like. Spiritual formation is itself the change MTCOGIC needs. The problem is, however, that the congregation has not intentionally considered what spiritual formation is or how it functions within the life of the church. According to the theological foundations of this project, spiritual formation is another way of saying sanctification (that is, progressive sanctification). Sanctification is the process of conforming the human being's interior or non-material world from the “old self” in order to reflect the “new self” of Jesus Christ. To put on the new self in Christ, which is the seeking of things above, is the calling and challenge of the church (Col. 3:1).

This research seeks to foster transformation within the congregation by calling the people of God toward spiritual formation. The congregation must recognize that spiritual renewal and transformation is possible. Change is a community enterprise. To realize deep transformative renewal within the congregation's discipleship program, everyone must be committed to spiritual formation intentionality. This research hopes to enable new and transformative modes of action.

The objectives are a visible feature of what this research desires to implement. Future congregational change is possible as congregants trust God. Congregants sense the need for and have verbally expressed their desire for change. The change congregants are searching for, even if they are unable to fully articulate it, is that of spiritual formation within the entire congregation. The aims and objectives of this research is articulated as follows.

This research hopes to assess the state of the congregation's discipleship process for maturity in Christlikeness. This researcher asserts that there is no definitive process for helping congregants to grow in Christlikeness. Willard stated, "I know of no denomination or local congregation that has a concrete plan and practice for teaching people to do 'all things whatsoever I have commanded you.'"⁹⁹ Willard's statement is true specifically at MTCOGIC. Therefore, this research hopes to engage congregants to discover what that process may have looked like in the past. It may be assumed that the congregation had a process for discipling believers in the past, and over time, like with most things in the quickly changing landscape of church life, diminished. Intentional processes for discipleship and spiritual formation often diminish either because congregations, along with ministry leaders, have not recovered, discovered, or uncovered the need for spiritually forming disciples of Jesus Christ.

The collective imagination of the congregation will be helpful in identifying past processes and reimagining what spiritual formation intentionality can look like toward the congregation's future. To establish an intentional process for forming congregants in Christlikeness, we must begin with a clear conceptualization of its current state. This pastor-student has his own conceptualizations regarding the congregation's state of discipleship and has

⁹⁹ Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation in Christ: A Perspective on What It Is and How It Might Be Done," accessed February 23, 2022, <https://dwillard.org/articles/spiritual-formation-in-christa-perspective-on-what-it-is-and-how-it-might-be-done#1A>.

put it forth through this project's problem statement: The Christian education ministry (discipleship program) at MTCOGIC is not intentionally facilitating spiritual formation within the congregants. Therefore, the evaluation of the congregation's state of discipleship processes will take the form of possibly identifying the reasons this is the reality, understand how congregants see the problem, and create the groundwork for an intentional process and strategy for the church's present/future.

This research hopes to develop congregational awareness around personal discipleship and spiritual formation. Oftentimes the congregation is distracted by secondary matters, and it forgets the necessity of personal discipleship and spiritual formation. The congregation can be a viable representation of what pursuing discipleship and spiritual formation looks like. The congregation can be a model for helping to mature believers into Christlikeness. However, congregants must become aware of the need for, absence of, and the rediscovery of intentionally forming disciples who embody the life of Jesus Christ. This intervention will attempt to bring spiritual formation awareness to the congregation and to initiate discussions among congregants.

This research is not attempting to completely resolve the problem related to this research. That will take some time. But if this research can get congregants conversing about spiritual formation and discipleship, with a specific concern for individual and corporate Christlikeness, then that would be an enormous step in the right direction. Ministry is not about the pastor imposing his vision or desires on the congregation; rather, it is about pointing the congregation in God's direction. God's direction is spiritually transforming his people into the image of His son, Jesus Christ.

This research hopes to foster spiritual formation within congregants. This project is setting out to execute a challenging order. Congregants are bombarded by the voices of secular

culture, social media, and the various demands of life (Mark 4:19). Everything around us wants our attention. Eugene Peterson articulates the problem congregations face this way:

It is not difficult in such a world to get a person interested in the message of the gospel; it is terrifically difficult to sustain the interest. Millions of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate. Many claim to have been born again, but the evidence for mature Christian discipleship is slim. In our kind of culture anything, even news about God, can be sold if it is packaged freshly; but when it loses its novelty, it goes on the garbage heap. There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.¹⁰⁰

Sustaining the interest in mature Christian discipleship and holiness is the challenge. The collective congregation cannot be held responsible for fostering this level of interest within congregants because to a degree the sustaining interest and enthusiasm for the patient acquisition for holiness is an individual task. Everyone must prayerfully position themselves for growth in Christian maturity through prayer, study of God's word, meditation, fellowship, and so on. But the congregation must take responsibility for doing its part, cultivating an atmosphere that makes producing disciples easy and simple. In other words, the congregation must return to spiritual formation intentionality and develop programs and processes that foster holiness (Christlikeness) within congregants.

This research hopes to promote honest and transformative dialogue among congregants.

To sustain the viability of the congregation, church leadership must slowly and intentionally foster a culture of honest dialogue. This research intervention will provide participants an opportunity to share their perspectives and to vision-cast what the congregation's future can look like as it seeks to put the great commission and spiritual formation at the heart of its existence.

¹⁰⁰ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, Commemorative ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 10.

Much can be missed when the congregants' voices are not engaged in the process of transforming the congregation's ways of thinking and behaving. The selected modes of data collection will serve as vehicles to gather the congregation's consensus of what is needed, what is missing, and how the congregation can make positive and forward movement toward discipling Christians.

This research hopes to encourage congregational revitalization. This researcher believes that the congregation needs to be revitalized. The congregation's vision, spiritual formation intentionality, discipleship programs and activities, and ministries must be reimagined considering Christ's commission to see transformation occur within congregants. To move toward revitalization within the congregation, new direction that encourages change is paramount. Spiritual formation intentionality will require consistent and unwavering commitment to seeing lives transformed through the congregation's revitalization efforts. This research hopes to put a paint brush into the hand of every congregant to begin actively drawing on the canvas of what God can do through congregants committed to spiritual growth. Intentional spiritual formation and discipleship must be fundamental to the congregation's revitalization efforts.

This research will implement a three-day spiritual formation Bible study. To address the lack of spiritual formation intentionality within the congregation's discipleship program, this research will implement a three-day spiritual formation Bible study (See Appendix C). More details will be disclosed shortly concerning the Bible study's design and curriculum. However, the Bible study is the set plan of action that emerges from the theological foundation to address the problem related to this thesis. The Bible study is the third phase of the intervention's data

collection plan. The phases of the data collection plan will be enumerated in the section on the order of the intervention process (see Figure 2.1).

Finally, this research will assist congregants in creating a personal spiritual formation plan. This last step coincides with the Bible study. The goal of this aspect of the study is that every congregant emerges from this intervention with a tangible resource that can be referenced. Creating a personal spiritual formation plan allows congregants to engage the Bible study, discussions, and dialogues, and to craft their own response to what they have heard from their neighbor in ministry. They will be asked to jot down what the Holy Spirit is bringing to their minds concerning their spiritual formation. Congregants will be responsible for developing their personal plan for spiritual maturity. The spiritual formation plan will be based upon the seven Christian spiritual formation dimensions proposed by Diana J. Chandler in her work *Christian Spiritual Formation*.¹⁰¹

Participants should understand the importance of becoming a spiritually formed disciple of Jesus Christ. Strong believers make for strong local churches that are making a major impact on its community. The role of the Holy Spirit cannot be underestimated in spiritual formation and discipleship. It is His power and influence that matures believers and guides them into the truth of Jesus. Imagine a congregation that is filled with the Spirit of God, controlled by, and influenced by Him in every way. Historically speaking, African Americans drew strength from Christian spirituality in the face of various oppositions, such as racism, poverty, rejection, prejudice, and so on. Suffering has been a crucible of sorts for African American spiritual formation. R. Neal Siler says, “The idea that God has been at work, forming and shaping a people for himself through all their trials is very much alive for African American Christians. It

¹⁰¹ Diana J. Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 2014).

is because of this belief that God is a part of all that we experienced and that somehow, he will vindicate us and heal our hurts that I am inspired to greater exploration of the efficacy of spiritual direction.”¹⁰²

Order of the Intervention Process

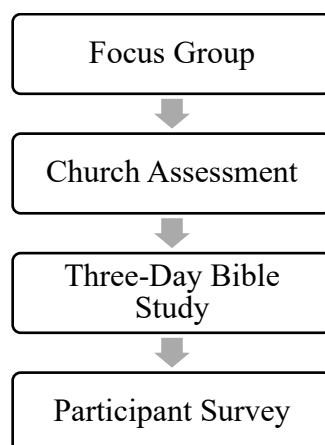


Figure 2.1 Order of the Intervention Process

This project’s intervention attempts to address the ministry context problem, which is that the Christian education ministry at MTCOGIC is not fostering spiritual formation in its congregants. Therefore, this researcher is using a four-phase approach to evaluating the problem to execute the objectives and aims already discussed in figure 1.1. Below this researcher will explain each step of the intervention process.

Focus Group. The intervention process will begin with a focus group. The focus group will be composed of all current Sunday school teachers at MTCOGIC. The congregation has Sunday school every Sunday morning at 10:00 AM until 11:00 AM. Men, women, youth, and children are combined into one class. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic the classes were separate. The congregation was primarily virtual for the entirety of 2020 and re-entered the sanctuary for

¹⁰² R. Neal Siler, "The Efficacy of Spiritual Direction in the African American Community," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 10, no. 2 (2017): 310.

in-person worship services in the beginning of 2021. Although the congregation re-entered the sanctuary in early 2021, it did not immediately return to having Sunday school classes, combined or otherwise. A plethora of challenges emerged at the outset of returning to in-person gatherings due to certain key congregants being absent out of caution and safety.

During this period, the congregation was undergoing pastoral transition. So, this caused further hesitation to return to normal congregational activities as the incoming pastor was learning specific congregational culture. Eventually a new plan was put in place for Sunday school. Initially, there were only two or three persons rotating the teaching responsibility of the combined class. But the pastor assigned all the Elders, Missionaries, and a handful of lay persons to teach the combined class on a rotation.¹⁰³ This rotation is still in place at the time of this writing. Therefore, the focus group will be comprised of these teachers, which total about nine persons. Each of these congregants will be asked to participate by sharing their responses to the following questions (see Appendix E):

1. How can Sunday School be enhanced to help congregants grow in their relationship with God?
2. What does discipleship look like at Miracle Temple?
3. What is the mission and purpose of the church?
4. How would you describe our church to a visitor?
5. What is our church's vision for making disciples?
6. What is our church's vision for helping believers grow in their relationship with God?

¹⁰³ According to COGIC polity, an Elder is a male ordained cleric, who is not the assigned or appointed pastor of a local church. The elder's primary responsibility is to serve his local church and pastor in whatever capacity deemed appropriate. However, the elder provides spiritual support to congregants, and assistance to his pastor. In COGIC, pastors are assigned and appointed by Jurisdictional Bishops. Missionaries, the female ministry counterpart, assist in various aspects of local church ministry, which may extend beyond the confines of her local congregation with the permission of her pastor.

7. What is discipleship? How do we understand it?
8. What is sanctification? How do we understand it?
9. What are your hopes and dreams for Miracle Temple COGIC?
10. How can we best help new believers develop strong lives in Christ?
11. How can we help mature believers develop a greater love for God?
12. How effective is our current discipleship program? (i.e., Sunday school)
13. What are some weaknesses of our current discipleship programs?
14. What are some strengths of our current discipleship programs?
15. Where are we most effective in our mission? Where do we seem to be making the greatest impact?
16. What are areas where we aren't as effective or haven't made as much progress?
17. What are the key areas, ministries, or aspects of church life that are working well?

These questions should not stop the free flow of discussion; rather, they should serve as a conversational guide. This researcher selected these questions since they identify some of the underlying problems at MTCOGIC and could possibly assist congregants in formulating the problem in their own words, along with potential solutions. Encouraging congregants at MTCOGIC to share their thoughts is very important because the congregants are naturally reserved and are not quick to share their perspectives. So, this pastor-student is striving to make healthy communication normative in the congregation. Healthy communication will help the congregation to collectively imagine God's vision for spiritual formation. The congregants must verbally communicate their desire for (or lack of thereof) spiritual formation in the life of the church.

The focus group will meet on zoom. Majority of the congregation's midweek activities are primarily virtual. This happened because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Virtual gatherings may be a long-term norm for the church (especially during the week). Sunday morning worship services are both in-person and online. The focus group session will be recorded. Congregants will be informed of the session being recorded at the beginning of the session. Congregants will also be informed that their responses will be used in this DMIN research, and their identities will be kept confidential. However, pseudonyms (false or fictitious names) may be used, if necessary, in this thesis. This researcher will serve as the facilitator of the focus group.

The focus group supports the purpose and objective of this project because it allows Sunday school teachers to explain what the problem is in their own words. However, the focus group can also take the form of a think tank. The congregation must begin thinking (loving God with the mind) about ways in which the level of intentionality can increase within the congregation. The Sunday school teachers are all influential and have relationships with congregants; therefore, each of them can use their influence among congregants to accentuate spiritual formation. Data from the focus group will be written down from notes. The group will be recorded via the zoom platform, which will enable this researcher to go back and record specific details. Its findings will be categorized accordingly in chapter 4.

*Discipleship Pathway Assessment by Lifeway.*¹⁰⁴ Once the focus group has met and completed its task, the next step in the intervention process will be the dissemination and completion of the congregational assessment. This project intervention will utilize the Discipleship Pathway Assessment by Lifeway Research (see Appendix B). In 2008, Lifeway

¹⁰⁴ "Discipleship Pathway Assessment," accessed December 6, 2020, <http://discipleshippathwayassessment.com/>.

Research surveyed 7,000 churches to discover principles involved in developing healthy churches. A year later, another study was conducted to focus on individual believers. More than 4,000 people were asked about their spiritual lives and level of Christian maturity. The findings of the assessment were compiled in the book *Transformational Church* by Ed Stetzer and Thom S. Rainer.¹⁰⁵ As a result, the project uncovered eight biblical signposts which will be used in this research to underscore personal discipleship for spiritual formation (See figure 3.1).

Eight Biblical Signposts
1. Bible Engagement
2. Obeying God and Denying Self
3. Serving God and others
4. Sharing Christ
5. Exercising Faith
6. Seeking God
7. Building Relationships
8. Living Unashamed

Figure 3.1 Eight Biblical Signposts

Presently the congregation communicates through social media, GroupMe, and its website. Due to a large majority of the congregation being aged, communication via modern digital platforms may be challenging. However, everyone makes strides to access pastoral observations in every way possible. Every Sunday the pastor announces special activities and events that the various ministries are conducting and requests the congregation to engage said activities for spiritual development. The circulation of the pathway assessment will be no different. This researcher will request willing congregants to access and complete the assessment. There is no paper version of the assessment available. It can only be completed online.

¹⁰⁵ Ed Stetzer, "Transformational Discipleship Identifies Eight Measures of Personal Discipleship," Christianity Today, 2012, accessed December 6, 2020, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/july/transformational-discipleship-identifies-eight-measures-of.html>.

Once congregants have completed the assessment, everyone will receive a score and recommendations for spiritual improvement which are generated by Lifeway Research. The assessment will also generate a congregational report which highlights the state of the congregation's discipleship based on congregants' responses. The assessment will incur a minor cost. For fifty participants it costs \$150. This researcher will cover the cost in full. Congregants will not have to pay anything to complete the assessment. An access code will be provided, and congregants will be able to click the link to navigate to the assessment. Figure 4.1 shows a copy of the email congregants received for registration.

The discipleship pathway assessment supports the purpose and objective of this project because it gathers an idea of sorts concerning the present state of discipleship at MTCOGIC. This is a very important component of this research. This researcher, through the problem statement, has declared what the problem is according to his observation and evaluation. However, everyone experiences or articulates the problem differently, and according to their level of ability. Therefore, the assessment provides an opportunity for congregants to demonstrate their position in spiritual formation. The signposts are the markers for personal and congregational discipleship. The results of the assessment will be shown as diagrams and charts, which are generated by lifeway research.

Email for Assessment Registration
<p data-bbox="207 1476 1318 1581">Hello Miracle Temple Church family, To complete the assessment related to my Doctorate program, please follow the instructions below under Registration steps.</p> <p data-bbox="302 1623 586 1654">passcode: axzqhle8hv</p> <p data-bbox="302 1696 545 1728"><u>Registration steps</u></p> <ul data-bbox="285 1770 1357 1871" style="list-style-type: none"> • Please go to tdatool.lifeway.com • Under the "User Registration" heading, please copy and paste your passcode and click SUBMIT.

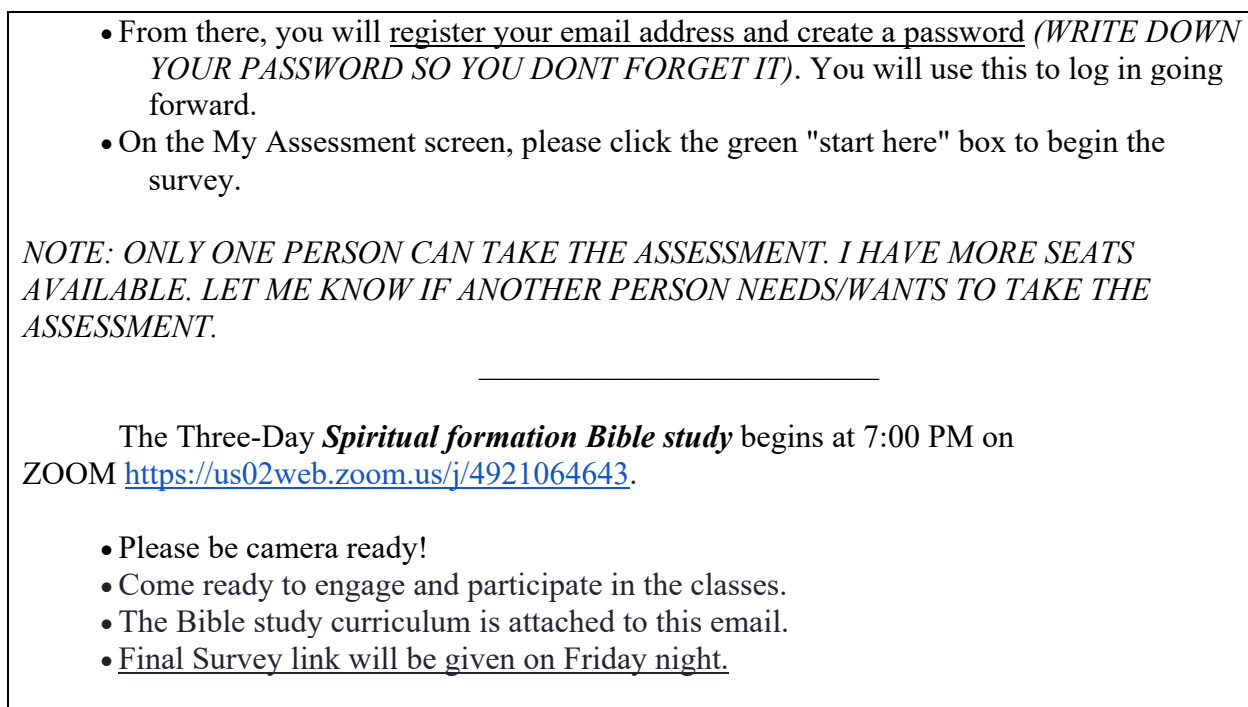


Figure 4.1 Email for Assessment Registration

Three-Day Bible Study. Once the assessment has been completed, congregants will be invited to participate in the actual three-day Bible study. First, it should be noted that the Bible study was initially supposed to occur every Wednesday for three consecutive weeks. This researcher had to change this timeframe due to meeting deadlines related to the completion of this research. This researcher provides more reflective detail on this point in chapter 4.

The Bible study will occur on zoom. The congregation will be given the appropriate link to join the Bible study each night. The curriculum will be given to congregants in advance as well. This researcher readily admits that the quick turnover and heavy curriculum may be tough on congregants, especially for a three consecutive night activity. The Bible study's curriculum will be designed according to the congregation's mission statement: Love God, Love People, Make Disciples. Participants will also create their personal spiritual formation plan. The eight biblical signposts will be placed under the appropriate and corresponding mission statement topic as seen in figure 4.1.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION BIBLE STUDY CURRICULUM DESIGN			
Day/Session	Lesson Topic	Eight Biblical Signposts Covered	Spiritual Formation Plan Dimensions Covered
1	Love God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bible Engagement • Seeking God • Exercising Faith 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiritual • Emotional
2	Love People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serving God and Others • Building Relationships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relational • Intellectual
3	Make Disciples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obeying God and Denying Self • Living Unashamed • Sharing Christ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational • Physical • Resources

Figure 5.1 Spiritual Formation Bible Study Curriculum

The spiritual formation Bible study supports the purpose and objectives of this research because it is directly focused on the problem. The title of the Bible study increases awareness of spiritual formation itself. The content of the lessons involves the basic elements of becoming a mature and transformed disciple of Jesus Christ. One of the best ways to encourage congregational progress is by going back to the Bible. The Bible study brings the entire congregation back what the Bible says about spiritual formation, and why it should be the very essence and core of the ministries' existence. The implementation of the Bible study itself is an objective of this project, and rightfully so. Through the facilitation of the nightly lessons, Sunday school teachers can learn how to effectively engage their classes and teach their students.

Participants Survey. The final intervention phase will be the participants survey. This researcher will ask each participant to complete a survey (see Appendix E). The survey will be used to gather further data to add into this research. This DMIN action research will employ triangulation (i.e., focus group, questionnaire (assessment), and survey). These three forms of data collection will allow this research to determine outcomes and the influence this intervention had on the congregation's spiritual formation intentionality. Congregants will be able to

complete the survey in two ways: (1) an online google survey; or (2) by paper. This researcher will keep careful notes as the research project intervention proceeds. Google forms is a tremendous tool that researchers can use for data collection. And it is free! The questions used for data collection are outlined as follows:

Participant Survey Questions (Appendix E)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gender: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Female <input type="radio"/> Male 2. Age Group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> 20-30 years old <input type="radio"/> 31-44 years old <input type="radio"/> 45-59 years old <input type="radio"/> 60 and older 3. Which of the following best describes your preferred Bible study approach? (Choose one) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> I prefer to study the Bible by myself <input type="radio"/> I prefer to study the Bible by myself and in groups <input type="radio"/> I prefer to study the Bible in groups 4. How important is it for you to learn and study the Bible? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Extremely important <input type="radio"/> Very important <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Important <input type="radio"/> Not at all important 5. What discourages or prevents you from participating more fully in bible studies/Sunday school? (Check all that apply). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> I do not have enough information about the time of bible study <input type="radio"/> I do not have time to devote to it <input type="radio"/> Work schedule conflicts <input type="radio"/> Family responsibilities <input type="radio"/> No groups tailored for individuals my age <input type="radio"/> No groups tailored for my gender <input type="radio"/> No groups tailored to my interests <input type="radio"/> Lack of transportation <input type="radio"/> I simply am not interested <input type="radio"/> This question does not apply to me 6. Which of the following bible study topics interests you? (Check all that apply) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Beginners guide to studying the Bible <input type="radio"/> Biblical perspectives on current issues <input type="radio"/> Christian marriage/relationships <input type="radio"/> Christian parenting <input type="radio"/> Practical Christian living <input type="radio"/> Understanding and exercising spiritual gifts

- Book by Book Study
 - Basic Christian Beliefs
 - Spiritual Disciplines
 - Leadership
 - Finances
7. Which of the following methods do you prefer in a bible study setting? (Check all that apply to your preference)
- Book, with leader facilitated discussion
 - Independent study with online group discussion
 - Group viewing DVD followed by group discussion with facilitator
 - Small group, peer-led discussion
 - Guest Speaker and discussion
8. What are your preferences for where Bible study sessions should be held? (Check all that apply)
- At the church
 - In someone's home
 - At a public place
 - At my home – I would be happy to host a bible study
9. As a result of the spiritual formation bible study, do you feel spiritually stronger?
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
10. Did the spiritual formation bible study stir your interest in becoming more like Christ?
- A great deal
 - A moderate amount
 - A little
 - None at all

The participant survey supports the purpose and objectives of this project because it directly engages the congregation. Direct congregational engagement is critical to any kind of transformative endeavor. The survey lists questions that congregants can answer to provide insights for collective, transformative action. The survey can help this researcher to identify why the Christian education ministry is not intentionally fostering spiritual formation in congregants. It helps because the congregants can state whether this intervention succeeded in its objectives in the first place. And the survey gives this researcher clues as to what is next for improving the problem area(s). The survey results will be shown via charts and graphs generated by google.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

As was noted earlier, this researcher employed triangulation, which is the use of three different ways of gathering data. This researcher is using a focus group (a group interview), an assessment (a questionnaire), and a survey. Using three data gathering methods enhances observation. This researcher wanted to obtain as much data as possible. This researcher felt that using one data collecting method would not be enough to generate a documented picture of the congregation's discipleship and spiritual formation status. This researcher did not secure the feedback of an outside expert for the purpose of data collection. There are a couple reasons this researcher did not apply this procedure:

- (1) *The pastor-student is a new pastor, who is still getting to know the congregation, its history, and collective goals.* This researcher was selected to be the pastor in February 2021, and upon coming into the church, immediately began to identify needs and problems within the congregation for improvement. The development of the shepherd-sheep relationship, at this point, was most important for this researcher.
- (2) *The Limitation of Resources.* Securing an outside expert would have been useful because they would have given a professional and expert opinion on what was happening in the church related to this project's research; however, the resources of time and money were significant limitations, especially navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.
- (3) *Congregational Consensus.* As a result of being a new pastor for the church, the congregation may not have felt completely comfortable with an outside expert coming in to paint a picture of its spiritual formation and discipleship status. People feel better when they are fully known and understood. This pastor-student was and is

in the constant process of building this “mutual understanding” relationship within the congregation. Inviting outside experts for things of this sort may not be useful at this present time. The future may yield a different result, however. This research is not opposed to bringing expert opinion; rather, it only seeks to protect the present condition and position of the congregation.

Analyzing the Collected Data. Once the data has been collected, it must be analyzed. This researcher will not employ a one-size-fits-all approach to analyzing the data. Each intervention phase will be analyzed according to its own merit. This researcher will listen for constant themes which emerge in the focus group. The hope is that the Sunday school teachers will converse freely and transparently. As they discuss the proposed questions, this researcher will take notes as repeated themes emerge. This writer is certain that there may be themes which resonate with other aspects of this thesis. And that is okay if it does. Themes are identified by participants’ common answers. Slippages in the data will be identified by disparate responses given by participants. It is common for slippages to occur since congregants will interpret the problem and questions in different ways.

The focus group, assessment, and survey will be analyzed as one unit at certain points. This is because the three will intersect at points and themes may connect between the three data methods. However, the assessment and survey will have their own summation of sorts respectively. This researcher will conclude the analyzation component of this research by providing an assessing the whole section, which evaluates the entire project’s results in one.

Baseline for Measuring Change. A significant aspect of this research was attempting to keep it measurable and simple. The problem presented in this research is sort of complex because it is difficult to measure abstract or non-material things. The data assists this writer in generating

the baseline for measuring change. To begin with, this project proposes that spiritual formation is the change the congregation is after. Congregants becoming more like Jesus. But that is the complexity of this research, how do we know when someone is really becoming like Jesus? How can we measure the entire congregation's change toward Christlikeness? Is Christlikeness determined by church attendance, building bigger facilities, raising more money, volunteering in more lay ministries, or is there some other measurement? We can confidently assert that change cannot be superficially determined. Willard proposes, in an interview, that Christian change can be measured by "fruit in keeping with the gospel and the kingdom."¹⁰⁶

However, for the purposes of this research, we may assume that change or getting closer to the ideal (spiritual formation) will be determined, in part, by the feedback of congregants as they participate in the focus group, assessment, Bible study, and survey. These data collection methods will give us more information regarding measurable change. Yet, this research has not attempted to prove that it can bring about a "clean sweep" change in the church. It merely states that it seeks change, wants change, and envisions change. But the definition of change is most important in this regard. If we are talking about spiritual formation, then ultimately the desired change is the "walk by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16), produced in congregants by the Spirit himself, resulting in "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22-23). In other words, congregants will be "filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:11).

The data collection methods will clarify if the congregation is getting closer or further away from creating and nurturing the congregation's intentionality and interest for spiritual

¹⁰⁶ Dallas Willard, "The Apprentices ", accessed February 24, 2022, <https://dwillard.org/articles/apprentices-the>.

formation. The hope is that the congregation is getting closer to spiritual formation, but if it is not, then hopefully the results of the research will assist in pointing church leadership and congregants in the right direction.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Phase I - Focus Group

The focus group met on Sunday, January 30, 2022, at 7:00 PM. The group consisted of nine people. Each of the group participants are current Sunday school teachers. Upon the start of the session, this writer expressed appreciation for participants willingly joining zoom, then laid out a framework for discussion, and presented some preliminary remarks. First, this writer explained that the purpose of the focus group was to provide stakeholders an opportunity to share their thoughts regarding our congregation's discipleship program and how it could better help people to grow spiritually. Second, this writer encouraged the stakeholders to view him as a transformation facilitator. The key question in everyone's mind should be what does Christian transformation look like within our congregation? The idea was not for the pastor/facilitator to take control of the discussion; rather, the pastor/facilitator would take the posture of a listener that guides/asks clarifying questions to help everyone truly listen to each other and further define what spiritual formation and discipleship looks like at Miracle Temple COGIC.

Third, this writer informed each of the participants that the session was being recorded to capture everyone's thoughts and ideas. Forth, this writer informed everyone that their identities would remain confidential, but that their ideas and feedback would be used within this research. Fifth, this writer encouraged everyone to relax and just allow the discussion to naturally flow, be detailed as much as possible, and be themselves. In private group settings, some people tend to withhold their ideas from the group for several reasons, but this writer really encouraged

everyone to be opened to share as they felt compelled. This writer felt that it was important to provide these preliminary remarks because the congregation is still getting used to having leadership that is open to hearing their feedback and perspectives. Many congregants often withhold their perspectives, but this researcher reminded everyone that transformation is a community effort, not an isolated or personality driven one.

Once this writer finished the preliminary remarks to help set the stage for real, engaging discussion, he placed the title of this research, *Toward Transformative Christian Education that Facilitates Spiritual Formation at Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ* on the screen for everyone to see and asked everyone to share their immediate thoughts regarding the topic. One person stated that it seemed to mean that “we are looking for a change to happen in Christian education and that we, as a collective group, must cast a vision for what it should look like or what we would change in it.” This writer validated the person’s thoughts and asked if everyone wanted a brief explanation for what the research was getting at? Everyone said, “yes, please share as it would be helpful for them to gather their thoughts.” This initial question and explanation of this project’s problem led to more than two hours of dialogue. This writer did not expect the discussion to go on so long, but the group quickly became a vision casting session. Yet several themes emerged from this discussion.

Applying the Bible to everyday life

The first theme that emerged from the question concerning discipleship and spiritual formation was how the Bible should apply to the everyday lives of believers. Some people do not engage in congregational discipleship programs because they do not grasp how the Bible fits their everyday life. Various approaches to biblical interpretation, which have not proven helpful, have long been the model for many educational programs. For congregants to mature in Christ,

the Bible must not only be the source for discipleship education, but it must also be applied properly and contextually to the lives of people, here and now. If the Bible is viewed by congregants as a first-century book which mattered for them alone, then congregants are less likely to fully engage the Bible. The participants all agreed that the Bible is the word of God and the foundation for discipleship and spiritual formation. If one is to become more like Christ, then they must engage the Bible for all it is worth, gleaning from it, precious insights and principles that shapes the mind of Christ into the believer. One participant stated that our discipleship program must go beyond regurgitating biblical facts and demonstrating how those facts apply to living in the twenty-first century. Spiritual maturity happens organically when the believer is taught how to apply God's word to their lives.

Another participant stated that we cannot forget the role of the Holy Spirit in applying God's word to the life of the believer. Therefore, prayerfully approaching God's word, inviting the Holy Spirit to apply God's word to the human heart is necessary. We believe the Bible has something to say to us today. We believe that God has spoken through the biblical writers and have provided to humankind all they need to know to have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Yet we instinctively draw conclusions from the Bible that coincide with our cultural and historical preconceptions. E. Randolph Richard and Brandon J. O'Brien argue that the modern world is, in various ways, drastically separated from the biblical world, and to draw conclusions or applications from the pages of the Bible, one must become familiar with the cultural, historical, and geographical context of the Bible.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ E. Randolph Richard, and Brandon J. O'Brien, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes: Removing Cultural Blinders to Better Understand the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

For instance, during the three-day Bible study, one participant shared that he read the story of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22 and literally interpreted the passage to mean that to be a Christ-follower he had to give away all his possessions. In tears the participant stated that he gave away everything he owned and immense suffering followed. He wondered if his rigid and literal interpretation was the accurate way to apply the passage. This pastor-student stated that it may not have been the proper way to apply the passage although the intentions and motivations were in the right place. Rather, one of the underlying biblical principles derived from the passage should be applied: Do not allow the love of wealth (or idols) to fill the human void that only God can satisfy; instead, acknowledge that eternal life is achieved through an act of faith in the goodness of God, not performing good deeds.

As far as interpretive biblical models go, believers and Bible teachers must dispense from legalistic and moralistic frameworks for understanding the Bible. Many congregants, for instance, have become disillusioned with traditional interpretations of Scriptures such as 1 Timothy 2:8 and 1 Peter 3:3-5, which are perceived to teach that holiness is primarily about placing restrictions on what one wears rather than being modest and respectable in one's outer appearance. Many Christians question if this kind of understanding of holiness truly assists them in conforming into the image of Jesus Christ. They conclude that it does not. One participant stated that God's word will transform the believer when it is applied correctly. We must believe that the Holy Spirit has the power to correct behaviors or habits that are inconsistent with God's word.

Separating Bible Classes based on Level of Need

Congregational Christian formation is often determined by the level of need and the stage of life people are in. This theme emerged as one participant noted that congregants may feel the

need to have a space which allows them to learn the Bible at their pace. Sunday school is typically understood to be a class for students that have a basic biblical framework to work with. Implementing an assortment of classes based on sex, life stage, and interest seems advantageous in helping congregants and new believers become stronger disciples of Christ. The participant suggested that the group consider how having a new believer's class may help a person that is not churched become acquainted with the teachings of the Bible. The Christian education ministry would have to be restructured, reorganized, and populated with various classes, which possess objectives and aims that intentionally seeks to increase spiritual formation in congregants.

One participant stated that the Christian education ministry should specifically create a curriculum for a new members class. This class could be the introduction, not only to our church, but to Christianity and its teachings, especially for the unchurched. A new member's class helps to assimilate new believers and prospective members into the life of the church and gives them an opportunity to become part of the body of Christ in a unique way. These separated classes could all occur online/virtually, which may be more useful than in-person gatherings.

Discipleship: Interested or Disinterested?

One participant defined discipleship as Christian training; helping someone understand the ways and characteristics of Christ and applying that to one's life. The participant stated that the problem, as they see it, is that we do not have people who are intentionally willing and able to attend Sunday school. Each week the same people attend Sunday school and although new people are attending church on Sunday mornings, none are funneling into Sunday school for Christian formation. We must find out what people want from Sunday school/discipleship. Some of the following questions emerged: How can the congregation better meet the needs of the

people? Is it a change of time or platform? How can we make Sunday school different? How can we help increase discipleship interest in the congregation? Is curriculum part of the problem?

Furthermore, there was an overwhelming sense among group participants that discipleship interest is lacking within the congregants. The deficiency in Spiritual formation and discipleship is more than a congregational problem, it is a cultural phenomenon, which effects all congregations in various ways. One participant stated that it seems many people are not driven to grow spiritually. Many people are not willing to do what it takes to grow spiritually. Another participant shared that when she first became a Christian, she was zealous for God, she read everything she could find. The thirst, hunger, and drive for God's presence was evident in her life. She attended everything she possibly could. She stated, "If you are going to grow and become like Jesus, you must cultivate the drive and hunger for God. There are no shortcuts. No one can produce this hunger. Essentially it is between the person and God. They must ask God to create a hunger and thirst for the Lord in their heart." For spiritual growth begins with God.

Learning God's word and applying it to one's life is central to producing the hunger for Christian growth. One participant stated, "We cannot force feed anyone Sunday school. Every congregant must take responsibility for their spirituality." Another participant observed that many people may hesitate to attend Sunday school and engage the Bible lessons because they do not know as much as others. Historically the congregation has provided breakfast as a drawing card. Yet giving the people breakfast did not work, nor did it last long. Therefore, the question was posed: Is catering to people and entertaining them the solution to getting them to attend discipleship programs? If so, then the congregation will have to accommodate and maintain a sort of entertainment culture.

Training the Teachers to Teach God's Word

Another theme that emerged during the focus group was training teachers. This point is important. Many congregants do not engage in congregational discipleship programs because teachers are not always equipped with the tools to critically engage the students, and to appeal to various learning styles. Teachers must first be disciples of Jesus themselves before they can help other congregants to become disciples of Christ. One participant stated that everyone is not gifted to teach people. Teaching God's word requires a certain level of skill. This skill can be developed through training, however. As the group discussed this point, this author considered the possibility of using an action-reflection model for training discipleship program facilitators.

If Sunday school is going to be the primary discipleship method at Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ, then training teachers to engage the lesson, inspire students to dialogue, integrate various learning styles into the educational approach, and grow in their knowledge of the Bible is necessary. One participant stated that Sunday school teacher training has never happened within the congregation. This would be an innovation for the congregation and may motivate congregants to attend Sunday school as the word regarding teacher training circulates.

Sunday School, Small Groups, or Both?

Questions regarding using Sunday school or small groups as the congregation's primary discipleship program emerged, and the group was divided on this point. Congregations today are moving away from traditional Sunday school models and implementing more informal learning contexts, making fellowship, food, and fun part of the outreach and discipleship approach. Sunday school traditionally takes place at the church, whereas small groups occur in homes or in public places. One participant stated that she believed mixing the two may prove useful for the spiritual formation of the congregation. She elaborated that small groups are effective in many

congregations, and there now exists several models that could assist Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ in creating its own model.

One participant stated that the congregation had a form of small groups in the past. One group met in the home of one of the congregants and maintained a consistent five or six people weekly. The facilitator would throw questions out for everyone, allowing them to share as they felt comfortable. The five or six people attending all reported experiencing spiritual maturity. The small group was marked by transparent dialogue based on a relevant biblical passage, food, and fellowship, getting to know one another, and praying together. The small group setting was less rigid, a relaxed environment, and enabled everyone to meet one another's needs in a simple yet extraordinarily intimate way.

A participant that was a part of the small group stated that she fell in love with Sunday school because of attending the small group. She became passionate about the mutual fellowship and encouragement that she would receive upon attending the small group. However, for various reasons the small group ministries did not sustain, and it is unknown if the trial run influenced a congregational-wide increase in spiritual formation and discipleship.

What is the Goal?

One participant stated, "the bottom line is that we cannot continue to do the same things, expecting a difference to take place in our congregation. We must do something different for difference to take place." Jesus was the ultimate example of drawing people to Himself. The congregation's discipleship program will only flourish as we teach the gospel, witness to people, and fulfill the great commission. Bringing people to Jesus Christ for spiritual transformation is the aim of the congregation's discipleship program. The goal cannot be entertaining and catering to people's desires because those will vary, and the congregation can easily become torn trying

to appease and accommodate everyone's desires. On the other hand, the congregation must return to the purpose of Christ's church, which is to love God, love people, and make disciples. Because everything hangs on love. The congregation must do its part to cultivate an intentional environment for spiritual formation and discipleship.

In conclusion, the focus group formulated a congregational vision for transforming present discipleship approaches and assessing the problem within the congregation, as they see it. Another weakness identified in the congregation is its lack of community outreach, which is closely related to and a contribution of the inconsistency in spiritual formation and discipleship intentionality. The level of interest, the lack of spiritual hunger and thirst for righteousness, and the apparent apathy within the congregation, which is evidenced and manifested by the lack of engagement, attendance, and willingness to experience congregational spiritual formation are unmistakably visible. One participant observed that the problems we face may be contributed to the high-level exposure of the church's imperfections, in a social media driven culture, which has turned many congregants and prospective Christians off, causing them to turn away from the appeal of the church to become spiritually vibrant Christ-followers.

Phase II – Discipleship Pathway Assessment

The discipleship pathway assessment by Lifeway was presented to the congregation as a tool to assist in formulating a collective and individual picture of the state of discipleship at Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ. Due to technical difficulties, the assessment link was sent out to congregants on Tuesday, February 1, 2022. Participants were given less than a week to complete the assessment. The aim was to have as many congregants as possible to complete the assessment prior to the start of the spiritual formation Bible study. The first weakness of the implementation of the assessment was its late dissemination. Twenty-seven congregants

completed the assessment. Most congregants submitted their assessment by the end of the week: Saturday, February 5, 2022.

A second weakness of the assessment itself is that it required the congregation to reach a minimum of thirty-three completed surveys with a church's attendance of sixty-seven people; otherwise, the results would not be statistically reliable. For future reference, this researcher must plan ways to engage and assist more congregants in completing a congregationally based assessment. The numbers of participants were too low to fully demonstrate the congregation's lack of spiritual formation intentionality. This pastor-student assumes that one likely reason for the low number of participants is due to the lack of technological savvy among older congregants. However, for the purposes of this intervention, the researcher will proceed to share the results of the assessment; nonetheless, readers should be aware that the results may not portray an accurate evaluation of the congregation's present state of discipleship. This researcher encouraged congregants to select responses that reflected their current individual sentiments.

This section will outline the collective results of the congregation's spiritual development based on the biblical signposts (See Figure 6.1). According to Lifeway, the biblical signposts are the common markers of spiritual formation and discipleship within Christians. In this section, this researcher will examine, assess, and reflect upon the projected results of the areas in which the congregation scored lowest. The congregation demonstrated consistent spiritual growth in Obeying God and denying self, serving God and others, exercising faith, seeking God, and the doctrinal positions. The congregation revealed that they understand what it means to obey God's word and how obedience to His word translates into denying self. The exercise of faith is born out of obedience to God and seeking God through spiritual disciplines. However, during the Bible study this was a mixed bag as well. Some people stated that they weren't as strong in

exercising faith and engaging in spiritual disciplines. This was likely not reflected in the survey and assessment because everyone did not participate in completing them but was on the online Bible study. The congregations' scores on all eight signposts are in figure 6.1.

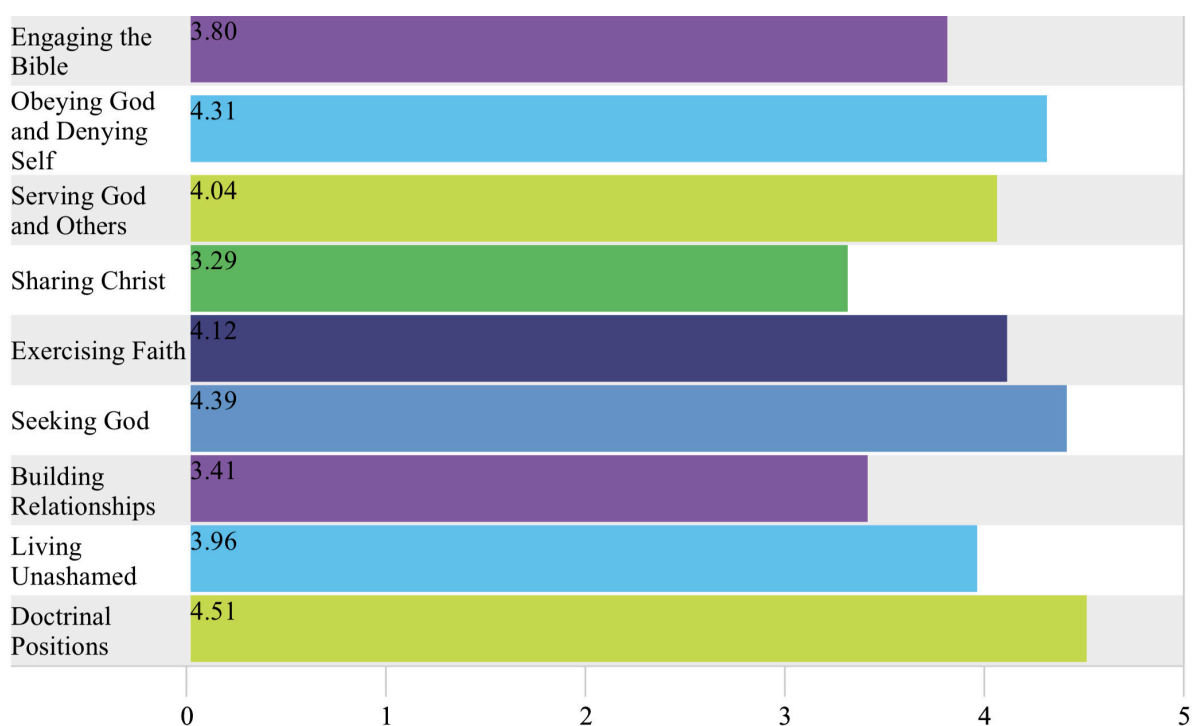


Figure 6.1 Collective Assessment Results

Engaging the Bible

The congregation showed moderate spiritual growth in this area. This is an area of concern because it reveals although congregants are moderately growing in their spiritual lives with Christ, yet they are struggling to engage the Bible in enriching ways. A little more than forty per cent strongly agreed that they find themselves thinking about biblical truths throughout the day. A little more than fifty-nine per cent strongly agreed that the Bible has authority over every area of their lives. And sixty-three per cent strongly agreed that they desperately miss time with God when they go several days without reading the Bible. The Bible having authority over every area of one's life is the foundation for every other marker of growth in the believer.

Although congregants stated that God's word has authority over their lives, they think about biblical truths throughout the day, and they miss intimate time with God through Bible reading, the lower scores reveal that they find it difficult to personally read the Bible and listen to or read teaching about the Bible, outside of church worship services. This may mean that congregants hear, listen to, or read the Bible/biblically related material mostly around church worship services. Overall, Bible engagement scored low, moderate spiritual growth; therefore, congregants need help in further engaging the Bible for all it's worth, on their own. Active engagement with the Bible will change us. It may be assumed that congregants know that the Bible is integral in their spiritual development, but this does not always influence practical/daily Bible engagement habits. Christians become more like Christ when they actively read, study, and apply God's word to their lives.

Sharing Christ

A certain mark of a growing disciple of Jesus Christ is an outward focus to share Jesus with unbelievers. Evangelism is a feature of Christlikeness and is part of the great commission to make disciples. The congregation showed moderate spiritual growth in this area. The questions which comprised this signpost showed some positive engagement from congregants. For instance, more than sixty-six percent of congregants strongly agreed that they felt comfortable that they could share their belief in Christ with someone else effectively. This is a good sign. But when asked if they had personally shared with someone how to become a Christian or invited an unchurched person to attend a worship service the number pointed in the opposite direction. A little more than thirty-three per cent of participants stated that they rarely/never pray for opportunities to tell others about Jesus.

Building Relationships

This pastor-student has encouraged congregants to search the Scriptures and identify references to interpersonal relationships. If one takes the time to examine the Bible, they will find that Christian community is fostered through healthy relationships within and without the church. However, building healthy, Christ-honoring relationships with other believers is often one of the most overlooked ingredients to discipleship and spiritual formation. The congregation scored low in this signpost. Most congregants somewhat agreed that they have Christian friends that keep them accountable and intentionally spend time with other believers to help them grow in their faith. A little more than forty-eight per cent strongly agreed that they have developed significant relationships with other people within the church.

Yet more than fifty-one per cent of participants stated that they rarely/never personally pray in a group with other Christians, outside of worship services. And a little more than twenty-five per cent of participants stated, in a typical month, they spend zero times attending small classes or groups for adults at church such as Sunday school, Bible study, small groups, or Adult Bible fellowships. This area indicates that the congregation needs more support, even in subtle ways, to develop mutually encouraging horizontal relationships with others.

Living Unashamed

Congregants that participated in the assessment also scored low in this area, collectively. If Christians have difficulty engaging the Bible, sharing Christ, and building relationships, then naturally it follows that they may be challenged to live a bold and unashamed life for Jesus in the world. The early Christians prayed for and exhibited boldness in ministering to others, even amid

immense suffering.¹⁰⁸ A little more than eighteen per cent strongly agreed that they were generally a different person in public than they are in private. About seven per cent of congregants strongly agreed that they those they are acquainted with needs to know they are a follower of Christ. About four per cent of participants strongly agreed that many people who know them are not aware that they are a Christian.

Phase III – Spiritual Formation Bible Study

The third phase of this project's intervention was the implementation of an intensive three-day Bible study. This researcher wrote the Bible study curriculum (see Appendix C) and provided both paper and PDF copies to the congregation prior to the start of the Bible study. This pastor-student encouraged congregants to read and study the lessons so that they could begin generating ideas and questions for dialogue. Each night the Bible study maintained an attendance of about thirty congregants. The study was convened on zoom. Most congregants were camera ready to engage the study. This researcher facilitated/taught the lessons each night. The Bible study began at 7:00 PM nightly on Wednesday, February 2, 2022, and concluded on Friday, February 4, 2022.

This pastor-student did not anticipate the Bible study lasting almost two hours each night. Congregants were exceptional. They participated in the lessons. They asked questions and commented both verbally and in the online chat box. Many congregants reserved their comments primarily to the online chat feature, for various reasons. The three-lessons were packed with biblical and practical material. The goal was threefold. First, this researcher incorporated our congregation's mission/vision statement into the lessons (hence the three-lesson titles) to

¹⁰⁸ See Acts 4:13, 29, 31; 9:28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8; 28:31; Phil. 1:14.

encourage congregants to think about the congregation's overall reason for existence. Second, to examine how the congregation would respond to a discipleship course that was outside of its normal offering (that is, Sunday school). Third, this researcher wanted to assess if the intervention would stimulate an increase in spiritual formation and discipleship intentionality.

This facilitator asked congregants where they felt they were in their spiritual formation. The responses from everyone were mixed. Some felt that they were consistently growing, while others felt that they needed more help in cultivating their spiritual formation. Others said that they were moderately growing. During the Bible study, everyone talked about spiritual formation in transformative ways. They talked about it as if it was a present reality in the world, present for them to enjoy here and now. Congregants were practically aware where they were in their personal spiritual formation. The congregants who were on and participating asked questions,

Phase IV – Participant Survey

At the conclusion of the spiritual formation Bible study, this researcher provided all participants with the link to complete the final participant survey. Congregants were asked to submit the survey by the end of the day on Sunday, February 6, 2022. The questions that were listed on the survey are in appendix E. This pastor-student posed these questions to gauge if the study motivated an increase in desire for Christlike growth and to continue the focus group's deliberation for future discipleship program transformation. Twenty-six congregants completed the survey. Although minimal in number and not a complete reflection of the congregation's membership, the survey responses represent what could be for the congregation. The survey results offered a glimmer of hopeful expectation. The survey mostly revealed the preferences of congregants. If the Christian education ministry is to be transformative, then it must try new things methods in reaching congregants, inviting them into spiritual formation.

Which of the following best describes your preferred Bible study approach?

26 responses

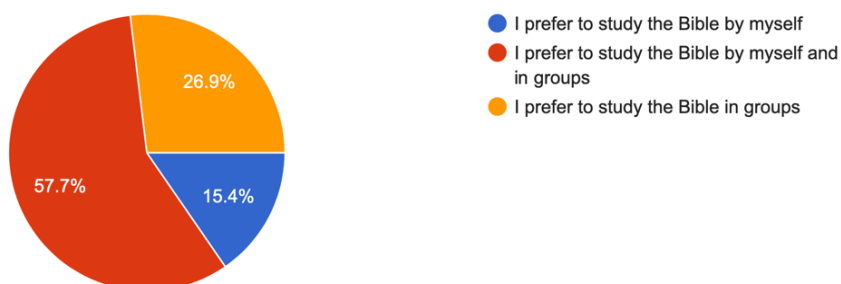


Figure 7.1 Preferred Bible Study Approach

Most congregants stated that they preferred to study the Bible by themselves and in groups. This researcher was glad to know that most congregants preferred this approach to Bible reading and study. Spiritual growth occurs when Christians read the Bible by themselves and in groups with other Christians. Encouraging the congregation's Christian education ministry to employ various approaches for individual and collective formation will be important. Figure 7.1 reveals that almost every congregant that completed the survey felt that learning and studying the Bible was important to them. The Bible is the source for spiritual formation and discipleship.

How important is it for you to learn and study the Bible?

26 responses

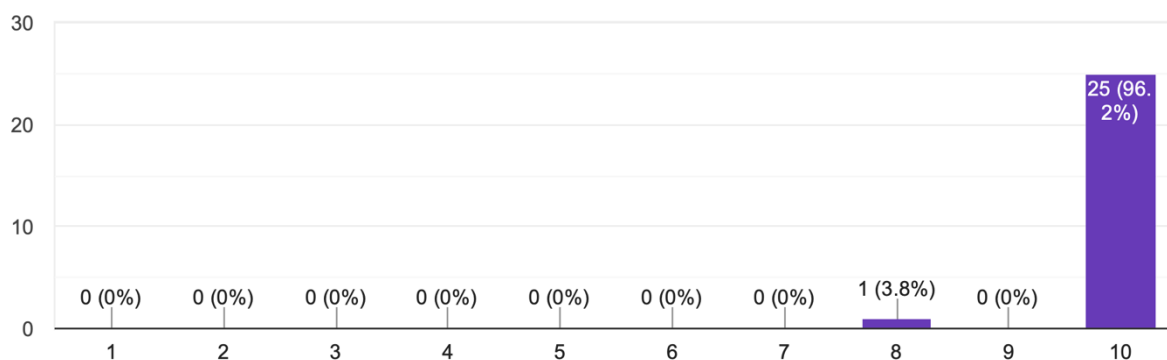


Figure 8.1 Importance of Learning and Studying the Bible

This project's problem centers on reality that congregants do not engage more fully in its discipleship programs (that is, Sunday school/Bible studies). The purpose of Christian education is to train believers in becoming disciples of and more like Christ. However, the problem is that many congregants do not attend or participate in the programs. Therefore, what discourages or prevents congregants from participating more fully in the congregation's discipleship programs? Figure 8.1 shows that many congregants are trying to balance the daily rigors of life and family. Discipleship programs will have to embrace a hybrid model (in-person and virtual) to potentially increase engagement.

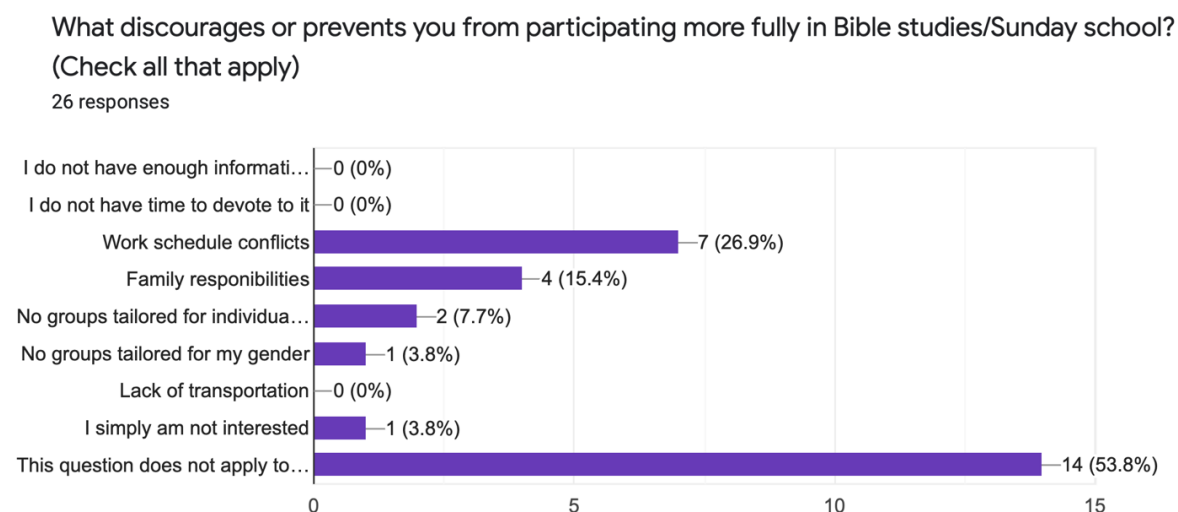


Figure 9.1 What prevents you from engaging in Bible studies/Sunday school?

The focus group observed that integrating varying interests and topics may prove useful in assisting believers of different stages of Christian growth to engage discipleship at their pace. Many congregants may be more interested in understanding the Bible by topics/interests instead of reading the Bible cover to cover, although this is a good practice to develop. Reading the Bible for application is most important. The range of biblical topics that could be studied are numerous. Figure 9.1 shows some of the topics that congregants were interested in exploring.

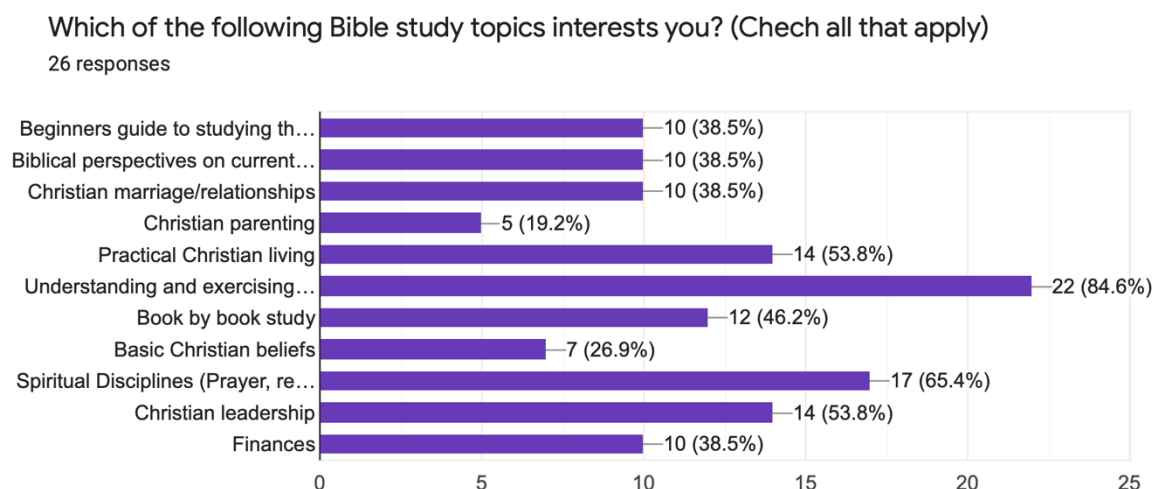


Figure 10.1 Bible Study Topics Congregants are Interested in

This researcher did not expect the twenty-two congregants that completed the survey to state that they were interested in understanding spiritual gifts. Assessing the graph reveals that many topics interested congregants, but spiritual gifts was the chief selection. This possibly indicates that congregants want to know more about what the Bible teaches on spiritual gifts and how it relates to their individual and corporate ministries, although the discipleship pathway assessment showed that most congregants regularly use their gifts to serve others.

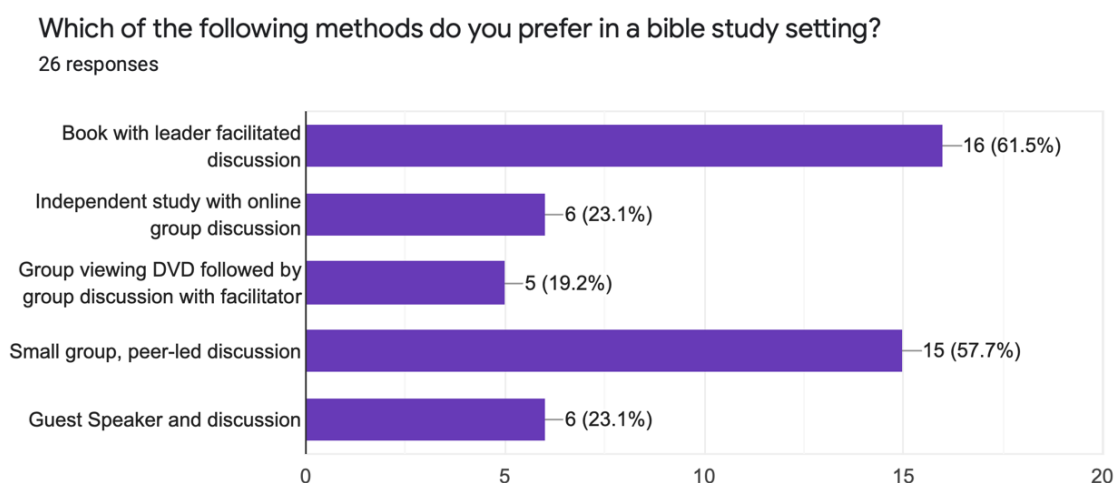


Figure 11.1 Preferred Bible Study Setting

Most congregants said that they preferred book with leader facilitated discussion and small group, peer-led discussion settings. Figure 10.1 shows the results of this question.

Participants stated that they preferred Bible studies to occur primarily at the church (see Figure 11.1). This DMin researcher did not expect the congregants to select this option. Forty-two per cent of participants stated that they preferred Bible studies in someone's home. This writer hoped that more congregants would be open to the idea of small groups/Bible studies in a home/public setting.

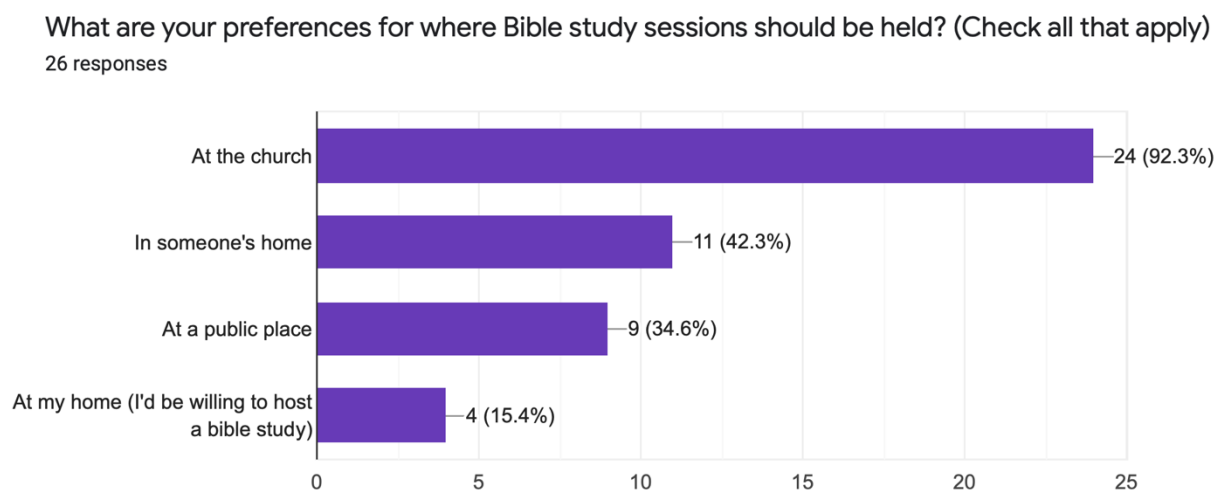


Figure 12.1 Bible Study Location Preference

The overarching goal of this research was to address the Christian education's lack of spiritual formation and discipleship intentionality. This research's purpose was to identify ways to increase intentionality within congregants. For congregants to experience long-term spiritual formation would require the Christian education ministry and the congregation to make radical steps toward a discipleship culture. Congregations do not change overnight, nor do they change in a short period of time. Change requires intentionality. Congregants reported that the spiritual formation Bible study caused them to feel spiritually stronger. This was one of the goals of this study.

As a result of the spiritual formation Bible study, do you feel spiritually stronger?

26 responses

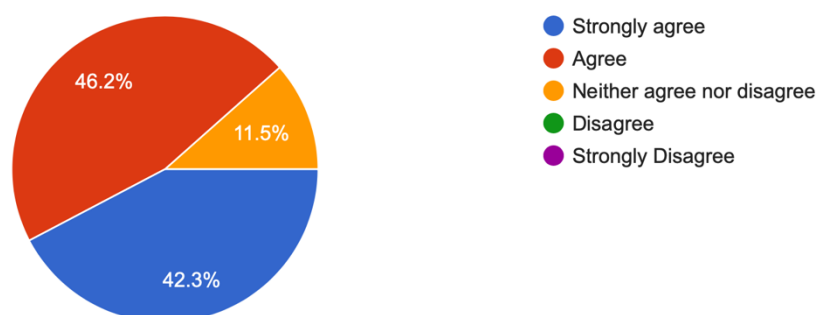


Figure 13.1 The Effect of the Spiritual Formation Bible Study

Another significant goal of this research was to stir the interest of congregants in spiritual formation, that is, becoming more like Jesus Christ. Christian education is one of the immediate ministries tasked with the responsibility of helping to increase or stir interest and intentionality for spiritual growth. This study hoped to encourage congregants to become more like Jesus, even if it was simply increasing their desire to become more like Christ. Seventy-seven per cent of the participants stated that the Bible study stirred their interest in becoming more like Christ (see Figure 13.1). Overall, this research was successful in this regard.

Did the spiritual formation bible study stir your interest in becoming more like Christ?

26 responses

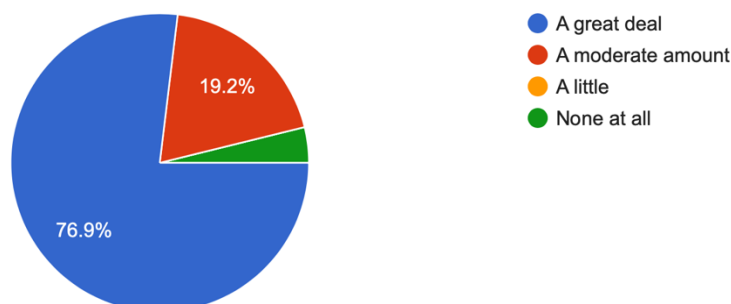


Figure 14.1 Interest in becoming more like Christ

The spiritual formation Bible studies curriculum centered on the congregation's mission statement: love God, love people, and make disciples. The focus group observed that the mission of the NT church is distilled through these three short phrases. Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ is called, first and foremost, to be lovers of God. When God's people love Him, they cannot help but to love others as a reflection of their love for God. And when we love God and others, making disciples is the natural outcome. Congregants stated that among the three lessons, loving God resonated most with them. One congregant said, "Because God loves all people and to be more like him causes me to love all people." Another participant stated, "You cannot love people and make disciples without God. You must love God before you can love anything or anyone else." Because God first loved humankind, we are enabled to love others and make disciples of all nations (see Figure 14.1).

Which of the three lessons resonated most with you?

26 responses

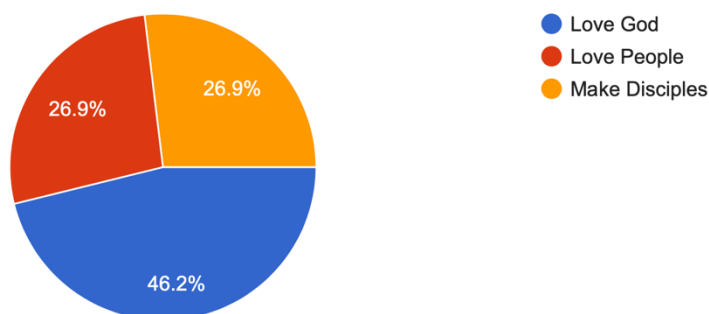


Figure 15.1 Which lesson resonated most with congregants?

The Bible study effected each congregant in different ways. Many congregants were encouraged to consider what building relationships within the church looked like. The assessment showed that building relationships was an area of moderate spiritual growth for the congregation. However, many were challenged to take active steps toward developing growing

relationships with other believers. Healthy relationships are critical to discipleship. The Bible study also integrated a spiritual formation plan. At the conclusion of each lesson, this DMin researcher encouraged congregants to write down their goals and desired outcomes in the space provided in their handout. The seven dimensions of spiritual development are listed at the end of appendix C. Figure 15.1 shows the results of which dimensions resonated most with congregants.

In regards to the spiritual formation plan, which of the seven dimensions resonated most with you?
(check all that apply)
26 responses

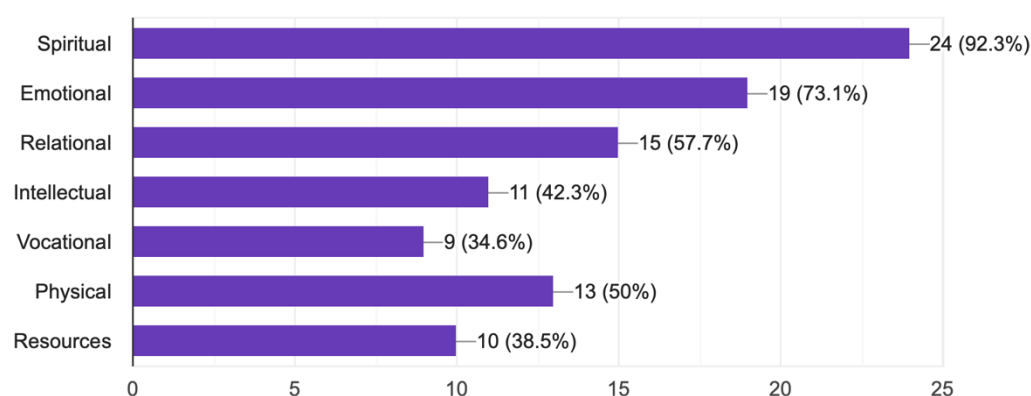


Figure 16.1 Which dimensions resonated most with congregants?

This researcher wanted to demonstrate that spiritual formation is more than an isolated spiritual endeavor; however, the pursuit of becoming like Christ involves and shapes the entire being. Finally, to further understand the congregation's perspective on particulars regarding small groups/Bible studies, the survey posed the question of whether in-person, virtual, or a combination of both would be useful. Majority of congregants stated that they preferred both. As far as implementing future programs is concerned, they can be a combination of in-person and virtual. This may allow more congregants to engage in the discipleship program's offerings. The next section will assess the results as a whole and outline this researchers' insights and conclusions gained from this study.

For small groups/Bible studies, which do you prefer the most?

26 responses

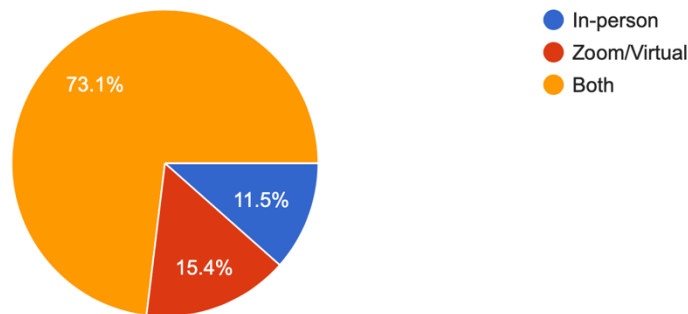


Figure 17.1 In-person, online, or a combination of both for Bible studies

Assessing the Whole

Considering the data collected, this researcher must put forth a cohesive assessment, although tentative, which evaluates the whole, and how it relates to this studies problem and purpose. Firstly, this pastor-students interpretation can be skewed since the data is minimal. The congregation is always in flux. It is always changing. The data is not completely accurate or reflective of the entire congregation. There was minimal participation from congregants in this project's intervention. The congregation consists of about eighty-five people. Twenty-seven congregants completed the assessment, and twenty-six congregants completed the final survey. Nearly thirty congregants attended the Bible study each night. The numbers for each phase were simply too low to determine the congregational-wide effect of this research.

This researcher believes that this study may have possibly engendered different outcomes if a few things were slightly improved. First, this researcher delayed scheduling the focus group, disseminating the link for the assessment, and convening the spiritual formation Bible study. This pastor-student publicly announced the aim and objectives of this research to the congregation during its Sunday morning services, which gathers in-person and virtually. Yet this

researcher assumes that some congregants may have wanted more time to process the research and to complete action steps for data collection. The initial implementation of the intervention stalled for various reasons related to the development of this DMin thesis. The research may have produced a different outcome if the intervention was implemented in a timely fashion. Perhaps more congregants may have participated.

A second observation was that many congregants later expressed to this writer that they had technical difficulties completing the action items. Older congregants unfamiliar with navigating technology expressed their inability to engage the online intervention platforms. Many do not have younger family members available to assist them. This is an ongoing barrier for enhanced ministry and relational development within the congregation. Initially, this researcher intended to offer paper and online versions of the final survey, but this failed to happen. Due to COVID-19, many congregants tested positive at various periods and discontinued attending in-person worship services. Consequently, disseminating paper versions of the research intervention phases were logistically challenging. This researcher postulated that using paper versions would become toilsome and unmanageable for effective evaluation of the collected data.

The congregants that both completed the assessment, survey, and attended the Bible study, for the most part, are the same congregants who attend Sunday school and the congregation's regular weekly mid-week service. This writer did not consider the idea of capturing the attention and participation of congregants that are considered less invested. This researcher understands that not every congregant will be fully and wholly invested into the life and ministry of the church. They may have a fond sentiment for the church because of familial relations. Many families have been connected to the church for many years. A problem that has

been long discussed among the more committed congregants is that many people are, what seems to be, primarily Sunday morning only Christians. Attempting to involve these congregants has been a challenge. This researcher believes that this intervention fell into the lap of the committed, and not those considered less invested in the life of the church. One of the goals of the congregation is to assimilate these congregants into the church's core.

The appropriate plan of action would have been to identify ways to gain the input of congregants who are less active in the overall work and life of the ministry. Yet, although not completely or wholly active, the congregants who are deemed less active or invested still make contributions to the church, even in small ways. However, the goal of this research was to directly stimulate every congregant's desire for spiritual formation and discipleship, invested or otherwise. But this research failed to narrow down the research's target audience: those who are seemingly disconnected from the inner workings of the church's life and ministry. The focus group was comprised of those who are predominately active, engaged, and invested in the ministry. Their perspectives were critical to this research. They provided tremendous insights, and vision-casted ways the congregation could possibly ignite the interest of those less invested.

On the other hand, inviting those congregants who are less engaged in the operations of the church may have been more beneficial for this research. If those who are considered less invested had participated, then this research would have been able to possibly identify what the disconnect is, what they needed to be activated, and to ultimately grow in Christ.

One idea that cannot be dismissed from this research is that each person grows differently. There is not a one size fits all approach to spiritual formation. The Holy Spirit operates within and develops each believer in various ways, according to his divine knowledge of us whom he created. Paul's words to the Philippians that "It is God who works in you, both to

will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13) are resounding at this point. This researcher considers the inner working of the Spirit. Although participants reported an increase in desire/interest for becoming more like Christ, it is God who will stir the heart of the congregation toward spiritual formation intentionality.

Another major goal of this study was transforming the congregation’s Christian education ministry. The problem, originally, was that the Christian education ministry was not intentionally fostering spiritual formation in congregants. This research still holds this problem statement to be true. It is true in the sense that the discipleship ministry must strategize around best practices, and brainstorm ways to make the church’s Christian education ministry more effective. The focus group expressed that Christian education is integral to fulfilling the church’s mission to make disciples, train Christians in the ways of Christ, and to help congregants become more like Christ through holistic Bible engagement. This study did not result in a ministry wide transformation; however, it did allow congregants an opportunity to discuss and imagine what that could look like.

The focus group conjured up many great topics. The discussion was fruitful, transparent, and eye opening. The group posited ideas for what could happen next; offered suggestions for what they felt was needed for the less invested, and for themselves to grow spiritually. The group raised past endeavors to move the church toward transformative Christian education. Unfortunately, these efforts were short lived. This researcher was surprised that the congregation had a form of small groups in the past. This pastor-student considered implementing a small group’s ministry, as a way of transforming Christian education. However, the researcher felt the congregation was not ready for that kind of development.

On a positive note, the intervention did affirm that participants wanted a combination of small groups and Bible studies. This researcher suspected that congregants would want an arrangement of this sort. It should be noted that this pastor-student believes that one way to transform the congregation's Christian education ministry is implementing a combination of small groups, Sunday school, and adult Bible study. The congregation may not be able to manage having all these forms of education, but certainly having one of them (that is, small groups) may be useful. The congregation must develop a discipleship strategy for assimilating new believers and new members into the life of the church. This is an area of extreme challenge for the congregation.

This research intervention succeeded in (1) identifying many of the preferences of congregants for discipleship ministry, (2) encouraging honest dialogue among both focus group and Bible study participants, (3) stirring interest in further spiritual formation, and (4) increasing spiritual formation and discipleship awareness. This pastor-student cannot firmly state that this research radically changed the congregation; however, it did cause congregants to contemplate becoming more like Christ and creating a disciples-making-disciples culture within the congregation. This researcher learned that congregational revitalization is challenging but possible with God's guidance and intervention. Introducing vision, strategizing next steps, and committing to God's absolutes for the NT church will eventually cause the congregation to grow and fully embrace its divine ideal into its life and ministry.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to demonstrate first the central importance of spiritual formation and discipleship to congregational development. First, the problem identified in this research is that the Christian education ministry at MTCOGIC is not intentionally fostering spiritual formation within its congregants. Second, the purpose of this research set out to address the lack of spiritual formation intentionality within the congregation's Christian education ministry. This research argued that maturity in Christ is ultimately a concern which belongs to local congregations, since "Christian spiritual formation is focused entirely on Jesus."¹⁰⁹ Congregations are the expression and embodiment of Christ in the world. Spiritual formation is critically important in the life of the believer, and the congregation, as we consider its very definition by Willard: "Spiritual formation is God's grace-filled process by which a person moves from self-worship to Christ-centered self-denial as an increasingly steady disposition of the heart."¹¹⁰ The entire congregation must hear the call of the Spirit to this steady disposition of heart.

MTCOGIC is an African American Holiness-Pentecostal congregation. The spirituality of the congregation is rooted in the Bible, the personal experience of the Holy Spirit, and the redemption of humanity through the finished work of Jesus Christ. It upholds the Scriptures as inspired, infallible, and authoritative. It is upon this foundation that the congregation builds its theology of spiritual formation and discipleship. The term "spiritual formation," however, may be new to many congregants at MTCOGIC. Congregants are likely more familiar with the term "sanctification." The congregation understands spiritual formation, in a practical sense, to be an

¹⁰⁹ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 16.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 70.

experience which all Christians are called to have on a consistent basis. Spiritual formation is the work of the Holy Spirit, who lives and dwells within the believer. The congregation understands discipleship to be the call of Jesus Christ to intentional and willing training in Christian belief and Christlike transformation. As Willard says, “As apprentices to Jesus, we must be active in the process of our salvation and transformation into Christlikeness.”¹¹¹ Therefore, the congregation identifies spiritual formation and discipleship as activities which require intentional, grace-filled effort to realize. Christian spirituality is both an active and passive enterprise.

This research is not an attempt to argue that spiritual formation and discipleship should be reduced to mere programs and techniques. Programs and techniques, however, have their place. If used properly, they can facilitate/foster the process of people becoming more and more conformed into the image of Christ within the local believing community. Programs cannot take the place of discipleship as the core of the congregation’s ministry of fostering spiritual formation in congregants. Spiritual formation and discipleship are not isolated and sporadic events; they are communal in nature and reflect the person and work of the Triune God. The Christian education ministry at MTCOGIC exists simply to foster Christlikeness in its congregants. Kenneth Gangel and James Wilhoit observes, “growth in the context of Christian education focuses on the goal of Christlikeness.”¹¹²

Although spiritual formation is the goal of the church, it is not easy to accomplish. It is the shedding of the old man and the constant unfolding of the new man in Christ (Col. 3:9). Several barriers exist within the congregation which makes the goal of spiritually growing

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Kenneth O. Gangel, and James C. Wilhoit, *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Adult Education* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 13.

believers a reality. In Galatians 4:19, Paul paints a graphic picture of his anguish in realizing the formation of Christ in his spiritual children at Galatia. This study has shown this researcher that congregational revitalization will not happen overnight. In many respects, it will call for deep anguish. Transforming the congregation's Christian education ministry to achieve spiritual formation within congregants requires consistency, intentionality, strategic planning, and prayer. Yet, revitalization will become a reality as "the community is born through the growth of Christ in individuals."¹¹³ The intent of this project was to affect change, provoke an increasing desire for spiritual formation, and explore ways in which the congregation can enhance its discipleship ministry to help congregants become more like Christ.

To address this project's problem focus, this researcher implemented a four-phase intervention, which revealed that many congregants desire spiritual formation. The various results are outlined in the previous chapter. But this study identified the congregation's lack of intentionality. If the congregation's Christian education ministry will realize the spiritual transformation of its congregants, then developing intentionality is necessary. Intentionality can be defined as anything done with or on purpose. Intentional action steps are critical to fostering spiritual formation within congregants. As Gangel and Wilhoit concur, "...The church has not yet awakened to its responsibilities and potential in adult education."¹¹⁴ This project has mainly focused on, or alluded to, the Christian education and development of adult congregants at MTCOGIC. Integrating more children, youth, and young adults into the congregation is a separate problem, albeit germane to the context in question.

¹¹³ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 212.

¹¹⁴ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 8.

Therefore, this pastor-student must first address the question of relevance gleaned from this study and to identify if it carries relevance and how it may apply to other congregations. Afterward, this researcher will outline next steps for carrying out related future research and pose questions (with possible answers, although not in a lot of detail) which emerge from this research.

Relevance of this Research

(1) *Christian education exists within every congregation in some form or another, and its emphasis, focus, and goal must be clear.* The Christian education ministry at Miracle Temple Church of God in Christ is a work in progress. The pastor invited leaders, Sunday school teachers, and lay people to discuss the congregation's discipleship ministry. It was identified that the focus and goal was unclear. Everyone had ideas concerning what Christian education should be doing, but there was no central purpose which unified the ministry and fueled its endeavor to provide biblical education. Various titles exist for the educational component of local churches such as Sunday school, discipleship ministry, Christian education, Church school, small groups, adult education, adult Bible study, and so on. No matter what the selected name or title is, the focus and purpose of the ministry must be clear. Biblical education should exist, in every congregation, to make disciples who are daily becoming more like Jesus Christ.

(2) *This research is relevant because the Bible is central to all congregational discipleship ministries.* This point may seem obvious, but it may be surprising to learn how many congregations are losing sight of providing challenging, deeply transformative, and insightful engagement with the Bible. Today there is a considerable decline in Bible engagement. Yet the Bible is the source for Christian education and the development of Christlikeness within congregants. There is nothing more relevant than the Bible. The Bible has so much to say to

Christians, and it is the source material for Christian education ministry. This research, if nothing else, encourages ministry leaders to themselves model and promote deep biblical engagement within the local church. Discipleship is a call to teach God's word and to faithfully live according to its principles and precepts through the enabling grace of God.

(3) *This research is relevant because spiritual formation intentionality is missing and declining in all congregations.* The spirituality of God's people tends to wane at certain periods. This has always been the challenge of God's people throughout history: to keep high the intentionality in following God and becoming more like Christ. The prophets and apostles of the OT and NT, in their times, called God's people to return to him with all their hearts, and to experience his renewing presence. Either they were losing intentionality, or they were being called to come back to it. Today the church must come back to intentionality. Spiritual formation in Christ must become the heartbeat of congregations. Spiritual formation intentionality is lacking in every congregation, albeit in varying degrees; nevertheless, must be adequately addressed.

(4) *This research is relevant because spiritual formation and discipleship are communal in nature.* In her book *Fashion me a People*, Maria Harris identifies, what she calls, the "classical activities of ecclesial ministry" in the early church of the book of Acts. Harris argues that these five activities shape and fashion the communal life and vocation of the church today. They are *Kerygma*, proclaiming the word of Jesus' resurrection; *Didache*, the activity of teaching; *Leiturgia*, coming together to pray and to represent Jesus in the breaking of bread; *Koinonia*, or community; and *Diakonia*, caring for those in need.¹¹⁵ The human heart longs for community.

¹¹⁵ Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press 1989).

Community is engrained within the heart of humankind. This point does not disregard individual spiritual formation; however, the Bible demonstrates the power of communal growth. Believers grow spiritually as they engage both private and communal practices. Congregations must be strategic about developing communities within the larger community which promote maturity into the image of Christ. The NT church is a community of people, who proclaim and teach God's word, pray, worship, fellowship, and serve others together.

(5) This research is relevant because it calls for a more robust understanding of spiritual formation and discipleship. The church must deliberately interact with the Bible's teaching, secondary, and tertiary literature on the topics of spiritual formation and discipleship. As American society becomes increasingly hostile toward traditional biblical ideals, it behooves the church to educate itself on how a robust understanding of spiritual formation and discipleship can transform its relevance, calling, and larger influence in the world. The call to making disciples and becoming more like Christ is the calling of the church. But the church must seek to further understand it and apply that understanding, in every way, to its life and ministry. Essentially, this is a call to intentionality. Intentionality in learning, critically engaging, and applying. Imagine the significant work local congregations can do in their communities when their very fiber and DNA is propelled by and with spiritual formation and discipleship.

(6) This research is relevant because local congregations can implement the four intervention phases in various ways and formats depending on their contextual and congregational needs. The four-phases included (1) a focus group which consisted of all the present Sunday school teachers at MTCOGIC; (2) the discipleship pathway assessment by Lifeway; (3) the three-day spiritual formation Bible study; and (3) the final participant survey. This researcher used triangulation (the use of a focus group/interview, assessment, and survey) in

collecting data for the purpose of addressing the lack of spiritual formation intentionality in the congregation's Christian education ministry. First, the focus group should be a congregation's primary tool for encouraging dialogue and brainstorming ideas for the purpose of vision casting. Developing good questions, encouraging healthy discussion can go a long way, and probing for detailed responses can prove transformative for congregants. Focus groups, however, will look different in every congregation.

This researcher selected the discipleship pathway assessment by Lifeway because it performed the basic tasks needed: (1) to provide data regarding the congregations' discipleship state; (2) to provide congregants with data for personal discipleship; and (3) to refrain from recreating the wheel. This researcher used the eight biblical signposts to create the spiritual formation Bible study curriculum. The Bible study was the selected method for introducing the congregants to spiritual formation terminology, using the church's mission statement as lesson topics (which reinforced and integrated congregational vision) and promoted the basic marks of what Christlike discipleship. The final survey posed important questions regarding the impact of the entire process, and if congregants felt motivated to increase their spiritual formation, and to obtain ideas from them concerning discipleship ministry at MTCOGIC.

Other congregations can implement one, all, or a combination of these four methods for identifying their congregational status in spirituality. These four-phases are not the only kinds that exist. Many other doctoral or scholarly works exist which promote varying methodologies for addressing congregational needs. Yet, this researcher encourages ministry leaders to prayerfully observe their context and know what fits them because everything does not work everywhere. And the results of said methodologies will yield varying results as well, which is largely dependent upon the context, timing, preparation, and planning.

Next Steps

The next question is simply, what is next? This research identified a problem and implemented an intervention to address that problem. Results were gained and conclusions made regarding the intervention, to see if it worked or did not. This researcher concluded that this research reached its goal and did not at the same time. By and large, the research did not completely resolve the problem, and that was not the goal or purpose of this research. However, it did move the spiritual formation needle among congregants a bit higher (this was a large goal). Many congregants expressed their desire to grow in spiritual formation, to build relationships, to love God, to love other people, to make disciples, and so on. That was all part of the purpose. On the other hand, the research failed to reach a larger target audience in the congregation, involve the present youth at MTCOGIC, and get more congregants to complete the action steps (four-phases).

But we must ask, what is next after this? Here are some ideas that emerged from this researcher's observations through the process of implementing this research:

(1) *The creation of a ministry development program.* This researcher has identified that the congregation needs ministry development. The topics covered in this program may range from public speaking and communication to training Sunday school teachers in how to be effective facilitators of their classes. This ministry development program will provide comprehensive, action-reflection based education to congregants, and may serve as a division of the congregation's Christian education ministry. The aim is to build and edify congregants' self-esteem, professional acumen, and confidence in serving within ministry.

(2) *Imbed spiritual formation teaching into the fiber of the church.* As it was noted earlier, spiritual formation is a new terminology within this congregation and within Black

churches in general. Therefore, this researcher will be intentional about integrating spiritual formation language and ideals within the congregation's life and ministry. For instance, the Christian education ministry can continue to have a monthly spiritual formation emphasis; preach spiritual formation sermons; use social media, marketing, flyers, and the church's website to reinforce spiritual formation; develop spiritual formation panel discussions/workshops; and assign select ministries an item for discussion which is related to spiritual formation. The goal is not to be exhaustive on this point; rather, it is to show that MTCOGIC (and other congregations) can creatively integrate spiritual formation and discipleship within the life of the church.

(3) *The creation of a Spiritual formation curriculum.* This researcher can collaborate with the publishing house/board of the Church of God in Christ (COGIC) in order to identify spiritual formation and discipleship markers, which reflect the needs of COGIC congregations for spiritual growth and maturity. Once these markers have been identified, they may be used to develop a comprehensive spiritual formation curriculum, which can offer COGIC congregations a Bible study/small group offering, immersed with practical applications, deep Bible engagement, and ideas for relationally based group participation. This curriculum could certainly help COGIC congregations in developing a catechesis (which does not exist to this researcher's knowledge) of sorts for long-standing, incoming, and prospective congregants.

Some of the potential curriculum titles for catechizing COGIC congregants could be: (1) Regeneration by the Holy Spirit: Understanding Salvation; (2) Spiritual Formation: Understanding Growth in Holiness; (3) Filled with the Spirit: Understanding the Baptism of the Holy Spirit; (3) Gifted to Edify: How to Identify and use Your Spiritual Gifts; (4) The Power of Spiritual Disciplines: The Tools for Maturity in Christ; (5) Engaging the Bible: Tackling the Problem of Biblical Illiteracy; (6) A Church Member: Understanding Your Role in the Local

Church; (7) Glorious Community: Understanding the Role of Community in Spiritual Growth; (8) Understanding the Basics of the Christian Faith.

(4) *Go beyond curriculum to a way of life, an all of life approach to discipleship.* It may seem that this point is a contradiction to the one which comes before it. However, it is not a contradiction. It is a reminder that discipleship is a way of life, an all of life approach to being with and becoming like Christ. Spiritual formation is an invitation to disciple everyone toward collective church growth. Do not underestimate the power of mentorship, one-on-one discipleship, sharing meals, empathetic listening, on-the-spot prayer, vulnerable exchange, fun activities which reinforce relationship building and bonding, and routine check-ins, to name a few. Curriculum's often do not mention these things, but they are the things congregation's need to effectively disciple congregants into the image of Christ.

(5) *Refrain from categorizing discipleship and spiritual formation as a ministry of the church; instead, it should be the core of ministry.* This point, in many ways, may have a lot to do with congregational structure and organization. Every congregation is structured differently. But if discipleship and spiritual formation will become the core of the ministry, then it must begin the process of culture shift and formulating a picture in congregants' minds concerning what is most and vitally important to the life of the church. If discipleship and spiritual formation is compartmentalized into a department or lay ministry, then it will fail to deeply move congregants to spiritual growth in Christ. Every activity, every ministry, every event must be immersed in spiritual formation and discipleship. At MTCOGIC, this researcher will intentionally begin to drown every ministry endeavor in spiritual formation and discipleship (that is, make them the topic of table conversation and the actual goal of everything as much as possible).

(6) *Improve the Congregation's Administrative and Management Infrastructure.* The previous point alluded to this point. This researcher is aware that if MTCOGIC is going to fully realize its vision of increasing spiritual formation intentionality, discipling people, and revitalizing the congregation-at-large by emphasizing Christlikeness, then enhancing the church's administrative infrastructure becomes equally important. Administration is a gift of the Spirit (Rom. 12:8), and necessary to facilitate the congregation's mission. MTCOGIC needs strong administrative and management practices. For instance, follow-up and assimilation of Sunday visitors and attendees needs enhancing. Practically speaking, this is part of the process in which people are invited into the congregation's collective endeavor of becoming like Christ. Every ministry (the various parts) will only be as effective as the administrative and organizational component of the congregation (the whole). People thrive and produce in organizationally structured environments.

(7) *Integrate children, youth, and young adults into the life of the church.* An important next step is engaging the children, youth, and young adults already present in the congregation. This research failed to intentionally get the ideas and viewpoints of the youth. Although some young adults did participate in the Bible study and survey, it was very minimal participation. Often youth are the last to be engaged within congregations. There are many reasons for this. (1) Pastors and ministry leaders are often bombarded by other ministry pressures and forget (not purposefully) to make youth congregants' spiritual formation an intentional pursuit, just like everything else. (2) Other times the lack of resources is the culprit. (3) MTCOGIC is primarily comprised of persons aged fifty and above. Demographics is important and cannot be disregarded; however, church leadership and present congregants must proactively identify ways to diversify the congregation. However, no matter what the reason for this lack of intentionality

for youth spiritual development, young people must be incorporated into the very life of the church, in various ways.

(8) *Encourage Small Groups*. This research revealed that a small number of congregants prefer a combination of traditional Sunday school and small group approaches to discipleship. This pastor-student will begin to prepare, plan, and organize focus groups which discuss what small groups can look like at MTCOGIC. Before launching a small groups ministry, the congregation will need intentional discussion, administrative improvement, facilitator/leader training, and so on. However, this researcher can begin a soft introduction to small groups by utilizing present Sunday school classes. The current Sunday school classes, which are combined with all congregants, can one or two Sunday's a month, breakdown into smaller, assorted groups in the main sanctuary, and discuss a point or two from the Bible lesson. Doing this over a period may encourage congregants to consider the viability of small groups.

(9) *Emphasize the Role of Spiritual Disciplines in Spiritual Formation and Discipleship*. To narrow the focus of this research, this study did not include insights concerning the role of spiritual disciplines in spiritual formation and discipleship. Most works on spiritual formation and discipleship include treatment on prayer, fasting, Bible reading and study, meditation, silence, solitude, worship, Scripture memorization, and service.¹¹⁶ In her book *Soul Care in African American Practice*, Barbara Peacock rightly asserts that spiritual formation practices “have been woven into the fabric of the African American culture.”¹¹⁷ Peacock renders

¹¹⁶ Depending upon the source, writers have identified twelve to twenty spiritual habits of the soul. See Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*, Dallas Willard's *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, or Donald Whitney's *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*. This footnote was adapted from Bill Hull's *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 2014, 193.

¹¹⁷ Barbara L. Peacock, *Soul Care in African American Practice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 1.

reflections on the lives of ten African American spiritual leaders, who both embody and models spiritually transformative habits. Truly, we learn how to live the Christian life by drawing on the resources of the presence of the Holy Spirit and Christ's people. This is essentially what Peacock is doing in her writing. Similarly, Willard agrees with her. Willard writes, "The Spirit uses the spiritual riches of Christ's continuing incarnation in his people, including the treasures of his written and spoken word and the amazing personalities of those in who he has most fully lived."¹¹⁸

(10) *Review the Seven Spiritual Formation Dimensions.* During the three-day spiritual formation Bible study, this researcher included the seven dimensions of human growth proposed by Diane J. Chandler's *Christian Spiritual Formation*. Chandler argued (which this researcher agrees) that spiritual formation involves every area of life. Becoming more like Christ means, for instance, we exercise and maintain a healthy diet as a reflection of our love for God. Congregants were asked to write down goals and desired outcomes related to the seven dimensions. After the completion of this research, this pastor-student cannot afford to follow-up with congregants regarding these areas. Therefore, this writer will host a Wednesday evening Spiritual formation night where congregants will be asked (if they feel comfortable) to share what they wrote down for their personal spiritual formation goals.

The Church of God in Christ (COGIC) has a rich history in relation to using spiritual disciplines for the development of personal holiness. As a next step, this research will encourage congregants to reflect upon, in various ways, how the spiritual disciplines help to form Christ in them. This is not a new next step; it is simply an effort to reemphasize the importance and place of building the spiritual disciplines into our daily practice of becoming like Christ.

¹¹⁸ Willard, *Revolution of the Heart*, 17.

In conclusion, C.S. Lewis said it best: “The church exists for no other reason but to make little Christ’s of men.”¹¹⁹ To see the congregants at MTCOGIC become more like Christ, having his presence, power, and provision actively shaping their daily lives is the pursuit of this researcher. This study sought to motivate spiritual formation intentionality in congregants. Rod Dempsey concludes, “For spiritual formation to be revived at the local church level, believers must be taught to obey the commands of Jesus, and the commands of Jesus can be summarized as loving God, loving one another, and loving our neighbors. The church that makes progress toward spiritually forming its members will become healthy and revived.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 199.

¹²⁰ Rod Dempsey, and Dave Earley, *Spiritual Formation Is...:How to Grow in Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2018), 65.

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APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How can Sunday School be enhanced to help congregants grow in their relationship with God?
2. What does discipleship look like at Miracle Temple?
3. What is the mission and purpose of the church?
4. How would you describe our church to a visitor?
5. What is our church's vision for making disciples?
6. What is our church's vision for helping believers grow in their relationship with God?
7. What is discipleship? How do we understand it?
8. What is sanctification? How do we understand it?
9. What are your hopes and dreams for Miracle Temple COGIC?
10. How can we best help new believers develop strong lives in Christ?
11. How can we help mature believers develop a greater love for God?
12. How effective is our current discipleship program? (i.e., Sunday school)
13. What are some weaknesses of our current discipleship programs?
14. What are some strengths of our current discipleship programs?
15. Where are we most effective in our mission? Where do we seem to be making the greatest impact?
16. What are areas where we aren't as effective or haven't made as much progress?
17. What are the key areas, ministries, or aspects of church life that are working well?

APPENDIX B: DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY ASSESSMENT¹²¹

<p>1. During difficult circumstances, I sometimes doubt that God loves me and will provide for my life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>2. I feel comfortable that I can share my belief in Christ to someone else effectively.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>3. Throughout many of my activities I don't think about God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>4. I have several Christian friends who keep me accountable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>5. A Christian must learn to deny himself/herself in order to serve Christ.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>6. I make everything I own available for God to use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>7. I am hesitant to let non-Christians know that I am a Christian.</p>

¹²¹ The assessment prompts in this appendix are taken from Lifeway research. Persons who would like to take this assessment and obtain accurate results and subsequent recommendations for improvement in the 8 biblical signposts from Lifeway Research are encouraged to visit <https://discipleshippathwayassessment.com>.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>8. I desire to please and honor Jesus in all that I do.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>9. I have developed significant relationships with people at my church.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>10. When I sing at church, my thoughts are usually focused right on God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>11. If I go several days without reading the Bible, I find myself unfulfilled.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>12. Each day I am overwhelmed by God's love for me.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>13. I am ready to live anywhere God wants me to live.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>14. I am ready to work in any job God wants me to have.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>15. Spiritual matters do not tend to come up as a normal part of my daily conversations with other Christians.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>16. I have committed my life to bringing glory to God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>17. The Bible has authority over every area of my life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>18. When things happen in my life I can't explain, I typically doubt that God was involved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>19. I try to avoid situations in which I might be tempted to think or do immoral things.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>20. I regularly use my gifts and talents to serve/help people in need who are not part of my church.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>21. While interacting with others on a normal, daily basis, I seek opportunities to speak out about Jesus Christ.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>22. I am intentionally putting my spiritual gift(s) to use serving God and others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>23. Throughout the day I find myself thinking about biblical truths.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>24. When convinced of sin in my life, I readily confess it to God as sin.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>25. I am eager to talk about Jesus with people who are not like me in terms of ethnicity, income, or interests.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>26. If I go several days without reading the Bible, I desperately miss the time with God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>27. I live as if I exist to praise and glorify God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>28. I intentionally spend time building friendships with non-Christians for the purpose of sharing Christ with them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>29. I intentionally make time in my schedule to fellowship and interact with other believers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>30. I sometimes doubt that God can change the lives of non-Christians I know.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>31. I intentionally try to be a peacemaker at church.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>32. I intentionally give up certain purchases so I can use that money for others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>33. I regularly find myself meeting a need without being asked.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>34. I intentionally try to serve people outside my church who have tangible needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>35. I find myself praying at the spur-of-the-moment throughout the day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>36. I intentionally spend time with other believers in order to help them grow in their faith.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>37. I don't think everyone I am acquainted with needs to know I am a follower of Christ.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>38. I consistently contribute financially to efforts and ministries that share Jesus Christ with non-Christians beyond my local church each month.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>39. Many people who know me are not aware that I am a Christian.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>40. I am generally a different person in public than I am in private.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>41. I intentionally try to get to know new people I meet at church.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>42. When I have the opportunity to serve someone, I also try to get to know them better.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>43. When I realize my attitude does not please God, I take steps to try and fix it.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>44. I openly share about difficulties I am experiencing when I talk with Christian friends.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>45. Many aspects of who I am have nothing to do with God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>46. I must have God's help to say no to worldly desires.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>47. I consistently contribute financially to my local church each month.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>48. God is just and sin has to be punished.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>49. If a person is sincerely seeking God, he/she can obtain eternal life through religions other than Christianity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>50. The Holy Spirit is at work in every believer teaching, convicting of sin, and guiding.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>51. Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>52. Jesus was a sinner just like us.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>53. Jesus died on the cross and was physically resurrected from the dead.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>54. The fruit of the Spirit (love, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, etc.) is evidence of a genuine relationship with God.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>55. It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>56. The Bible is the written Word of God and is totally accurate in all that it teaches.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree ○ Somewhat Disagree ○ Strongly Disagree
<p>57. Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strongly Agree ○ Somewhat Agree

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>58. The God of the Bible is no different from the gods or spiritual beings depicted by world religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>59. Christ will return a second time to gather believers to Himself.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>60. There is one true God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Strongly Agree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Agree <input type="radio"/> Neither Agree nor Disagree <input type="radio"/> Somewhat Disagree <input type="radio"/> Strongly Disagree
<p>61. Have you been baptized?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
<p>62. Have you discovered what spiritual gift(s) the Holy Spirit has given you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
<p>63. About how often, if at all, do you personally read the Bible? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Everyday <input type="radio"/> A few times a week <input type="radio"/> A few times a month <input type="radio"/> Rarely/Never
<p>64. About how often, if at all, do you personally study the Bible (more in depth than just reading it?) Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Everyday <input type="radio"/> A few times a week <input type="radio"/> A few times a month <input type="radio"/> Rarely/Never
<p>65. About how often, if at all, do you personally set aside time for prayer of any kind? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Everyday <input type="radio"/> A few times a week

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ A few times a month ○ Rarely/Never
<p>66. About how often, if at all, do you personally set aside time for worship, praise, or thanksgiving to God? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Everyday ○ A few times a week ○ A few times a month ○ Rarely/Never
<p>67. About how often, if at all, do you personally listen to or read teaching about the Bible? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Everyday ○ A few times a week ○ A few times a month ○ Rarely/Never
<p>68. About how often, if at all, do you personally pray in a group with other Christians? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Everyday ○ A few times a week ○ A few times a month ○ Rarely/Never
<p>69. About how often, if at all, do you personally confess your sins and wrongdoings to God and ask for forgiveness? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Everyday ○ A few times a week ○ A few times a month ○ Rarely/Never
<p>70. About how often, if at all, do you personally pray for the spiritual status of people you know who are not professing Christians? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Everyday ○ A few times a week ○ A few times a month ○ Rarely/Never
<p>71. About how often, if at all, do you personally pray for opportunities to tell others about Jesus? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Everyday ○ A few times a week ○ A few times a month ○ Rarely/Never
<p>72. In a typical month, about how many times (if any) do you attend a worship service at your church?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 4 or more ○ 3 ○ 2

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> zero
<p>73. In a typical month, about how many times (if any) do you attend small classes or groups for adults at church such as Sunday school, Bible study, small groups, Adult Bible fellowships, etc?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> 4 or more <input type="radio"/> 3 <input type="radio"/> 2 <input type="radio"/> 1 <input type="radio"/> zero
<p>74. In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, shared with someone how to become a Christian?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> 10 or more times <input type="radio"/> 6-9 times <input type="radio"/> 3-5 times <input type="radio"/> 1-2 times <input type="radio"/> zero
<p>75. In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, served someone who you knew could not repay you.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> 10 or more times <input type="radio"/> 6-9 times <input type="radio"/> 3-5 times <input type="radio"/> 1-2 times <input type="radio"/> zero
<p>76. In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, invited an unchurched person to attend a church service or some other program at your church?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> 10 or more times <input type="radio"/> 6-9 times <input type="radio"/> 3-5 times <input type="radio"/> 1-2 times <input type="radio"/> zero
<p>77. Are you currently involved in ministries or projects that serve people in the community not affiliated with your church?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
<p>78. Do you currently have regular responsibilities at your church (for example: greeter, teacher, musician, etc.?)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No

APPENDIX C: THREE-DAY BIBLE STUDY CURRICULUM

Lesson One **LOVE GOD**

Lesson Text: Matthew 22:34-40

Memory Verse: *“And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ (Matt. 22:37).*

Introduction

We live in a fast-paced, information-overloaded, technological culture. People have become accustomed to soundbites, text messaging, e-mail, blogs, and internet surfing. This accelerated pace of life has caused people to become dominated by impulse and instant gratification. The church has become a locale for entertainment and baseless socialization instead of a community transfixed on loving God. The patient development of spiritual formation has almost become obsolete, even in Christian circles.

Our culture is not the first to leave its first love. Jesus lived among a religious culture that was intoxicated by the external act of piety, following the law's commandments but rejecting the true spiritual essence of the law. In our lesson text, Jesus is approached by an expert in Jewish law, a pharisee whose only reason for questioning him is to test him. The lawyer asks him, *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”* (v. 36). Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 and states that all the law and the prophets depend on these two commandments (v. 40).

Spiritual Formation can be defined as the process of being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ (sanctification). To become more like Jesus, you must learn to love God with your entire being – heart, soul, and mind (v. 37). Becoming like Jesus may seem like a lofty and unattainable goal; however, loving God and growing spiritually is attainable because John said, *“We love because he first loved us”* (1 John 4:19). The love of God is poured into the hearts of believers when they receive the Holy Spirit, and he enables us to love the Lord with our lives (Rom. 5:5). Here are three ways you can grow spiritually in your love for God:

Bible Engagement

Learning to love God with your entire being begins with reading and studying God's word (2 Tim. 2:15). You must allow the story of the Bible to transform your mind (Rom. 12:1-2). God's story becomes your story, and you begin to see yourself as part of the dramatic story of God's redemption in Jesus Christ. Today love for God has grown cold because love for God's story is regarded as worthless and outdated (Matt. 24:12; 2 Tim. 4:3).

The Bible is the written word of God and the rule of faith and practice for Christians. The Bible teaches us how to love God, and it explains why we struggle to love God with our entire being. It is the divine revelation of God Himself. God demonstrates His love for humanity through the *logos* (the word made flesh) Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3; 3:16) and therefore invites us to have an

intimate and personal relationship with Him by faith. The Bible is the cradle of spiritual formation.

Obedience to God's commands is the evidence of love (John 14:24). Therefore, how do we increase our Bible engagement to further grow in our love for God?

- 1) *Pay attention to how you approach God's word* – Do you approach God's word with reverence and respect, or do you lightly brush off the Bible as another book?
- 2) *Read the Bible carefully* – if you race through reading the Bible, you can miss what God is saying to you. Read slowly and keep a notebook close so that you jot down things you observe.
- 3) *Ask Questions* – Approach the Bible with curiosity.
- 4) *Pay attention to the Context* – to interpret the Bible correctly; you must read the entire context. Read the chapter, book, and testament to understand the message better.
- 5) *Pray* – Begin your time in God's word with prayer. Prayer is vital to understanding the Bible and God's will for your life.
- 6) *Obey the word* – The more you read the Bible, the more you will discover new applications for living the Christian life. Read the passage and ask the Spirit to show you what it's saying to you and how you should apply it to your life.

FORMATION NUGGET

Coming to terms with past emotional traumas, wounds, regrets, and bondages are inseparably tied to our faith journey and being formed into the image of Jesus Christ. God wants you to be emotionally and spiritually free.

Seeking God

To love God and to grow spiritually requires you to seek God. To seek means to search or look for or to discover. Discovering God is an amazing journey. To draw closer to God, one must believe that he exists and reward those who seek him (Heb. 11:6). Socrates' precept remains true, "Know thyself." Seeking God is a matter of learning oneself or going deeper into oneself (knowing/acknowledging your strengths and weaknesses) to be formed in Christ.

Understanding the human condition and how God enters the world's chaos to bring peace and redemption motivates us to seek him more. God calls his people to seek him (Is. 55:6-7; Hosea 10:12; Amos 5:4-6). God promises to be found when people seek him (Deut. 4:29-31; Prov. 8:17; Matt. 7:7-8). Seeking God leads to life (Rom. 2:7-8), forgiveness (2 Chron. 7:14), blessing (Ps. 119:2), provision (Ps. 34:8-10), protection (Ps. 27:4-5), wisdom (Prov. 28:5), strength (Is. 40:30-31), and rejoicing (1 Chron. 16:10).

Seeking God is closely related to loving him with all your heart, soul, and mind (1 Chron. 22:17-19; Ps. 27:8; 63:1). Loving God should be the priority of our lives as we seek God and his kingdom (Matt. 6:33; Ps. 27:4). So, how can we make seeking God a practical part of our daily lives? (1) Read the Bible, (2) Cultivate your prayer life, (3) Find ways to serve within your local church and community, (4) Make a conscious effort to think about God, (5) Develop strong relationships with other believers, (6) Spend time in silence and solitude, (7) journaling, (8) Attend a good Bible study, (9) Make confession a daily practice, (10) Spend time worshipping God. What other practices can you put in place to stir your personal spiritual formation.

Exercising Faith

Faith is defined as confidence or trust in a person or thing. Faith is a constant outlook of trust towards God, whereby humankind abandons all reliance on their own efforts and places their complete confidence in God, his word, and his promises. Since the 17th and 18th centuries' Enlightenment, many people in the west have rejected the notion of faith because it appears to have no proof for it or is contrary to reason. Richard Dawkins, an acclaimed Atheist, said, "Faith is blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence. It is a process of non-thinking. It is evil precisely because it requires no justification and brooks no argument."¹²²

Dawkins' characterization of faith is not the Christian understanding of faith. Its priority on faith and beliefs widely depicts Christianity. Christians are commonly called "believers" because their lives are fully characterized and identified by their faith in God. The act of having faith includes emotional trust, intellectual belief, volitional love, obedience, and reason (the acts of understanding, discovering, and proving truths). To have faith in God is an act of the entire person (heart, soul & mind). It is vulnerability: entrusting your life, hopes, dreams, desires, failures, and future into the hands of God. Paul says, "*We walk by faith, not by sight*" (2 Cor. 5:7, ESV). In other words, the believer has a spiritual capacity to interpret the world around them according to God's word. We fix our eyes on what is unseen and eternal (John 20:29; Rom. 8:24-25).

Love for God is evidence of true faith. Love and faith are both entirely in Jesus Christ and overflow into the lives of believers (1 Tim. 1:14). True faith produces love for God and others. Paul told Timothy to be an example in speech, how he lived, in love, in faith, and in purity (1 Tim. 4:12). You can grow in faith by reading and studying the example of believers in Scripture who stood firm in faith and refused to waver in their confident trust that God would fulfill his word (Rom. 4:20-25; Heb. 11).

Questions for Reflection

- 1) What does spiritual formation mean?
- 2) What does it mean to love God with your heart, soul, and mind?
- 3) What is the role of the Bible in your spiritual formation?
- 4) What does seeking God look like in your daily life?
- 5) What does it mean to have faith in God?
- 6) How does engaging God's word, seeking God, and exercising faith help you grow in your love for God?
- 7) How are you intentional about spiritually forming your love for God?
- 8) What does it mean to identify, express, and understand your emotions in a healthy and Christ-honoring way?

Spiritual Formation Plan Assignment

Spiritual formation involves every dimension of life. **Complete the spiritual and emotional dimensions of the formation plan.** Write down at least three goals or outcomes you'd like to accomplish for each category.

¹²² Quoted in Alister McGrath and Joanna Collicutt, *The Dawkins Delusion?: Atheist Fundamentalism and the Denial of the Divine* (London, ENG: SPCK, 2007), 1.

Lesson Two **LOVE PEOPLE**

Lesson Text: John 13:34-35

Memory Verse: *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for another” (John 13:35).*

Introduction

Jesus’ disciples are commanded to love one another. This command was nothing new to Jesus’ first-century audience. They were very familiar with it (Lev. 19:18). Discipleship is the call to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt. 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8). Christians are given a divine responsibility to reflect God’s love to one another and those outside of the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). In 1984, Tina Turner released the song, “What’s love got to do with it?” The Christian response is everything. The love the disciples were to demonstrate was reflective of Christ’s love for them (John 15:12; Eph. 5:2), the love the Father had for Jesus (John 15:9; 17:26), and the love Jesus had for the Father (John 14:31).

The truth is that we can look around our world and see the hatred people have for one another. We can see in real-time the love deficiency everywhere. Perhaps the problem is that people don’t know how to love, nor have they had good models of what authentic love looks like. The Bible predicted that people would become lovers of themselves (2 Tim. 3:2), lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God, and not loving what is good (v. 4). These are undoubtedly characteristic of our times. People simply don’t love one another. Our culture is marked by individualism (the individual’s happiness matters more than the community). But what happens to the church when it adopts this individualistic mentality? One answer is that it turns inward and becomes preoccupied with itself and not the needs and interests of others. It becomes infected by the deadly disease of isolation from the broader community, which needs its gospel message.

Therefore, maturity and growth in Jesus Christ look like serving God and others and building relationships. Christians must return to seeing the value in serving in ministry and developing healthy relationships with people, even those different from you. It is not enough to say that we love God and dismiss our brothers and sisters (1 John 4:21). The watching world knows that we are Christ’s disciples when we show and practice love to one another (John 13:35).

Serving God and Others

Christians display the love of God when they serve God and others. Growing into spiritual maturity involves doing the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12). God’s love is the foundation for genuinely loving ourselves and loving people in the right way. But we must first love God. Ministry is a privilege. Love should be the motivation for doing the work of ministry. If you function in ministry to receive accolades, praises of men, or gain social status, your motivation is misplaced. There are many ways to have misplaced motivations in doing ministry. However, if we seek to bring glory to God and express his love to a troubled world, we are serving God and others rightly.

As God's holy people, compassionate, kind, humble, and patient, we bear with one another, forgive one another, and we seek to outdo each other in honoring one another (Col. 3:12-14; see also Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 3:12; Heb. 13:1). This is part of the Christian's ministry. Love is expressed in humility (Gal. 5:26; 1 Pet. 5:5), patience (1 Thess. 5:14), acceptance (Rom. 15:7), acts of kindness (1 Thess. 5:15), burden-bearing (Gal. 6:2), encouragement (Heb. 10:24-25), teaching and admonition (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19), prayer and confession of sin (James 5:16), and showing hospitality (1 Pet. 4:9).

The mark of growing into Christlikeness and being a disciple of Jesus is loving other people as Christ has loved you. We must be reminded that the Holy Spirit has distributed spiritual gifts to Christians to build up the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:1-11). Congregations become weakened when believers fight each other over whose gift is better or more significant or more necessary (1 Cor. 12:14-24). Every believer in the congregation fits and is essential to the proper functioning of the body of Christ. Disciples of Jesus cannot serve one another when divisions and competition consume them. Paul says, "*if one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together*" (v. 26). Envy hinders Christians from truly empathizing with one another.

Building Relationships

It was noted earlier that a quest increasingly marks our culture for independence, self-preservation, control, privatization, avoidance of accountability, superficial relationships, and isolation.¹²³ People are busier than ever, and the dawn of social media has changed the way people connect. This does not make social media inherently bad; it just heightens the possibility of superficial relationships because it's easy to cast a false image of oneself to give the impression you are happy when you may not be. Technology, media, entertainment all contribute to the growing plight of authentic, deep interpersonal relationships.¹²⁴

People often feel it is best to isolate themselves and do life alone. This way, they can avoid being hurt by others. Fear of rejection contributes to this pervasive sense of isolation from community. There are several reasons people run away from communal relationships. Christian spiritual formation and discipleship are community-based. We come to faith in Christ as individuals, but we grow into Christlikeness in community. Some people cannot grow spiritually in community because they possess a know-it-all attitude, and no one can tell them anything. This cuts away at the Christian community. Discipleship often doesn't happen because building relationships in the church is missing. Relationships are critical to maturity and disciple-making.

We must remember the biblical foundation of community. Community begins with the triune God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. We do not believe in three Gods. There is only one God (Deut. 6:4; Is. 42:8; James 2:19). Yet God reveals himself in Scripture as three persons. Each of the persons of the Godhead does things only God can do, receive the worship due to God alone. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit interact with one another in complete love and harmony and with us. They share the same purpose and activity. Then, the

¹²³ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical, Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 440.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Triune God created human beings with the deep need for relationship with himself and with others (Gen. 1:26). The need for relationships is fundamental to human existence.

So, what can we do to build better and mutually sharpening relationships that assist Christlike growth amid the increasing corrosion of relationships around us? How can we build relationships?

- 1) *Build relationships one at a time* – You may never be able to build strong relationships with many people. Building relationships is hard work. It requires perseverance. So, start with a like-minded individual and build out from there. Jesus called his disciples to follow him one at a time and often in small clusters.
- 2) *Be friendly* – On the one hand, developing friendships requires you to be friendly. A smile can go a long way, or asking a person how they are can spark a conversation—on the other hand, making friends too quickly and indiscriminately can end in your own destruction. You must pray for discernment and wisdom as you create relationships (Prov. 18:24; 19:4).
- 3) *Ask questions* – Don't be afraid to ask people questions. Some people are willing to share about themselves. You can learn a lot by listening and being attentive. Have a sincere curiosity about other people.
- 4) *Share about Yourself* – It's okay to share things about yourself as you get to know others. It's easy to put up a guard and block yourself off from sharing too. But share what you're comfortable with. Don't feel pressured to tell your whole life story. Take it slow. Find out what the other person is willing to share. That may help you to learn what you should or should not share.
- 5) *Explore the world* – Travel. Visit other cities, states, and countries. You can learn about the various lifestyles and cultures of the world. This will expand your sensitivity to other people.
- 6) *Accept people for who they are* – Don't make changing other people your goal. To forge new and fresh relationships, meet people where they are. Embrace people for who they are and find out where they want to go. Invite the Holy Spirit in to do the work of changing them. Sometimes we want to change other people into copies of ourselves because it makes us comfortable. Refrain from trying to create people in your own image.
- 7) *Listen* – Listening is a lost art nowadays. Most people spend more time talking than listening. Relationships will never grow or flourish if you don't learn to listen to others. Listening well is a skill that must be developed. If you listen well, you can understand others better.

A Deeper Look at Christian Community

Read Acts 2:42-47. After the Holy Spirit descended in the upper room on the day of Pentecost, the NT church was born. The gathered disciples (men and women) were filled with the Spirit and were empowered to be witnesses of the gospel. Peter, the apostle, preached the first sermon, and thousands were brought to Christ. Acts 2:42-47 gives us a closer look at the practices of the early church and how the believers interacted with one another. As you read the passage, write down what you observe regarding the early church's practices in the space below. These practices should be the norm for the church today:

FORMATION NUGGET

For human beings to flourish and produce, the basic need for relationships is essential. Healthy and formative relationships nurture personal identity, character, self-esteem, belonging, a sense of competence, and intimacy. Christ-honoring relationships are vital in spiritual formation and discipleship.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) What does it mean to love your neighbor?
- 2) How do you love a person that constantly hurts you and mistreats you?
- 3) How do you love unlovable people?
- 4) What is the mark of Christlike growth and being a disciple of Jesus Christ?
- 5) What are some of the reasons people avoid developing relationships with others?
- 6) What are some of your fears regarding building relationships with others?
- 7) As you read Acts 2:42-47, what stood out to you about the state of the early church's discipleship and spiritual formation?

Spiritual Formation Plan Assignment

Spiritual formation involves every dimension of life. Being whole spiritually influences every aspect of your life. **Complete the relational and intellectual dimensions of the formation plan.** Write down at least three goals or outcomes you'd like to accomplish for each category.

Lesson Three
MAKE DISCIPLES

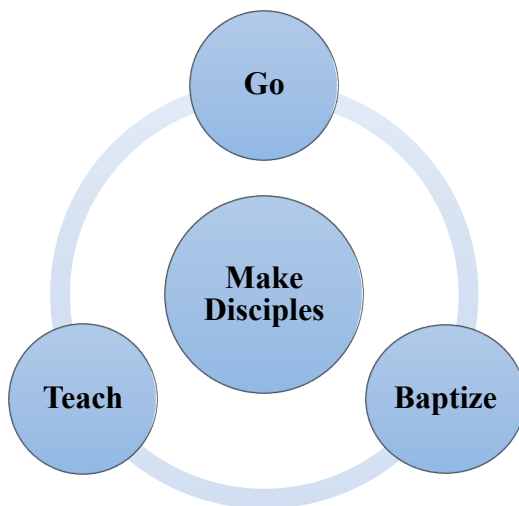
Lesson Text: Matthew 28:16-20

Memory Verses: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you...”* (Matt. 28:19-20, ESV).

Introduction

Dallas Willard said, “The great commission has become the great omission.” The church is experiencing a discipleship deficit. Discipleship is not a high priority in many Christian circles and congregations. Why has the church lost focus on making disciples? Probably because it has made entertainment, popularity, fashion, and position seeking, to name a few, its priority. When Christian discipleship is absent, you are left with a sickly and frail church. Actual spiritual formation can only occur in atmospheres driven by disciples making disciples.

In Matthew 28:16-20, Jesus arranged for his eleven disciples to meet with him in Galilee. The presence of doubt (that is, the hesitation or indecision, not unbelief) of some has caused many scholars to believe that more than eleven disciples were present during this meeting with Jesus. The eleven disciples who had received at least two or three appearances from the risen Jesus were prepared to worship him. But those disciples in Galilee who had not yet seen the risen Christ, like Thomas in John 20:24-29, would have had reasonable doubt concerning Christ’s bodily resurrection from the dead. Jesus appeared to them and declared his divine authority (v. 18). Because of his authority, he commanded his disciples to make disciples of all nations (v. 19).



The imperative “*make disciples*” is the central focus of the great commission, while “*go*,” “*baptizing*,” and “*teaching*” describe aspects of the process of making disciples. To go is to evangelize the lost, to be witnesses of Jesus Christ’s transforming power, and to reach out to the community with the gospel by performing acts of kindness, which reveal God’s love for people. Baptizing in the name of the Triune God is the result of people hearing the gospel and making a committed decision to follow Jesus. To demonstrate their commitment to Christ, they are

baptized in water, representing Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead (Col. 2:6-15), and the believers internal cross over from death to life (John 5:24). To teach is the task of the disciple. Disciples teach the word of God (that is, all that Christ has commanded). Other marks of Christian discipleship are obeying God and denying self, living unashamed, and sharing Christ.

Obeying God and Denying Self

The call to be a disciple of Jesus is essentially a call to obey God and deny self. Christian discipleship is not popular because of this very reason. It is not widely accepted to deny oneself what one believes one deserves. People tend to feel they are being sinned against if they cannot have what they believe belongs to them. The rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-30 is a great example. The young man wanted to know how he could inherit eternal life. Jesus railed off a few of the laws, and the young man retorted that he had kept all the commandments, Jesus mentioned. Jesus said, *"One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me"* (vv. 18-22). The young man instantly became sad because he was wealthy (v. 23). He could not deny his wealth. He loved riches more than God; therefore, he could not follow God.

Many people cannot follow God because the cost is too high. The cost of discipleship is self-denial and taking up your cross to follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 14:27). Following Jesus will cost you friends, family, riches, comfort, and status in the world, but the payoff is greater than what you could ever give up (Luke 18:28-30). Jesus died so that believers could be free from living for themselves (2 Cor. 5:15). The Christian lives for and belongs to the Lord (Rom. 14:7-9). The sacrifice of the believer is their very life. The believer's life is no longer centered on living for human passions; instead, they live for the will of God (1 Pet. 4:2).

Giving up the "good things" of life to follow Jesus seems dreary and uninteresting. But on the contrary, it is the best life you could ever live because you know that your life has purpose and meaning, and the call to selflessness and commitment to God and people is worth it. Obedience to God should not be perceived as some empty religious performance (1 John 5:3). Instead, obedience is borne out of love for God (John 14:21, 23-24; 15:10, 14). Obedience to God is the key to answered prayer (1 John 3:22). But obedience is not blind. We obey because we know the truth, which has set us free (John 8:32).

FORMATION NUGGET

Living for God does not mean that we disregard healthy living. We must make self-care, exercise, and eating healthy part of our daily lives. Living a whole and integrated life in Christ involves taking care of our physical bodies so that we can serve God and others without impairment. Being a follower of Jesus means being a faithful steward of our entire being.

Living Unashamed

As believers in Christ, we have no reason to drop our heads in despair and hopelessness. We have no reason to be ashamed of our calling to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Paul said, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes"* (Rom. 1:16). It has become common for believers to live private lives. They don't want anyone

to know that they are born-again Christians. Isn't this unfortunate? People gladly proclaim their allegiance to a particular sports team, career, lifestyle, or hobby. Why should the Christian be ashamed of living their life for Christ out loud and boldly so that everyone can see the goodness of God through them?

Jesus told his followers that they were the light of the world, a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden (Matt. 5:14). The result of the disciples' bold living would bring glory to God (v. 16). Rejecting the demands of discipleship is to be ashamed of Jesus Christ. Believers should not be tiptoeing through the world; we should be boldly using every opportunity to do good for the sake of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The growing disciple of Jesus is filled with holy boldness (Acts 4:29-31).

Sharing Christ

The final mark of a disciple continually formed in Jesus Christ is sharing Christ. Believers should not be fearful of living boldly for Christ, and they should not be afraid to share Jesus with others. The great commission emphasizes going into the world with the good news (Matt. 28:19). Evangelism is essential to discipleship. First, the church must be reminded of what the gospel is. The gospel is the good news of Christ's life, suffering, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, and how that message transforms the sinner into a believer that is being renewed into the image of Jesus Christ.

The gospel is the message about God's love for fallen humanity. God reveals the gospel (Gal. 1:11-12). It centers on Jesus Christ (Mark 1:1; Acts 11:20). It is the announcement of God's kingdom (Luke 4:18-19). It concerns the death and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:3-4). It is a call to repentance and the forgiveness of sin (Luke 24:47). It is the announcement of peace with God (Acts 10:36; Eph. 2:17-18; 6:15). Evangelism is a gospel responsibility. And the very act of evangelizing is empowered by the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Sharing Christ with the lost is the call of every growing disciple of Jesus. We share Christ because we care about the lost. We want them to hear the good news of salvation through the grace of God.

Questions for Reflection

- 1) What does it mean to make disciples?
- 2) Why is obeying God and denying self so hard to do?
- 3) How do you share Christ with an unbeliever?
- 4) What does it mean to be the light of the world, a city set on a hill?
- 5) How do you know you are growing spiritually as a disciple of Jesus Christ?
- 6) How does eating healthy effect your spiritual life?

Spiritual Formation Plan Assignment

Spiritual formation involves every dimension of life. Being whole spiritually influences every aspect of your life. **Complete the vocational, physical, and resource dimensions of the formation plan.** Jot down at least three goals or outcomes you'd like to accomplish for each category.

APPENDIX D: PERSONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION PLAN

“...until Christ is formed in you!” (Galatians 4:19, ESV)

SPIRITUAL FORMATION PLAN		
Dimension		Goals or Desired Outcomes
Day One	Spiritual	1)
		2)
		3)
	Emotional	1)
		2)
		3)
Day Two	Relational	1)
		2)
		3)
	Intellectual	1)
		2)
		3)
Day Three	Vocational	1)
		2)
		3)
	Physical	1)
		2)
		3)
	Resource	1)
		2)
		3)

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT SURVEY¹²⁵

18. Gender:
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Male
19. Age Group:
 - ☐ 20-30 years old
 - ☐ 31-44 years old
 - ☐ 45-59 years old
 - ☐ 60 and older
20. Which of the following best describes your preferred Bible study approach? (Choose one)
 - ☐ I prefer to study the Bible by myself
 - ☐ I prefer to study the Bible by myself and in groups
 - ☐ I prefer to study the Bible in groups
21. How important is it for you to learn and study the Bible?
 - ☐ Extremely important
 - ☐ Very important
 - ☐ Somewhat Important
 - ☐ Not at all important
22. What discourages or prevents you from participating more fully in bible studies/Sunday school? (Check all that apply).
 - ☐ I do not have enough information about the time of bible study
 - ☐ I do not have time to devote to it
 - ☐ Work schedule conflicts
 - ☐ Family responsibilities
 - ☐ No groups tailored for individuals my age
 - ☐ No groups tailored for my gender
 - ☐ No groups tailored to my interests
 - ☐ Lack of transportation
 - ☐ I simply am not interested
 - ☐ This question does not apply to me
23. Which of the following bible study topics interests you? (Check all that apply)
 - ☐ Beginners guide to studying the Bible
 - ☐ Biblical perspectives on current issues
 - ☐ Christian marriage/relationships
 - ☐ Christian parenting
 - ☐ Practical Christian living
 - ☐ Understanding and exercising spiritual gifts
 - ☐ Book by Book Study
 - ☐ Basic Christian Beliefs
 - ☐ Spiritual Disciplines
 - ☐ Leadership
 - ☐ Finances
24. Which of the following methods do you prefer in a bible study setting? (Check all that apply to your preference)

¹²⁵ This survey was adapted from <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TPP8H8T> (accessed on February 5, 2021). This researcher modified certain aspects of the survey to accommodate the needs of the project's context.

- ☐ Book, with leader facilitated discussion
 - ☐ Independent study with online group discussion
 - ☐ Group viewing DVD followed by group discussion with facilitator
 - ☐ Small group, peer-led discussion
 - ☐ Guest Speaker and discussion
25. What are your preferences for where Bible study sessions should be held? (Check all that apply)
- ☐ At the church
 - ☐ In someone's home
 - ☐ At a public place
 - ☐ At my home – I would be happy to host a bible study
26. As a result of the spiritual formation bible study, do you feel spiritually stronger?
- ☐ Strongly Agree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Strongly disagree
27. Did the spiritual formation bible study stir your interest in becoming more like Christ?
- ☐ A great deal
 - ☐ A moderate amount
 - ☐ A little
 - ☐ None at all