

# ***NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY***

THE SOFIA DISCIPLESHIP PROJECT: A CONTEMPORARY ADAPTATION OF THE WESLEY  
CLASS MEETING TO MEET THE DISCIPLESHIP FORMATION NEEDS OF THE LEADERSHIP

TEAM OF THE SOFIA FIRST CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE

A Project Submitted to the Seminary Faculty In  
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement For the  
Degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

By  
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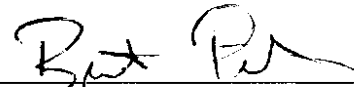
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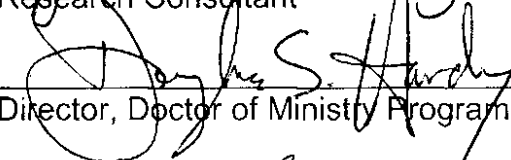
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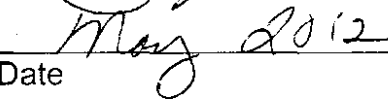
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## **ABSTRACT**

Delivering Covenant Discipleship through social networking is an effective way to connect established communities to overcome contemporary challenges to discipleship. Over ten weeks, four online reporting modes measured the SDP's effect both on a group and on six individuals. The SDP illuminated the realities of dissatisfaction with discipleship practices, busyness in ministry overwhelming disciple formation, and an imbalanced practice of discipleship. The project called for increased intentionality on discipleship formation in the preparation and practice of ministry, measuring discipleship and ministry in terms of faithfulness and fruitfulness, a commitment to group discipleship accountability, and a balanced approach to discipleship.

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**CHAPTER 1: THE CONTEXT AND FOCUS OF THE SOFIA DISCIPLESHIP PROJECT**

**Realities of Contemporary Life**

The realities of contemporary life are numbing. The world seems to be in a constant state of accelerated change. Technology regularly emerges which make outdated and obsolete the technologies that emerged two to three years previously. New technologies arrive with the promise to simplify our lives, connect us with others, and make the living of life more convenient. Yet, too often the results of an over dependence on technology accomplishes just the opposite; increased burden, further isolation from others, and additional complication of our lives.

For those living in the cities, substantial energy is required to keep up with the demanding pace of life. Moving from point to point in the cities requires choosing between two daunting options. The first option of public transportation often involves the utilization of numerous inconvenient connections on over crowded buses, trolleys, or trams (with their accompanying sights, sounds, and smells). The alternative option is to travel with your own vehicle and endure the stresses of congested traffic and inadequate parking. It is no surprise then, that many urban people are guarded in making further commitments of time and energy beyond the basic requirements of life and work. There is a high bar to be hurdled in order to convince the contemporary urban person that an additional event in the week is worth the time and energy it

will demand.

Contemporary life is increasingly mobile. People tend to relocate away from the place of their birth. The pursuit of education and the demand for jobs compel them to move away from their home setting. In doing so, they lose the network of family and friends on which they have depended for various areas of support. The loss of a support network is not easy to re-establish in a new and unfamiliar location. As a result, displaced people often remain disconnected or establish a patchwork of weaker connections, absent of the network of support on which they have depended.

Contemporary realities for those in ministry are also demanding. Pastoral and staff ministry come with high and often unrealistic expectations from the people they serve. The range of ministries expected and the level of excellence demanded by congregants requires a high level of professional performance. The amount of time and energy required to successfully meet these demands in such an environment is unrealistic. Many do not have an adequate supply of time or energy and are, therefore tempted to divert time and attention away from essential areas like discipleship formation in order to meet the demands of ministry.

### **Questions Arising Out of Contemporary Life**

Valid questions arise in light of these amazing realities. What is the function and proper place of discipleship in the life of the contemporary Christian? Will the same unchanged methods of discipleship be appropriate and adequate in this ever-changing environment, or do the realities and challenges of today's society call for a change in the discipleship methods we utilize? Are contemporary urban Christians willing to invest adequate time for the discipline required for discipleship, or are the realities and



challenges of contemporary life incompatible with living a consistent, disciplined life of discipleship? How do we support today's ministers, in light of the demands placed on them, and hold them accountable for consistency in discipleship?

Certainly every generation is presented with its own obstacles and challenges to discipleship. Discipleship is never easy or convenient, nor is it meant to be. We cannot expect that the demands of life in any era, for any generation, will easily lend themselves to a life committed to the discipline of discipleship. It is the charge of every generation, therefore to wrestle with the questions with which they are presented, and with wise discernment, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to develop effective strategies for discipleship for the people of its generation.

### **The Sofia Discipleship Project Defined**

The Sofia Discipleship Project is an attempt to do just that. The SDP seeks to explore the contemporary context and to search for ideas and methods that converse with the questions and challenges that arise out of the present generation. The SDP attempts to recover valuable aspects of the past and implement them in the light of the realities of the present. The SDP seeks to strengthen the effect of discipleship practice by restoring a proper balance between the discipleship practices that develop love for God with those that develop love for neighbor. The project aims to take away the notion that discipleship is an individual endeavor, and replaces it with the conviction that discipleship is a group project. To do so in the current mobile society with its weaker connections, the SDP explores a new format of social media that has the potential to connect people in a way that addresses the contemporary, urban challenges of time and distance. The Sofia

Discipleship Project then is a group discipleship project that contemporizes Wesley's class meeting in the form of covenant discipleship through the medium of a social network.

### **The Need**

The Sofia Discipleship Project begins with a confession. We have neglected a consistent, intentional commitment to the discipleship formation of our leaders and congregants. We have failed these people with a hit-and-miss approach to discipleship, leaving the responsibility for discipleship in the lap of the individual. The SDP then, grew out of a realization that the way discipleship has been done is ineffective and needs to be re-examined. In the times when we have paid attention to discipleship, we have often employed outdated and culturally inappropriate methods. The stark realization is that we have not done an adequate job of discipling our people.

At a leadership meeting prior to the SDP, one of the members of the Sofia 1<sup>st</sup> leadership team confessed to the group that he had not picked up his Bible for six months, since the last time he was asked to preach in the Sofia church. Several of the others present at the meeting nodded in agreement and confessed similar feelings of spiritual dryness. This became a wake up call, loudly calling for an effective, intentional, culturally relevant discipleship method that can be implemented to meet the discipleship/formation needs of the Sofia leadership team.

### **The Context**

The context for the SDP is the Sofia 1<sup>st</sup> Church of the Nazarene located in Sofia, Bulgaria. The Sofia church was described in a recent congregational analysis.<sup>1</sup> The average participant in the Nazarene

Church in Sofia is a woman (86%) over the age of 75 (50%), retired (72%) and widowed (42%).<sup>2</sup> She earns less than 150 Leva (\$100.00) a month (42%). The typical attendee comes to church every Sunday (79%) by multiple lines of public transportation (84%) traveling more than 45 minutes (60%) one way. She began coming to the Nazarene Church for a variety of reasons and continues to come to the church because she feels the presence of God and because she likes the pastor. She has been attending the church for around 8 years.

Most attendees are members of the church, have completed the membership classes (71%), and were not members of another denomination previously (71%). The attendee indicates that she is happy with the church (73%) and feels that her opinions about the church are heard and valued (100%). She would like to invite someone else to the Nazarene Church in Sofia (93%) and would describe the church to a friend as being a good church, with good people, good preaching, and with love between the members.

<sup>1</sup> See Nancy T. Ammerman, et. al. *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> See "Congregational Analysis of Sofia 1st Church," conducted in December 2006 for the course DM925 Ecclesial Ministry in the Wesleyan Spirit.

The average attendee would like to change the church by having better facilities and more people, especially young people. She believes that the best thing about the church is the people, the love between them, and the preaching of the Word. She believes that the greatest challenge facing the church is the building and the growth of the church.

She believes that the mission of the church is varied; mainly to spread the Good News and to grow.

The composite attendee is content with the amount of attention shown to worship (92%), prayer

(79%), preaching (75%), and Nazarene beliefs (62%). She strongly believes that many of the ministries and activities of the church need more attention; outreach and evangelism (86%), church growth (83%), Sunday School (83%), NCM programs (79%), small home groups (79%), activities for senior adults (79%), and others. She very strongly believes that no activity or ministry of the church should receive less attention (0% of all answers were marked "less attention needed").

### **The Potential Participants**

Ten people from Sofia, Bulgaria were invited to participate in the Sofia Discipleship Project. This group actually was fairly diverse, consisting of six Bulgarians, and four others from two separate countries. They range in age from mid 20s to mid 40s. Six of the potential participants were women and four were men. All but two of the participants have formal theological education. Six of the participants have master level degrees in various fields. Nine of the ten participants were recognized as mature Christians by the other participants while one was seen as a newer Christian.

Those invited to participate in the SDP were busy, urban young adults committed to ministry. They keenly felt the stresses of contemporary life and ministry described above. They tried to juggle the stresses of contemporary urban life with the demands of ministry. They have had a desire to deepen their walk with Christ through consistent discipleship, but often have not found the time or energy to do so.

The desire for the project was that that it would have produced an "ecclesiola in ecclesiolae" effect on the participants of the project as well as on the congregations they attended. It was hoped that the rising of a few would result in the rising of the entire church. Although all the potential participants have attended Sofia 1<sup>st</sup> Church in the past, the circumstances of life have scattered them across several congregations

throughout Europe. It was hoped that greater attention to accountability for discipleship formation in the participants would also produce a leavening effect in the congregations where the participants worship and serve.

### **SDP Main Questions for Exploration**

The Sofia Discipleship Project sought to answer the following questions;

***Question 1: Can the 18<sup>th</sup> century Wesley class meeting be effectively adapted to meet the discipleship/formation needs of the Sofia 1<sup>st</sup> leadership team?***

Obviously we cannot assume that a discipleship approach developed to meet the needs of people in 18<sup>th</sup> century Britain will automatically transfer to the 21<sup>st</sup> century Bulgarian context. History has progressed, culture has changed, and even language has evolved. What aspects of the class meeting transfer to the SDP context and what aspects need to be adapted? David Lowes Watson has done good work to translate the class

meeting through the changes of time. More work is required, however, to translate the

<sup>3</sup> See Brent D. Peterson, "A Post-Wesleyan Eucharistic Ecclesiology: The Renewal of the Church as the Body of Christ to be Doxologically Broken and Spilled Out for the World." (Ph.D. diss., Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2009), 145-46 for an excellent discussion of the historical development of *ecclesiola in ecclesiolae* and its place in Wesley's thought.

class meeting through the changes of culture.

***Question 2: Will the combination of compassion and holiness result in more effective discipleship formation in the life of the participants?***

James 1:27 teaches that pure religion (or we can also say discipleship) is the combination of holiness and compassion, where the two exist in the same space.<sup>4</sup> Too often these essential aspects of discipleship have been disjointed, with one aspect taking predominance over the other. Can we realign these essential aspects into balance, and will the balance of the two result in noticeable improvement in "pure religion" (or discipleship)?

***Question 3: Will the changing of the approach to discipleship/formation from individual effort to a group project increase the effectiveness of discipleship formation in each of the participants?***

Possibly the most all-encompassing encroachment of western culture into the religious experience in the west is individualism. Taking the Reformation's claim of the universal priesthood of believers to an extreme, many western Christians believe their discipleship is the individual's personal responsibility. Discipleship is not an area that others are invited to participate in, nor is it an area for others to meddle in. This has greatly weakened discipleship. We, as isolated individuals, have an uncanny ability to overlook our shortcomings. We are able to accept our lack with great ease. Without the accountability of others, we can even justify the remaining presence of outright sin in our lives. We convince ourselves that everything in our discipleship lives is Okay, when it obviously is not. The result is stunted or no growth in our spiritual lives year after year. It

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 9 for an in depth explanation of James 1:27.

is time, then to recover an understanding that we really are responsible for each other.

***Question 4: Will the utilization of social media methods overcome the perceived challenges of the leadership team while maintaining the necessary connectedness of the group?***

Because of the realities of contemporary life, people are disconnected and are slow to make commitments of time. These issues have become significant challenges to discipleship formation in contemporary society. Can the utilization of social media effectively address these challenges?

***Question 5: Can the Wesley class meeting be appropriately adapted within an Orthodox cultural context?***

In the literature review, a strong distinction will be made between the theology and practice of the spiritualities between Orthodoxy and the west. Because of the cultural and historical realities, theology and spiritual practice in the east and the west cannot be approached in the same way. Yet Wesley was heavily influenced by the 4<sup>th</sup> century Desert Fathers and incorporated a significant amount of their thought in his own theological understanding. What of the class meeting, then is appropriate in the Orthodox context and what needs to be adapted to better connect to the Orthodox environment?

#### **Definition of Terms**

For the sake of clarity, the following terms will be understood in the following way throughout the SDP:

***Adequacy Indication questions*** - the questions in both the Initial Questionnaire and the Final Questionnaire which asked the participants to evaluate the adequacy of each of the 11 discipleship

commitments. The rating system was Non existent, Inadequate, Hit and Miss, Adequate, and Consistent.

***Covenant Discipleship*** - David Lowes Watson's concept of a group that meets together regularly to hold each of its members accountable for discipleship commitments previously agreed upon in a Covenant Statement.

***Covenant Statement*** - a document agreed upon by all the SDP participants at the end of the initial weekend seminar that contains the discipleship commitments as well as the personal commitments.

***Discipleship*** - the journey of becoming more like Christ through the consistent practice of the spiritual disciplines.

***Discipleship commitments*** - refers to the 11 specific statements in the Covenant Statement that the SDP participants identified and committed to.

***Final Adequacy Indication*** - a point value based on the participants' rating of the Adequacy Indication questions in the Final Questionnaire. The point values are Non existent equals 0 points, Inadequate equals 1 point, Hit and Miss equals 2 points, Adequate equals 3 points, and Consistent equals 4 points.

***Final Satisfaction Indication*** - a point value based on the participants' assessment in the Satisfaction Indication questions in the Final Questionnaire. Zero (0) points were

given for "Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve" and 1 point was given for "Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is."

***Initial Adequacy Indication*** - a point value based on the participants' rating of the Adequacy Indication questions in the Initial Questionnaire. The point values are Non existent equals 0 points, Inadequate equals 1 point, Hit and Miss equals 2 points, Adequate equals 3 points, and Consistent equals 4



points.

***Initial Satisfaction Indication*** - a point value based on the participants' assessment in the Satisfaction Indication questions in the Initial Questionnaire. 0 points were given for "Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve" and 1 point was given for "Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is."

***Initial Weekend Seminar*** - the weekend meetings at the beginning of the SDP designed to establish a common understanding of the need of discipleship and construct the covenant statement.

***Personal commitments*** - refers to the additional personal statements in the covenant statement in addition to the discipleship commitments. These are specific commitments a particular participant has made on which they will also report and on which they are asking the other participants to hold them accountable.

***Satisfaction Indication questions*** - the questions in both the Initial and Final Questionnaire which asked the participants to evaluate their satisfaction level with each of the 11 discipleship commitments. The participant was to respond either "Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is," or "Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve."

***SDP*** - The Sofia Discipleship Project. This specifically refers to the initial weekend seminar and the 10 weeks of check-in in through the website.

***Social media*** - a form of connection through Internet web sites. Specifically for the SDP, this is the closed website at <http://dp.seethefield.org>.

## **Research Methods**

The Sofia Discipleship Project will employ research methods as outlined by William R. Myers in

*Research in Ministry.*<sup>5</sup> Specifically, the quantitative research method will be used to establish a baseline of data through a questionnaire, an interview, a week activity log, and a spiritual autobiography. At the end of the project the interview, the questionnaire, and the week activity log will be repeated. The results will be compared to the initial baseline data in order to measure the effect of the project.

### **Preview of the Remaining Chapters *Chapter 2: Relevant***

#### ***Literature Informing the Sofia Discipleship Project***

The second chapter of the Sofia Discipleship Project will explore the literary background of the areas the project explores. Specifically, four areas will be explored; Orthodox theology and spirituality, Wesley and the class meeting, recent approaches to discipleship, and social networking. The literary review will provide an understanding of both the background of the setting as well as a starting point from which to adapt the program to the specific context in which the leadership team is located with its unique particulars.

<sup>5</sup> William R. Myers, *Research in Ministry: A Primer for the Doctor of Ministry Program*. (Chicago: Exploration Press, 1993), 25.

#### ***Chapter 3: The Participants and Process of the Sofia Discipleship Project***

The third chapter of the Sofia Discipleship Project will introduce the reader to the participants of the SDP. This chapter will also document in detail the chronological process of the project beginning with the recruitment of potential participants and concluding with the post-project meeting of the participants. Initial questionnaires, interviews, an activity log of a typical week, and a spiritual autobiography will assist the reader in understanding the backgrounds and discipleship challenges of each participant. A questionnaire, interview and activity log will also be conducted toward the end of the project and compared to the initial data to analyze the effectiveness of the project.

#### ***Chapter 4: Results and Trends of the Sofia Discipleship Project***

The fourth chapter of the Sofia Discipleship Project will attempt to measure the effectiveness of utilizing social networking for Covenant Discipleship to meet the discipleship and formation needs of the Sofia leadership team. Specifically, the data will be analyzed to measure the effect of the project on each individual participant as well as its effect the participant group as a whole. To accomplish this, a descriptive analysis of the data collected at the end of the project will be compared to the baseline data collected at the beginning of the project. While a portion of the data is based on the participant's self-assessment in various areas of discipleship and formation, the input of the other participants will also be taken into account. The SDP data will also be examined in the light of the five SDP Main Questions for Exploration.

#### ***Chapter 5: Lessons Learned and Further Implications of the Sofia Discipleship Project***

The fifth chapter of the Sofia Discipleship Project will take the results and trends discovered in chapter 4 and ask the question, "So what?" What do the results and trends tell us? What has the SDP helped us to discover and learn? Were there surprises or unexpected outcomes? The results of the initial, pilot project will underline the value of repeating the project in future settings. What does the project want to say to the broader church? The SDP will attempt to make strong recommendations to the church about what needs to be changed in its efforts for discipleship formation.

## **CHAPTER 2: RELEVANT LITERATURE INFORMING THE SOFIA DISCIPLESHIP PROJECT**

Four streams of thought have influenced the formation of the Sofia Discipleship Project. First,

Eastern Orthodox theology and spirituality forms the cultural and theological background of most of those invited to participate in the project. Second, Wesley and the class meeting provide a historical example of what can be accomplished through intentional, communal attention to discipleship and formation. Third, recent approaches to discipleship, with close attention to David Lowes Watson's work in the area of covenant discipleship, help to shape how the centuries-old methods of Wesley can be effectively utilized in the current day. Fourth, social networking is the media format of the project chosen to connect the participants for the purposes of encouragement and accountability. A descriptive and analytical survey of the relevant, representative literature in each of these areas can provide valuable insights to contribute to the effectiveness of the project.

### **The Influence of Orthodoxy**

While it is true that none of the participants of the Sofia Discipleship Project have ever understood themselves as devout adherents to Eastern Orthodoxy, the influence of Eastern Orthodox values and worldview on the Bulgarian culture and people should not be underestimated. Eastern Orthodoxy is the spring from which the theological understanding and the spiritual practice of the Bulgarian participants has sprung.

The Orthodox context begins with a brief history of Bulgaria's adoption of Orthodoxy, and how Orthodoxy fits into the contemporary Bulgarian mindset. Understanding Orthodoxy and its influence on the Bulgarian people is a difficult task for those outside Orthodoxy. The task is further complicated by the fact that over the centuries the development of Orthodox theology and spirituality has followed a divergent stream of that of the western church. Dimitru Staniloae then, is consulted as the primary guide to help us

understand the movement of Orthodox spirituality. Kallistos Ware is the primary guide to help us understand selected aspects of Orthodox theology.

### **The Orthodox Setting**

<sup>6</sup> Kallistos (Timothy) Ware, *The Orthodox Church*. (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1997),

Bulgaria became an Orthodox nation in 865 AD, when Greek clergy baptized Khan Boris I into the Orthodox faith.<sup>6</sup> Since that time, Orthodoxy has become enmeshed with the national and cultural identity of the Bulgarian people. Most Bulgarians would enthusiastically nod in agreement to the frequently heard phrase, "To be Bulgarian is to be Orthodox." For a country situated on a small peninsula which bridges the expansion-hungry empires in the west and in the east, the greater significance of this phrase is its implied, converse meaning; "To be Bulgarian is to NOT be Muslim," or "To be Bulgarian is to NOT be Catholic or Protestant." Remaining Orthodox has been a matter of national pride and cultural identity against the external pressure on Bulgarians to convert to Islam or western Christianity. Even though few devout Orthodox believers can be found in contemporary Bulgaria, the simple fact of the unbroken identification of the Bulgarian people with Orthodoxy for over 1200 years underlines the significance of Eastern

Orthodoxy's influence on the Bulgarian people.

Orthodoxy is the preservation of Christian Tradition defined as "the faith and practice which Jesus imparted to the Apostles, and which, since the Apostles' time, has been handed down from generation to generation in the church." The faithful believers glorify God through 'right worship,' that is nothing less than the one true church of Christ on earth.<sup>8</sup>

## Understanding Orthodoxy

In the west, the certainty and stability of the church of modernity is fading into the uncertainty and instability of post modernity. The proclamation of the spoken and written word is being de-emphasized in favor of participation in ritual liturgies. Expounding the logical and well-established doctrines of the church is giving way to exploring the mystery of the faith. In the search for fresh, new expressions of worship, some seekers are turning to the richness of the ancient faith of Orthodoxy. The practice of church in the west is evolving to something similar to the ancient practices of the church in the east.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 8.

Becoming intimately acquainted with Orthodox theology and spirituality, however, is a difficult task and may be outside the grasp of someone who does not fully embrace the Orthodox faith. Kallistos Ware asserts, "There is only one means of discovering the true nature of [Orthodox] Christianity. We must step out upon this path, commit ourselves to this way of life, and then we shall begin to *see for ourselves*. So long as we remain

outside, we cannot properly understand."<sup>9</sup> Alexander Golubov more sharply states the same, saying "the stark realization, ultimately, is that an externally descriptive approach to [Orthodox] Christian spirituality is, at best, meaningless, absent the dimensions of theological definition and evaluation, appropriation, and understanding of inner goals and

purposes."<sup>10</sup> Orthodox theologians insist, therefore, that the only purpose of studying

Orthodox spirituality is to invite the learner into it.

Even if an external examination of Orthodox theology and spirituality was a viable possibility, the western inquirer may still find Orthodoxy difficult to understand. Eastern Orthodoxy was isolated from the west during the most influential centuries that shaped the way a westerner thinks and views the world. The Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Age of Enlightenment, therefore, have had a relatively limited effect on Orthodoxy. Because of this, Orthodoxy often has different theological categories, philosophical foundations, and logical starting points than the western church. Ware affirms this noting,

Christians in the west, both Roman and Reformed, generally start by asking the same questions, although they may disagree about the answers. In Orthodoxy, however, it is not merely the answers that are different - the questions themselves are not the same as in the west.<sup>11</sup>

Theological inquiries between the east and the west, then, require a great deal of careful attention and grace in order to avoid misunderstanding.

<sup>9</sup> Kallistos (Timothy) Ware, *The Orthodox Way*. (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), 8.

<sup>10</sup> Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar*. (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2003), 11.

Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 1.

## **Two Divergent Streams**

The difference between the church in the east and the church in the west can be understood as divergent streams which have run independently for the last 1,000 years. Islam's advancement through the Byzantine Empire and later in the Ottoman Empire has been harsher in Orthodox lands than in the west. The

two streams have flowed farther apart in the past century: the west facing such challenges as industrialization, modernism, postmodernism, materialism, relative ease and complacency; and the east struggling for their very survival in the face of severe persecution under Atheism and Communism.

The approaches to theology and spirituality greatly differ between the eastern and western churches. Eastern Orthodoxy is more art than science. It is more caught than taught. It is more of a sense than a sight. It is more of a feeling than a thought. It is more mystical than logical. The westerner who ventures into the thought and practice of the Eastern Orthodox Church will have to deal with these significant differences. Offering some hope, Ware gives the following advice to those seeking to better understand Orthodox spirituality, "we need to be given directions before we start; we need to be told what signposts to look out for; and we need to have companions . . . but this is no substitute for direct, personal experience."

**Dimitru Staniloae: A Guide to Orthodox Spirituality**

<sup>12</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 8

The writing of Dimitru Staniloae then, will serve as a guide to help us better understand Orthodox spirituality. Staniloae was a Romanian Orthodox priest serving the church in Romania during the dark and difficult period of Communism. He paid a dear price for his faith by being interred in a Bucharest prison for six years. Staniloae's

academic contribution to Romanian Orthodoxy was immense, teaching in seminaries and translating significant Orthodox texts into the Romanian language. His practical contribution was also great through his clear and profound explanation of spirituality and his consistent lifestyle. He is highly revered in Romania to this day.<sup>13</sup> Because of his vibrant Orthodox faith in the face of great diversity and the depth and clarity of



his writing, Staniloae is regarded as one of the most significant Orthodox voices from the Balkan peninsula over the last century.

### *The Passionate State*

Staniloae meticulously describes the movement of Orthodox spirituality. The passionate state has been described as the lowest level to which human nature can fall, a state of passivity or slavery. The passions quickly overcome the will, so that the passionate person is no longer a person of their own will, but a person ruled and enslaved by the desires of the passions. Specifically, two interwoven characteristics of the passionate state tie the passionate person to the world and, against their will, further alienate the passionate person from the Divine. These characteristics are both precipitated by the passions and serve to further propagate them. They are both fruit and cause of the passions.

<sup>1</sup> See John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches*. (Cambridge: University Press, 2002), 92-93.

<sup>14</sup> See Staniloae, 26.

One such characteristic is the passionate person's existence between the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.<sup>14</sup> Much of life is spent between these two poles. As

pleasure inevitably ceases, a pause of boredom follows which reminds the passionate person of their finitude and unavoidable, impending death. The passionate person, then, is compelled to again pursue pleasure with greater vigor. This establishes the instability of the person in the passionate state.

A second characteristic of man in the passionate state is the disunity of the human self due to the

straying of the mind from the heart. The mind has escaped the heart and, in its continuous activity, is easily distracted by the passions. Staniloae notes, "The mind which wants to return to the heart hardly finds the way. It must struggle much with the thoughts around it, to make its way toward it and to open it."<sup>15</sup> The mind's rebellious independence from the heart, seeking pleasure over pain, represents the predominance of the senses over the spirit.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 259.

The two characteristics of the passionate state, seeking pleasure over pain and the distraction of the mind apart from the heart, ensure that the one in the passionate state is vulnerable, easy prey for Satan's temptation. Satan sends the passionate person 'bait' by means of the bodily appetites; stirring up from the outside a need in the sub-conscious realm. From this initial, external provocation the mind 'couples' with the outside thought in connection with a passion and considers the temptation as a possible option. At this point the temptation is given approval by the mind and quickly ascends to concrete action and outright sin. Staniloae describes the devastating effects of the passionate state, "our nature becomes like a ball in the hands of the passions, thrown here and there by every circumstance and impression. It no longer stands firm in freedom; it has reached a

spiritual weakness that bears all the signs of corruption."<sup>16</sup> The Orthodox view of the person in the passionate state, therefore, is bleak,<sup>17</sup> requiring a long and determined path of ascent out of the hopeless and devastating grip of the passions.

*Purification, Illumination, and Union*

Man's reestablishment as a unified self in relationship and unity with the Divine requires a path of purification, illumination, and perfection. Shults and Sandage describe this three-stage progression as the classical Christian understanding of transformation. The first stage, purgation (or purification), is "awakening to the idea that one's way of life is tending toward death."<sup>18</sup> The second stage, illumination, is coming to understand oneself in light of the divine presence. It is depending on God rather than on one's own capacity to "know."<sup>19</sup> The culminating stage, union (or perfection), is coming into

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relational unity with the Divine. It is intimacy with God, the gift of divine presence.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>17</sup> See Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 23 - 24; The bleak Orthodox view of the person in the passionate state, does not equate to either an Augustinian or Calvinist view of fallen humanity. Although the image of God is distorted by original sin, it is not destroyed. Human freedom is always present.

<sup>18</sup> F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 26.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 26-7.

<sup>21</sup> Staniloae, 97.

The long process of purification of the passions begins at baptism. Mark the Ascetic taught that at baptism Christ comes to live at the altar of the heart. Christ dwells in the innermost part of the baptized believer, without the believer realizing it at firsts

The believer gradually becomes aware of Christ's presence in the heart as the ascent of purification

progresses. Christ's presence begins to replace the reign of Satan in the heart of the passionate man.

Diadochos of Photiki asserts that at the moment of baptism, grace "is hidden in the depths of the mind; Satan is evicted and he influences us from now on by

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the bodily senses and by the sweetness of irrational appetites." The miracle of baptism is not only a mystical death and resurrection by the one who is baptized; it is also the inauguration of a process in which this death and resurrection continue until perfection. Staniloae confirms this saying, "baptism is the death of the old man, understood in two ways; first as a mortal blow which it gives to it, making the start for the new man, and secondly as a gradual mortification of the tremors which will last for a time."<sup>23</sup>

Baptism, therefore, is the beginning of purifying the mind and the heart of the passions. All progress and good in spiritual ascent is the unfolding of the grace that God has already placed in the heart of the believer at baptism. The grace of baptism is "the embryo of the new man."<sup>24</sup> The unfolding of the grace of baptism is a natural progression of ascent, as each virtue grows out of and builds upon its preceding virtue. The establishment of the ascending virtues serves to dislodge and expel the dominance of the passions.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 186.

Upon the attainment of all of the previous virtues, the believer enters the state of dispassion. Dispassion is "a state of peace and quiet, of spiritual rest."<sup>25</sup> Kallistos Ware describes dispassion, "not as a negative condition of indifference or insensitivity in which

we no longer *feel* temptation, but a positive state of reintegration and spiritual freedom in which we no longer *yield* to temptation."<sup>26</sup> Staniloae describes the benefits of the dispassionate state saying,

The endeavor for dispassion is one of pulling up the weeds which hinder the growth of the grain field of love; its breaking down of the wall of the egotism of the soul, to let the soul be of real use to others, not a more complete enclosure within the walls of total indifference.<sup>27</sup>

Having been freed from the distraction of the passions by the attainment of the virtues, the mind now has gained the ability to concentrate on a higher subject. After the work of purification is completed, the gifts of the Holy Spirit received at baptism are activated, as

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is the activation of the Holy Spirit's direct influence in the life of the believer. The mind of the believer begins to seek knowledge about the Divine.

The processes of purification and illumination not only free the believer of the passions, but also serve as the necessary preparation for the believer to receive the gift of God himself. The unity with the Divine through the gracious descending of divine light sets the believer on an unending discovery of knowledge of the Divine. Such knowledge is not gained through intellectual understanding, but through personal union and direct, empirical experience with the Divine. The dispassionate, virtuous believer is invited to participate in the life of the Holy Trinity, characterized by self-giving love between the persons of the Trinity. Through the process of deification, human energies, therefore, are increasingly replaced by divine energies.

<sup>26</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 117.

<sup>27</sup> Staniloae, 189.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

Shults' description of wisdom closely mirrors the movement of Orthodox

spirituality, "we become wise as we come into a transforming relation with divine wisdom, in which we are invited to share in the intimacy of the dynamic knowing and being known that is the life of the infinitely faithful Trinitarian God."<sup>29</sup> The triune God is the origin, condition, and goal of the human knowing and being known. As we are invited into this intensifying relation with the triune God of knowing and being known we are neither absorbed by God nor alienated from him. Instead, we realize our true identity as we share in Jesus' experiential knowledge of the Father through the Spirit. Transforming prayer becomes the expression of knowing and being known by God. Shults' understanding of wisdom comes very close to the Orthodox concepts of theosis and deification. Through the sacraments and the life of the church we are brought into participation in the Trinity. He became what we are so that we might become what He is. The triune God initiates the process and is therefore the origin. The triune God is also the goal in the process in that we become what he is. The entire process is God's doing through grace, and is, therefore, the condition of the process. We are not assimilated into the essence of God, but fully participate in the energies of God.

### **Kallistos Ware: A Guide to Orthodox Theology**

An excellent guide to help the inquirer understand Orthodox theology is Timothy (Kallistos) Ware. Bishop Ware bridges the gap of understanding between the east and the west. Ware's heart is firmly entrenched in the east. Ware is an Englishman, yet he has advanced deep into the Orthodox faith being consecrated as the titular Bishop of the

Shults and Sandage, 71.

Diokleia in 1982. Bishop Ware's mind, though, is still firmly oriented in the west. Ware's writing style is simple, logical, and thorough. He organizes Orthodox theology and practice in a way that is familiar to western thinkers. So through Bishop Ware's writings there is a unique opportunity to grasp the eastern church in ways that engage the western thinker. With his western mind and his eastern heart, Ware constructs a bridge of understanding between the two divergent streams.

### *Ware's Ecclesial Contribution*

Beyond providing helpful introductory information on Orthodox theology and spirituality in a logical and understandable format, Kallistos Ware also makes a valuable contribution in the area of ecclesiology. Orthodoxy teaches that the church is to be an

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icon of the Holy Trinity. Icons paint images of the spiritual world, "opened books which remind us about God."<sup>32</sup> As an icon of the Holy Trinity, then, the church is to incarnate

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" Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, foreword.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 240.

on earth the mystery of unity and diversity present in the Holy Trinity. In the Trinity there is one essence but three persons. Although the Son is begotten of the Father and the Spirit proceeds from the Father, there is no rigid hierarchy among them. They mutually indwell in each other in perfect communion and love. Where one person of the Trinity is present all are present. This mystery of unity and diversity is to be mirrored in the church. Members of the church are to "live sacrificially in and for others in practical service

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active compassion." In doing so, the church becomes a powerful icon through which the world views the image of God.

Ware contends that an incorrect understanding of the Trinity leads to an incorrect understanding of the church. The reverse is also true; an incorrect understanding of the church can be attributed to an incorrect understanding of the Trinity. According to the Orthodox Church, the genesis of the rigid hierarchical structure present in the Roman Catholic Church originated from their departure from a correct understanding of the Trinity, specifically allowing the appearance and acceptance of the *Filioque*. The insertion by the west of the phrase "and [from] the Son" in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed to "I believe . . . in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father," most likely originated in Spain to guard against Arianism in the sixth century.<sup>33</sup> Over the next five centuries the *Filioque* became more widely accepted in the west, yet remained strongly opposed in the east. Bishop Ware asserts, "Filioquism confuses the persons, and destroys the proper balance between unity and diversity in the Godhead."<sup>34</sup> According to some of the stricter theologians within Orthodoxy, the Holy Spirit in western thought has become subordinate to the Son - if not in theory, then at any rate in practice. The west pays insufficient attention to the work of the Spirit in the world,

in the church, and in the daily life of each person. Ware then concludes,

<sup>34</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 39.

<sup>35</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 50.



<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

Because the role of the Spirit has been neglected in the west, the church has come to be regarded too much as an institution of this world, governed in terms of earthly power and jurisdiction. And just as in the western doctrine of God, unity

was stressed at the expense of diversity, so in the western conception of the church unity has triumphed over diversity, and the result has been too great a

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centralization and too great an emphasis on Papal authority. The western church reflects its  
//ogwe-induced subordinate view of the Trinity through its hierarchical church structure. In doing so, the western church's structure fails to reflect the mystery of the unity and diversity of the Trinity. The church should be the image of the self-giving love which exists among the personalities of the Godhead.

#### *Communal Salvation*

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>39</sup> Kallistos (Timothy) Ware, *How are We Saved?: The Understanding of Salvation in the Orthodox Tradition*. (Minneapolis: Light & Life Publishing, 1996), 68.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 70.

For the purposes of the Sofia Discipleship Project, several points of Orthodoxy must be highlighted. First of all, although Staniloae's depiction of Orthodox spirituality is seen as highly dependent on the individual's toil, Ware recovers Orthodox theology's insistence that salvation is a social and communal process, not merely isolated to the individual.<sup>39</sup> This is due to our being created in the image of the Triune God. God is "not merely personal but interpersonal, not a unit but a union, not self love but shared love."<sup>40</sup> The salvation of the believer then, is to mirror this communal and relational union in the Trinity. Because we are created in the image of this interpersonal God, our salvation can only be attained in

unity with other persons. Our salvation is "inextricably bound up with the salvation of the neighbor."<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, the place for this communal salvation is in the church. Ware explains,

No one is saved alone. He who is saved is saved in the church, as a member of her and in union with her other members. If anyone believes, he is in the communion of faith; if he loves, he is in the communion of love; if he prays, he is in the  
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communion of prayer. In Orthodoxy, there is no salvation outside the community of the church.

#### *The Unbroken Fellowship of the Church*

Another important insistence of Orthodoxy is the unbroken, universal connection and fellowship of the true church. Through the sacramental fellowship with a bishop and in the midst of even a few believers, the presence of Christ is constituted. Where Christ is, there is also the complete church from all times and from all locations. As such, the church becomes the extension and perpetuation of the Incarnation in the world. Just as Jesus Christ is Immanuel, God with us, through his Incarnation, the Church is to be Immanuel Incarnate, God with us, in the world wherever it is located.

#### *The Incarnation*

<sup>42</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 107-8.

The importance of the doctrine of the Incarnation in Orthodox theology cannot be overstated. Through participation in the Divine Liturgy and the entire experience inside the walls of the church, the believers empirically witness the Incarnation. The Word becomes flesh and lives among us. God has

stepped into the material world to bring about its redemption. Our senses are the door, the avenue through which we encounter the God who came into our physical world. The participatory witness through the senses in the Divine Liturgy is a reminder that the Orthodox faithful are the continuation of the Incarnation of Christ in the world. God incarnates Himself outside the doors of the

Church through the lives of the faithful believers. Christ is placed in the heart of the believers at baptism. His presence in the heart of the believers is nourished through the believer's participation in Holy Communion. As the faithful Orthodox believers leave the confines of the cathedral and return to their homes and places of work, they literally carry Christ with them into the world. In doing so, therefore, Christ is further incarnated into the world.

The Orthodox Church maintains that empirical experience in worship is an affirmation of the Incarnation. It is through the material of the created order that salvation has come to the world. The Divine God entered into matter and thus made it holy. Christ became a visible, touchable, hearable, physical man. Worship, then is meant to be physical and sensual. All senses are utilized in Orthodox worship. From the moment the believers step through the outer doors of the church, their senses remind them that they are in a different place. They are no longer in the world with its rebellion and opposition to God. The overwhelming empirical evidence confirms that they are in a new place, an intersection between heaven and earth. The sweet smell of incense is a reminder of the near presence of God and the ever-present, interceding prayers of the saints. The beauty of the icons, devoid of emotions, is a window into heaven, retelling God's intervention in and through the lives of the saints. As such, they are a clear contrast to and break from the continual visions of the passions in the world outside the doors of the church. The harmonies and chants are a stark contrast from the sounds outside the church and stand in contrast to the sensuous, clanging melodies

of the world. Even through the common tastes of bread and wine, the believer is brought to another place; the presence of Christ. Furthermore, as the legs tire and the joints begin to ache from standing for hours on the

hard concrete floors of the cathedral in the midst of the majesty and beauty of God, the Orthodox faithful are reminded of their own human frailty.<sup>43</sup> God is great but we are weak. We are in constant need of God to sustain our lives and to aid our spiritual ascent toward Him. We encounter the Divine through the physical and material world.

A natural consequence of the Incarnation is the redemption of the entire created world. It is the only possible outcome after the infinite, holy God became embodied in the created order. The infusion of the holy, divine, God into creation overwhelms and expels the rebellion and decay in the created order. Bishop Ware alludes to this, stating, "We are not saved *from* but *with* the world . . . Our salvation leads to the redemption of the whole created order."<sup>44</sup> We, therefore, are caught up in and participate in the redemption of the entire creation.

#### *Scripture*

<sup>43</sup> The physical description of Orthodox worship is taken from my own experience from a practicum during the Lenten season of 2008. With the permission of Father Valentin, I regularly attended the Divine Liturgy at the Cathedral of the Dormition of the Theotokos of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church Old Calendar in the Buxton district of Sofia, Bulgaria.

<sup>44</sup> Ware, *How are We Saved?*, 80-81.

<sup>45</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 199.

The Orthodox view of the authority and function of Scripture is important to note. For the Orthodox believer, it is essential that Scripture not be taken out of the entire body of Tradition, but be seen as a part of Tradition as a whole. The Bible is not to be seen as something set up *over* the church, but as

something that "lives and is understood from *within* the church."<sup>45</sup> Bishop Ware notes, "It is from the church the Bible ultimately derives its authority, for it was the church which originally decided which books form a

part of Holy Scripture; and it is the church alone which can interpret Holy Scripture with authority." It was the church that gave birth to the Scriptures, so the Scriptures serve as the daughter of the church. When someone converts to the Orthodox Church, therefore, they do so with a promise, "I will accept and understand Holy Scripture in accordance with the interpretation which was and is held by the Holy Orthodox Catholic Church of the East, our Mother." Scripture serves the church.

#### *The Goal of Orthodoxy*

What, then, is the purpose or goal of the life of the Orthodox believer? According to Bishop Ware, "The whole aim of the Christian life is to be a Spirit-bearer, to live in the Spirit of God, to breathe the Spirit of God." In Orthodoxy, this is the way of deification, to become "partakers of the divine nature." It is the mission of Orthodox believers to be earthly icons of the beauty of heaven; on earth as it is in heaven. Through faithfully receiving and actively participating in the Tradition of the church members of the church embark upon the journey to participate in the Divine nature. In doing so, Orthodox believers become icons of God in the world, opened books to remind others about the infinite beautiful and mysterious unity and diversity of the Triune God. The church continues the Incarnation of Christ as the Holy Spirit empowers and engifts its members to

continue Pentecost in the world. As the Christian community progresses on the way of deification, the church becomes healers of even the physical world, mediating redemption to the entire creation. The vision of Karl Barth corresponds to the optimistic Orthodox view of the church in the world. Barth says that the goal of the church is the

revelation of the sanctification of all humanity and human life as it has already taken place in Jesus Christ. In the exultation of the one Jesus . . . there has been accomplished already a powerful archetype, not only the cancellation of sins and therefore the justification, but also the elevation and establishment of all humanity and human life and therefore sanctification.<sup>51</sup>

The continued presence of Christ in the world, the church, completes the work of the Incarnation of Christ by bring redemption to the entire created order.

### **The Influence of Wesley**

The discussion of the influence of Wesley begins with a brief history of the early Methodists. The section continues with an exploration of the development of the structure of Methodism; society, class, band, and select society. Several theologians then voice in on the significance of Methodism on the church and society both then and now. The discussion then turns to selected significant aspects of Methodist practice and theology. Finally Orthodoxy and Wesley are placed side-by-side, drawing comparisons in their respective thought and practice.

#### **The Early Methodists**

<sup>51</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV.2, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. Edited by. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992f 620).

The Methodist movement was birthed when a small group of university students began to meet together regularly to aid one another in their pursuit to live scriptural

Christianity and personal holiness. Because of their zeal, the Wesleys were shunned by their fellow students, their university, and their church. They were called the "Holy Club" and were branded as "enthusiasts" as a condemnation by others who did not agree with their practices.

These Oxford Methodists were committed to reading the Scriptures and doing acts of mercy. They became convinced that salvation was by grace alone through faith.<sup>52</sup> Because John Wesley continually preached "inward, present salvation as attainable by faith alone,"<sup>53</sup> he was forbidden to preach in most churches. George Whitfield invited the Wesleys to join him in preaching to the masses in the fields. Initially, John Wesley was reluctant to accept Whitfield's invitation, but later relented, possibly because he had fewer and fewer opportunities to preach in the churches.<sup>54</sup>

### **The Organization of Societies**

Many people responded to the open air preaching. They were convicted of their sins and, wanting to know how to respond, turned to John Wesley for spiritual guidance. This was the beginning of the Methodist societies. Wesley described the origin of the societies,

Rupert E. Davies (Ed.), *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 9: The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 369.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 442.

<sup>54</sup> This assertion arose out of a discussion of students of the DM915 Wesleyan Theology for Ministry course in June 2006, at Nazarene Theological Seminary.

In the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to me in London who appeared to be deeply convicted of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired . . . that I would spend time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their

heads.<sup>55</sup>

Later Wesley again described the formation of the societies, "I . . . advised the serious part of the congregation to form themselves into a sort of little society and to meet once or twice a week in order to instruct, exhort, and reprove one another."<sup>56</sup> So, on July 11, 1739, the first "distinctively Methodist society" was born.<sup>57</sup> Previously, in 1738, Wesley

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published *Rules of the Band Societies* and began using these rules in the society.

Admission requirements for the society were minimal, but continuation in the society made more demands of the participant. As stated by Wesley,

There is only one condition previously required in those who desire admission into these societies, 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.' But wherever this is really fixed in the soul it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they should continue to evidence their desire for salvation.<sup>59</sup>

Those desiring to be a part of the society were posed eleven questions before they were admitted. The questions included whether the person had received forgiveness of sins, and the assurance of that forgiveness, whether the person was currently under the dominion of any inward or outward sins, whether the person was willing to be told their fault, etc.<sup>60</sup>

In the society meetings themselves, people were often asked the following five questions:

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Ibid., 9.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 70.

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Ibid., 77-78.

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret?<sup>61</sup>

Wesley was quick to recognize the advantages of the society. He noted that, after a few months, those who were not united "fell back" while those who had united continued forward.<sup>62</sup> Wesley described the society as "a company of men 'having the form, and seeking the power of godliness,' united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."<sup>63</sup> Henry Knight outlined the characteristics of the societies as the smaller classes and bands;

1. It was a "temporary yet essential haven from a hostile world."
2. Participants watched over one another in love; accountability for discipleship.
3. Participants were mutually responsible for one another to work out salvation.
4. Participants accepted Wesley as spiritual director.<sup>6</sup>  
(" Ibid., 78.

<sup>62</sup>Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 97.

<sup>63</sup> Davies, 69.

<sup>64</sup> Knight, 97.

<sup>65</sup> Davies, 10-11.

The members of the societies were retained in membership only if they continued to evidence signs of their

first desire, and this meant a considerable strictness of life.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Class Meeting**

The classes were initially developed to meet a practical, financial need, but were quickly recognized to also be an effective way to meet a spiritual need. The first Methodist preaching house was built in Bristol in 1739.<sup>66</sup> A member of the society, Captain Foy, suggested that each society member should contribute a penny a week toward the liquidation of the debt.<sup>67</sup> Wesley then organized the society into groups (classes) of 12 and assigned a leader who was to go around weekly to collect the pennies. It became impractical for the leaders to travel to every member weekly so they created another weekly meeting. Wesley saw that this could also be an effective way of caring for the souls of the members. The class leaders could help detect those who were "disorderly walkers" from within their groups.<sup>68</sup> Matthaei summarized what took place at the meetings, "Each member of a Methodist society received instruction in the faith and nurture for holy living in a system whose purpose was behavior change, spiritual growth, personal interaction, and community transformation."<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 505.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>68</sup> David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: Its Origins and*

*Significance*. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1985), 104.

<sup>69</sup> Sondra Higgins Matthaei, *Making Disciples: Faith Formation in the Wesleyan Tradition*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 131.

<sup>70</sup> Knight, 99.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

As the society meeting grew in numbers of people, the class meetings assumed the function of the societies and adopted their rules.<sup>70</sup> The class meeting became the entry point of Methodism.<sup>71</sup> Like for the society, there was no prerequisite for joining the class

meeting other than a desire to save one's soul. Wesley describes the entry requirements for the classes, "Any person determined to save his own soul may be united . . . this desire must be evidenced by three marks: avoiding all known sin, doing good after his power, and attending all the ordinances of God." The intent of the class meeting was to ask each participant to give "a straight forward accounting of what had taken place the previous week according to the general rules." Members in good standing would be eligible to be admitted into the society the following quarter. Watson noted the results of the class meetings,

The priority of the early Methodists was not to seek a particular religious experience, but to pursue an obedient discipleship. Their commitment to the class meeting expressed belief in a salvation which gave them freedom *and* responsibility under God's grace. It was a supportive structure for discipleship, grounded in the realities and the common sense of worldly living; and . . . it was the muscle of the Methodist movement.

Wesley noted the effectiveness of the class meetings,

Great and many are the advantages which have ever since flowed from this closer union of the believers with each other. They prayed for one another, that they might be healed of the faults they confessed—and it was so. The chains were broken, and the bands were burst asunder, and the sin had no more dominion over them. Many were delivered from the temptations out of which till then they found no way of escape. They were built up in our most holy faith. They rejoiced in the Lord more abundantly. They were strengthened in love, and more effectively

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<sup>75</sup> Davies, 268.

provoked to abound in every good work. The class meeting became the primary of accountability for the growth in discipleship of its members.

### **The Band Meeting**

Michael Henderson clarifies the distinction in Wesley's system between the role of the society and the role of the class meeting. He states, "Whereas the society was an instrument for cognitive acquisition, almost to the exclusion of any interpersonal dynamics, the class meeting was a tool for the alteration of behavior, to the virtual exclusion of any data-gathering function."<sup>76</sup> Henry Knight notes that the class meeting became a very effective avenue for those seeking new birth but not the best avenue for those in the process of sanctification.<sup>77</sup> Something more was needed for those who were seeking sanctification so Wesley formed bands of 6 or 7 people for the purpose of assisting those seeking sanctification to work out their salvation. The band was a more intimate and intense experience than the class meeting.<sup>78</sup> Members were directed to 'carefully' avoid evil, 'zealously' do good works, and 'constantly' observe the ordinances of God.<sup>79</sup> At each band meeting every member was asked, "What temptations have you met with?" and "What

have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?"<sup>80</sup>

Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*. (Nappanee, Indiana: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 96.

<sup>77</sup> Knight, 100.

<sup>78</sup> In a telephone conversation with David Lowes Watson, he noted that the band meeting preceded the class meeting. The class meeting was envisioned because the band meeting was too intense for those in the society meetings who had recently responded to Wesley's preaching.

<sup>79</sup> Knight, 101.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

### **The Select Societies**

Taking the organizational process even further, Wesley developed select societies.

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The select societies were to be the fullest realization of the Christian life. The three rules of the select societies were;

1. Nothing spoken in the meeting to be repeated outside the meeting.
2. Submission to the Minister in all 'indifferent' things.

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3. Bring in all that could be spared toward a common stock.

The select society was the most exclusive circle in the Methodist system and was reserved for those who had progressed furthest in their walk with Christ.

### **The Significance of Methodism**

Henry Knight comments on the effectiveness of the system of Methodism, "The small groups, with their attendant discipline, became centers for nurturing faith, enabling persons to experience the presence of God in the means of grace of the church. The intent

of the movement was not to replace the church, but to open persons to the reality of God in the church."<sup>83</sup> He later adds, "The concern for the Christian life in these communities was more particularly a concern for those affections which characterize that life: a living faith, an expectant hope, a humble love for God and one's neighbor."<sup>84</sup> Rupert Davies comments on the significance of Methodist communities,

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>82</sup> Davies, 270.

<sup>83</sup> Knight, 35.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 96-96.

<sup>85</sup> Davies, ix.

One of the major contributions of John Wesley to the imier life of the church at large was to create and order close-knit companies of ordinary men and women who were committed to the pursuit of holiness, bound together by a common discipline, and engaged in the loving service of their fellows.<sup>85</sup>

Finally Randy Maddox asserts,

The primary purpose of these substructures of the Methodist societies was to support members' *responsible* participation in the transforming work of God's *grace*. The different forms emerged gradually, as practical-theological responses to the changing needs and contexts of the growing movement. As they emerged, Wesley wove them into a creative set of overlapping levels of accountability.<sup>86</sup>

The system of Methodism made a profound impact on the 18<sup>th</sup> century England. Both the methods and the theology continue to have a strong effect on the church today.

Nearing the end of his life Wesley wisely voiced the following concerns about

Methodism,

The thing which I was greatly afraid of all this time, and which I resolved to use every possible method of preventing, was narrowness of spirit, a party zeal, a being straitened in our own bowels; that miserable bigotry which makes many so  
unready to believe that there is any work of God but among themselves.

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He further commented,

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast to the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.<sup>88</sup>

In order for Methodism to not be a dead sect, there needs to be a rediscovery of and recommitment to a contemporary form of Methodism.

### **Important Aspects of Wesley's Methodism**

<sup>86</sup> Randy L. Maddox. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994) 212.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 265-66.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 527.

1. First and foremost, it is important to note that the energy and vitality of the

entire Methodist movement naturally grew out of the Wesleys' and the Oxford Methodists' spiritual zest and vitality. John Wesley lived and embodied what he preached and taught.<sup>89</sup> He had a burning passion for the poor and marginalized. He had a keen desire to see his church revived and to see his nation turn back to God. Wesley earnestly sought to live a pure Biblical Christian life of holiness. Methodism was not a new program that Wesley learned about at a seminar at Oxford, it was his unwavering pursuit until the last day of his life. Wesley pursued Christian perfection and the propagation of it with unmatched energy and vigor. It was for him a vocation that defined every aspect of his life and ministry.

**2.** Methodism effectively combined mass evangelism (field preaching) with discipleship (society, classes, and bands). One aspect without the other is irresponsible and incomplete. Those who responded to



the field preaching and wanted to save their souls from the coming wrath were admitted into the class meetings. The class meetings encouraged discipleship and spiritual growth. Participants were held accountable for their spiritual condition and were expected to continually progress. It was a safe and optimal environment to incubate the spiritual life that had been awakened in them through the field preaching. Participants encouraged one another and took responsibility for each other's spiritual development. Good class members were admitted into society meetings and later to the bands and selected bands.

3. Methodism was transformational. Real changes in the lives of many could be documented with empirical evidence. Methodism made an impact on the social ills of 18<sup>th</sup>

and Charles Wesley as well.

century England. Wesley's religion of the heart brought real change. Wesley explained,

By salvation I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven; but present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.<sup>91</sup>

Wesley further explained the effects of true religion, "Religion is an inward principle, that

it is no other than the mind that was in Christ; or in other words, the renewal of the soul

after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness."<sup>92</sup> Knight expounds, "Wesley

was concerned with more than refraining from a list of sins. He sought the abandonment

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of an entire way of life rooted in the values of society but subversive to faith." Finally,

nothing illustrates the transformational effect of Methodism better than Wesley's own

description of what was taking place. He recounted,

The habitual drunkard, that was, is now temperate in all things. The whoremonger now flees fornication. He that stole, steals no more, but works with his hands. He that cursed or swore, perhaps at every sentence, has now learned to serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice unto him with reverence. These formerly enslaved to various habits of sin are now brought into uniform habits of holiness. These are demonstrable facts.<sup>94</sup>

There are wide differences of opinion among scholars as to the extent of the impact of Methodism on 18<sup>th</sup> Century England. Elie Halevy, the French historian, is credited for postulating the thesis that Methodism and Evangelicalism helped save England from a French-style revolution. See Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, Third Edition (London: Epworth Press, 2002) for a discussion of other factors contributing to the avoidance of revolution in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England.

<sup>91</sup> Knight, 19-20.

<sup>92</sup> Davies, 527.

<sup>93</sup> Knight, 107.

<sup>94</sup> Davies, 111.

Methodism transformed lives. People were released from the traps of their sinful habits to enter into a deepening relationship with Christ.

David Lowes Watson in trying to adapt Wesley's class meeting to contemporary society affirms the transformational aspect saying, "Discipleship requires more than a change of heart. It requires a change in our lives. It requires us not only to know Jesus Christ, but also to walk with him. It requires us not only to hear his words, but to *act on them*."<sup>95</sup> He goes on to describe the process through which transformation can occur, "We do not learn discipleship overnight. We must form habits, and allow the Holy Spirit to change our inward disposition, so that obedience to Jesus Christ eventually becomes instinctive, and disobedience becomes thoroughly abhorrent."<sup>96</sup>

4. Discipleship had effective accountability within community. Wesley advised members of the societies, "Strengthen you one another. Talk as often as you can. And

<sup>95</sup> David Lowes Watson, *Class Leaders: Recovering a Tradition*. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1991), 10.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>97</sup> Davies, 256.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>99</sup> Matthaei, 176.

pray earnestly with and for one another that you may 'endure to the end and be saved." Wesley stated, "When any members of these, or of the United Societies are proved to live in known sin, we then mark and avoid them, we separate ourselves from everyone that walks disorderly."<sup>98</sup> The expectation of the Methodist was that he should avoid sin and continually grow in Christ likeness. The members held each other accountable to this end. Matthaei affirms this, saying "Formation for holiness of heart and life invites persons to keep their eyes on God, leaving individualism behind and taking on a new identity in the communion of community."<sup>99</sup> She goes on to say,

It is not enough that we only cultivate personal piety or spirituality in a Wesleyan ecology of faith formation. In John Wesley's understanding, personal holiness must be accompanied by social holiness. This social responsibility is a stand persons take on behalf of others in response to God's gift of grace in their lives. Formation for holiness of heart and life must include opportunities for social witness.

Paul Chilcote underscores this by paraphrasing Wesley's thought, "Religion that is purely inward, he claimed, is a subtle device of Satan. Christianity is essentially a social religion, and to turn it into a solitary religion is to destroy it."

Knight comments on the effectiveness of group accountability within the classes and bands stating, "Through their common struggle to live a disciplined life, the members of the class or band helped each

other to keep a 'single eye' on God in the midst of a world full of distractions." He further notes, "The members of a class or band stood together before God as both sinners and as those promised new life. Each Christian life was not the solitary project of the individual, but the common responsibility of the fellowship." While persons came to the classes and bands seeking their own salvation, through meeting together they soon recognized their need of fellowship and responsibility for one another. As Knight notes, "Salvation must occur in community if it was to occur at all."

Randy Maddox comments,

Given the subtleness and deceitfulness of sin, Wesley was convinced that every

Christian needed spiritual direction to provide accountability for their growth in holiness. The conviction lies behind his insistence that the task of Methodist preachers involves far more than preaching sermons or bringing people to repentance; they are in the business of 'caring for souls,' which necessarily includes supervising spiritual disciplines in their charges.<sup>105</sup>

Community was developed not because it was simply helpful, but rather because it was essential to growth in holiness.

5. Wesley insisted on the importance of Methodists to visit the poor. Ministry to the poor is to be a natural outflow of those who have been transformed by God's love. The love that God has shown to the believer in salvation must continue to flow by the believer reaching out to others. As an example of this, Methodists were asked to visit the poor on a regular basis. Henry Knight notes, "Love must be active, it is something which is done. There can be no 'inward' love without a corresponding change in one's active relationship with God and neighbor."<sup>106</sup> Knight further explains,

For Wesley, to fail to love one's neighbor indicates a deficiency in our love for God, and therefore we have not been recreated by God's love for us. We cannot love our neighbor unless we first love God, and we can only love God when we have been transformed by God's love for us. Acts of piety serve as means to express our love for God even as they are means through which God's love changes our lives.<sup>107</sup>

Kenneth L. Carder underlines this saying,

Methodism began as a movement *of* the poor, *for* the poor, *by* the poor, and *with* the poor. Failure to be in friendship and ministry with the poor, the impoverished, and the vulnerable people of the world is a betrayal of the gospel as communicated

<sup>108</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Maddox, 212.

<sup>106</sup> Knight, 4.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Kenneth L. Carder, "What Difference Does Knowing Wesley Make?" in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1998), 28.

through the Wesleyan tradition.

The poor were the focal point of Methodism. Their inclusion and involvement was mandatory for the Methodists to remain faithful to their calling.

The love that flows to and through the believer is transformational. For Wesley, ministry to the poor is a means of grace in which we, more than the poor, are transformed into the character of God. Carder asserts that Wesley's insistence on ministry with the poor emerged "from a conviction that a relationship with the poor is constitutive of the gospel of Jesus Christ—one cannot know and serve Jesus Christ without friendship for the poor." Carder projects this concept further in light of the contemporary church,

If the poor are constitutive to the gospel of Jesus Christ as practiced and preached by Wesley, separation from the poor is separation from the Triune God and from our theological and missional tradition. Renewed relationship with the impoverished may be the means of evangelizing the affluent and breaking the idolatrous grip of the consumerist market logic to which middle-class North American Methodism [as well as much of the rest of the contemporary church] has fallen captive."<sup>10</sup>

An ongoing relationship with the poor was an essential aspect of Wesleyan discipleship.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 30.

Wesley emphasized the value and necessity of direct, personal involvement with the poor. Jennings

captures the importance of visiting the poor for Wesley, saying, "Apart from this practice of visitation, no real experience of the plight of the poor is possible. Without it, the nerve of compassion is cut and the possibility of a pertinent and transforming praxis is lost." Jennings continues quoting Wesley, "it is far better 'to carry relief to the poor, than to send it' not for their sake but also because this was 'far

more apt to soften our heart, and to make us naturally care for each other'." - Jennings further explains, "thus the practice of visitation was directly necessary for developing the sort of compassion that, for Wesley, was the heart of true religion . . . [visitation of the poor] was a means of grace to be ranked alongside private and public prayer or the sacraments themselves."

Not only did Wesley and the early Methodists respond to the outward needs of the poor, Wesley also employed several approaches to dealing with the underlying issues of poverty. As early as 1741, Methodists were asked to give a penny a week to a fund for the relief of the poor and weak."<sup>4</sup> Wesley set up a small cottage industry in knitting for "the women who desired to work and establish a method for visiting the sick."<sup>5</sup> The idea of lending stock was developed to "enable the poor to acquire for themselves the tools and materials to develop their own businesses."<sup>6</sup> He was also an advocate for free health

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>114</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 128.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 128

<sup>1</sup> Jennings, 61.

<sup>1,7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 71.

care for the poor. Wesley dealt with the systemic causes of poverty; the distilling business, the emergence of big farm policies, and high taxation to support wasteful government spending, to name a few."<sup>8</sup> This also included protesting against concrete forms of injustice."<sup>9</sup> Heitzenrater summarizes Wesley's concern for the poor as "the

hallmark of the Methodist movement."<sup>120</sup> Theodore Jennings compliments this, saying, "Solidarity with the poor is not one program among others, however important, but is the norm of all activity of the people called Methodists, of those who seek to embody scriptural Christianity."<sup>121</sup>

Why did Wesley elevate visitation of the poor to such a high level? In visiting the poor, we, more than the poor themselves are opened to transformational grace. Jennings summarized, "In visiting the marginalized, we invite them to transform us, to transform our hearts, to transform our understanding, to transform us into instruments of divine

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mercy and grace." Ministry to the poor is to be a natural outflow of those who have been transformed by God's love. The love that God has shown to the believer in salvation must continue to flow by the believer

reaching out to others. The love that flows to and through the believer is transformational. For Wesley, ministry to the poor is a means of grace in which we, more than the poor, are transformed into the character of God.

Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 27.

<sup>131</sup> Jennings, 66.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 57 - 58.

<sup>123</sup> Davies, 225.

6. Methodism offered a powerful message in contrast to the dry ritualism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century church in England. Wesley described the "Christians" in England as being "utter strangers to the religion of the heart."<sup>123</sup> By contrast, Methodism was an inner faith that emphasized the present work of Christ. Salvation was a here and now reality. Knight highlights this point, "The believer not only lives and walks in eternity, but begins to live

the life of eternity, the life of love which characterizes the kingdom of God." " The transformed life of the Methodism was to be a powerful testimony to the world. They were to live their lives in the presence of God and at the same time in the midst of a world in which God had been forgotten.<sup>125</sup> Salvation for a Methodist was to be a present experience.

7. Wesley's Methodism placed great emphasis on the means of grace. The Lord's Supper, for Wesley, was not an occasional memorial to the past work of Christ. It was an



essential and vital aspect of the present work of Christ in the believer by which the relationship with God was nourished. Knight reminds us that for Wesley, the means of grace; Scripture, the Lord's Supper, the prayer book, enable us to remember *who* God is and *what* God has promised.<sup>126</sup> Knight asserts,

The means of grace were a loci of divine activity and our reaction to that activity of God's love and forgiveness and our love, praise, and gratitude. They are means of our worship even as they are means of God's grace. To fail to 'use' the means of grace was to fail to maintain a continuing relationship with God, and thereby not progress in the Christian life.<sup>127</sup>

For Wesley then, the sacraments and the grace given through them were indispensable aspects of the Christian life.

<sup>124</sup> Knight, 71.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>128</sup> Knight, 170.

The means of grace are means by which we express our love and gratitude to God, our love in service to our neighbor, our trust and hope in God's promises, and our repentance in the light of God's purposes.<sup>128</sup>

8. Wesley effectively organized the Methodists to hold in union personal holiness and social action. In Wesley's terms, these were differentiated as "works of mercy" and "works of piety." Watson described Wesley's "works of mercy" noting,

There are certain ways of serving Christ in the world that are so basic, they can be attempted by anyone who has the desire to do so, given the prevenient grace which all of us possess. These he called the 'works of mercy' and defined them according to the guidelines of Jesus (Matt 25:35-36) and those in the Epistle of James (2:14-17): To feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisons

and the

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hospitals, and seek out those in need. Watson then described Wesley's "works of piety;"

The basic spiritual disciplines through which all persons can further open themselves up to God's grace, again regardless of the nature of their response. These he called 'works of piety' or 'means of grace' . . . The instituted means of grace were listed as prayer (private, family, and public), searching the Scriptures, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, fasting, and Christian Conference (which today we would call serious conversations about the will of God).<sup>130</sup>

Chilcote describes the works of mercy and works of piety as "nothing other than the love

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of God and love of neighbor acted out in conformity to the love we see in Jesus."

<sup>129</sup> David Lowes Watson. *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation Through Mutual Accountability*. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1991), 39.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Chilcote, 107.

<sup>132</sup> Watson. *Covenant Discipleship*, 48.

Watson underscores the significance of Wesley's description of the spiritual disciplines as "works of mercy" and "works of piety" saying, "The implication is profound. By *doing* these things, we open ourselves to grace . . . we can so order our lives that we are more receptive to grace, more open to grace; that there are means, or channels, through which we can receive grace more abundantly."<sup>132</sup> For Wesley then the spiritual disciplines were a means to an end, an avenue through which we can receive more of

God's grace.

## Comparison Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Wesley

Drawing comparisons between Orthodox and Wesleyan spiritualities is not an easy task. Part of the difficulty is due to the fact that the vocabulary of theology and spirituality contains so many cultural connotations and nuances that it does not refer easily to the same realities in both contexts.<sup>133</sup> Although Wesley's eclectic approach to theology and the spiritual life was heavily influenced by the Eastern Fathers, further difficulty arises from the opposite poles to which the two spiritualities are oriented. Orthodoxy is oriented to the east and tends toward an ascetic, philosophical mysticism. Wesleyanism is oriented to the west and tends toward a logical, empirical rationalism. In the realm of theology, bridges can be crossed between the two poles. In the realm of spirituality, however, contrasts between the two spiritualities are more easily drawn than are the similarities.

*The Starting Point of Spirituality*

<sup>133</sup> Binns, 107.

One immediate contrast between Orthodoxy and Wesleyanism is the starting point of human spirituality in being restored to God. For Wesley, the starting point is the transformation of the heart. The heart is the center of motivation out of which all thoughts and actions originate. As the self-centered heart is changed into a heart filled with perfect love, transformation occurs from the central core of the person to the outward thoughts and actions. The starting point in Orthodox spirituality, however, is the discipline of the mind. Through ascetic practice the human will disciplines and improves itself.<sup>134</sup> Through the toil of the mind, the passions are replaced by the virtues. In doing so, the mind gathers itself in the heart where the newly unified self experiences the presence of Christ and the direct influence of the Holy Spirit.

*Prevenient Grace*

A Monk of the Eastern Church. "The Essentials of Orthodox Spirituality," in *Exploring*

*Christian Spirituality: An Ecumenical Reader*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 110.

<sup>135</sup> Staniloae, 124.

In Wesleyanism, prevenient grace is seen as the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a person before conversion to draw the unbeliever to repentance and salvation. Orthodoxy comes to a similar view of grace from a different starting point; the Incarnation. When God became man, the infinite filled the finite. The holy presence of the Divine dwelling inside the created, material world sanctified all of creation. Because of the Incarnation, the entire created world is being redeemed. Therefore, God's grace is active in everything and in everyone drawing all to redemption even before Christ is placed in the heart at baptism. Staniloae comes closer to a Wesleyan understanding of prevenient grace stating, "There isn't anyone, who really wants to believe, who doesn't get the power to believe. But, the fact that someone wanting to believe is able to, is due to a previous grace in us. Because by his simple will, man would never get to the point of believing." " It is the "previous grace" of God working in the life of the unbeliever (the person in the passionate state) that draws them to the point of faith.

### *Free Will*

Another point of similarity between Orthodoxy and Wesleyanism is an understanding of the free will of humanity. A Wesleyan-Armenian understanding of free will can be simply stated as the free agency of a person to accept or reject the invitation of God's grace. Snyder expounds upon this in describing Wesley's view of the will,

Wesley saw *the will* as essential to the image of God. God had given men and women a will, either to serve him or to rebel. Now, because of sin, the will was under bondage. People choose to do evil rather than good. Salvation therefore meant restoring the image of God and freeing the will to do God's will. By grace, men and women could will to serve God.<sup>136</sup>

Alexander Golubov states the Orthodox understanding of freedom, stating "every human person is created autonomous and free, in the Image of God, in order to become, through intentional acquisition of His Likeness, a child and heir of His eternal Kingdom . . . the acquisition of the 'Divine Likeness,' being man's primary spiritual vocation, is wholly dependent on man's free choice, and constitutes the immediate task of his spiritual life on earth."<sup>137</sup> Zizioulas notes the importance of free will in relation to community, "True being comes only from the free person, from the person who loves freely—that is who freely affirms his being, his identity, by means of an event of communion with other persons."

#### *Synergy*

<sup>136</sup> Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns for Church Renewal*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 144.

<sup>137</sup> Staniloae, 15.

<sup>138</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being As Communion*. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 18.

As Golubov's previous statement already indicates, an understanding of free will necessitates a synergistic relationship between God and humanity. A Monk of the Eastern Church describes synergy stating, "the incorporation of man into Christ and his union with God require co-operation of two unequal, but equally necessary, forces: divine grace and human will."<sup>139</sup> Staniloae affirms the synergistic relationship stating, "certainly, we must work together with Christ who dwells in us through the holy mysteries; otherwise we aren't saved. But the basis for the possibility of our cooperation is arranged on high; it is the grace of Christ."<sup>140</sup> Orthodoxy holds up Mary, the Mother of God, as the supreme example of

synergy between God and humanity. The grace of God invites but does not compel.<sup>141</sup> Snyder states Wesley's view of synergy, "Wesley was very clear that salvation was wholly by grace alone. But he was equally insistent that God graciously enabled men and women to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the great work of salvation, of restoring the image of God. Therefore a believer's failure to do his or her part in cooperating with God's work was sheer disobedience."<sup>142</sup>

<sup>139</sup> A Monk of the Eastern Church, 109.

<sup>140</sup> Staniloae, 61.

<sup>141</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 222.

<sup>142</sup> Snyder, 47.

<sup>143</sup> Staniloae, 298.

Synergy in Orthodoxy, however, seems to place a heavy emphasis on human toil. Staniloae describes the role of the mind through the purification and illumination stages, "the mind has progressed in a knowledge of God . . . by its own efforts to return to itself and to love God."<sup>143</sup> The believer's perception is that progress toward God is through the mind's toil, not initially realizing the help of Christ, situated in the heart from baptism, and of the Holy Spirit in the progressive effort. It is the task of the mind through various

mental and spiritual operations to discipline itself and overcome the passions.

Because of Orthodoxy's heavy emphasis on human toil in the synergistic relationship between God and humanity, Orthodoxy spirituality has, at times, been branded as Pelagian or semi-Pelagian. Pelagianism is an ascetical teaching that minimizes the freedom of God in granting the gift of His grace, denying the balance between man's free will and divine grace. Humanity is left to earn salvation and progress in perfection through its own striving and effort. Boosalis strongly defends Orthodoxy against this accusation

noting, "Orthodox ascetics, however, always recognize that their progress is due directly to God, who continuously strengthens and guides them on their journey, freely granting them His grace."<sup>143</sup>

### *Crisis and Process*

In both traditions, spirituality is marked both by a crisis and process. For Wesleyanism, there is a progression toward faith that leads to the crisis of new birth. At new birth the new believer is transferred from the kingdom of the world to the kingdom of God. Progression continues to a second crisis point of entire sanctification, being the complete consecration of the believer to the lordship of the Holy Spirit.

Growth in grace proceeds further until death.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

Orthodox spirituality can, at this point, employ the same process and terminology as Wesleyan spirituality. Because of the Incarnation, grace is at work in all to bring each person to faith and baptism. At baptism Christ is placed in the heart of the believer and

dwells there forever. All spiritual progress in the believer's life from this point is simply the unfolding of the grace that is already in the heart from baptism. Progression takes the form of overcoming the passions with the virtues to a crisis of unity with the Divine.

Progression continues as the believer is deified and brought into the life and self-giving love of the Triune community. Because God is infinite, the progression and deification of the believer is an unending process. Boosalis describes this well stating,

According to Orthodox teaching, sanctification—which is also referred to as perfection, theosis, or deification—is not to be understood as a static state, where man maintains or preserves a particular high level of spiritual virtues. The human person is called to grow ceaselessly and progress continually into the likeness of God. Thus, perfection has no limits. It continually advances, not only on earth, but also in the life to come.<sup>146</sup>

In both traditions then, progressive growth both proceeds and follows significant crisis events in the life of the believer.

### *Scripture*

Another contrast between the two spiritualities is the position and role of the Scriptures in the life of the believer. For Wesley, Scripture is the foundation of authority. Along with reason, tradition, and experience, Scripture guides the believer in all matters of salvation. Randy Maddox underscores this noting, "Wesley consistently identified the Bible as the most basic authority for determining Christian belief and practice. Indeed, at times he declared it the *sole* or only authority."<sup>147</sup> Scripture, inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit, is the first and highest authority.  
<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>147</sup> Maddox, 36.

Scripture in Orthodoxy does not have the same role as in Wesleyan spirituality.

Orthodoxy understands Scripture to be the daughter of the Church. Scripture came into being and was gathered together, preserved, and canonized through the Church. Scripture then is seen as a faithful witness in the service of the Church. Scripture exists within the wider Tradition of the Church and is never to be lifted out and used apart from Tradition. Ware identifies the Tradition of the Church as the Bible, the Creeds, the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, the writings of the Holy Fathers, the Canons, the Service Books, the Holy Icons as well as the whole system of doctrine, Church government, worship,

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spirituality, and art which Orthodoxy has articulated over the ages. Of these, the Bible, the creeds, and



the doctrinal definitions of the Ecumenical Councils are understood by Orthodoxy as "something absolute and unchanging, something which cannot be canceled or revised."<sup>149</sup> It is from the church that the Bible ultimately derives its authority, for it was the church which originally decided which books form a part of Holy Scripture; and it is the church alone which can interpret Holy Scripture with authority."<sup>150</sup>

### *Perfection*

<sup>148</sup> Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 196.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

A further point of similarity can be drawn between the two spiritualities around the concept of perfection. In Wesleyanism, perfection refers to a moral perfection of the heart through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit infills the heart of the sanctified believer, and the spirit of Christ becomes Lord of the believer's heart, the motivation behind the thoughts and actions of the sanctified believer turn toward love of God and love of neighbor. Although the sanctified believer's performance will continue at times to miss the mark (due to human frailty) and fall short of God's perfect will, sin, in Wesley's narrower understanding of it, is overcome by perfect love. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the believer empowers the believer to willfully resist breaking and disobeying the known laws of God and to live a life of love that pleases God.

Staniloae identifies perfection as the goal of Orthodox spirituality, he states, "Orthodox spirituality aims at the perfection of the faithful in Christ. This perfection [cannot] be obtained in Christ, except by participation in His divine-human life. Therefore, the goal of Orthodox spirituality is the perfection of the believer by his union with Christ."<sup>151</sup> In order for union with Christ to be possible, the passions must be

defeated and replaced by the virtues. As in Wesleyan spirituality so also in Orthodox spirituality, the problem of sin can be overcome in this life. For Orthodoxy, however, sin is not seen and defined in legal, juridical terms, but rather seen as a sickness of the soul. Father Valentin, the head priest of the Cathedral of the Dormition of the Theotokos of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church Old Calendar Synod<sup>152</sup> states, "Sin is a sickness of the soul. Like a physical ailment, the soul requires treatment to overcome its infirmities. Sometimes healing is accomplished quickly through taking medicine, but at other times more drastic and prolonged procedures like surgery and rehabilitation are required to

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return health to the soul." The healing of the infliction of sin can and must be accomplished in this life.

<sup>151</sup> Staniloae, 21.

<sup>152</sup> For more information about this cathedral and the synod to which it belongs, go to <http://www.synodinresistance.org/Administrationen/Bulgaria.html>

<sup>153</sup> Personal Interview with Father Valentin on April 14, 2008.

Albert C. Outler articulated the close connection between Wesley and the Eastern

Church in the area of perfection. He noted, "If Wesley's writings on perfection are to be read with understanding, his affirmative notion of 'holiness' *in the world* must be taken seriously—active holiness in *this* life—and it becomes intelligible only in the light of its indirect sources in early and Eastern Spirituality."<sup>134</sup> Wesley agreed with the Eastern Church that overcoming of the effect of sin is attainable in this life.<sup>133</sup>

### **Bringing Wesley Forward to Today**

The attempt to contemporize Wesley begins with learning how Wesley himself developed his

discipleship structures. Several contemporary voices call for a return to such an approach to discipleship. Four recent approaches to discipleship are then explored. Marjorie J. Thompson's rule of life is an attempt to construct the framework on which a holy life can develop. *The Upward Call's* quartet of authors call for holy living in community with others. Floyd L. Schwanz calls for the church to be active in fellowship and discipleship through the utilization of small groups. David Lowes Watson's covenant discipleship is an attempt to contemporize Wesley's class meeting and regain a communal approach to discipleship.

### **Wesley's Approach**

<sup>154</sup> Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley*. (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1964), 252.

<sup>15</sup> Outler also notes that Wesley avoided the term "sinless perfection." Perfection for Wesley was not juridical but moral, the perfection of love.

How much of what Wesley developed in the eighteenth century is relevant to the church in the twenty-first century? Wesley himself did not see that the Methodism of

eighteenth century England was to be duplicated in all places for all time. Henry Knight explains, "The voluntary communities of Methodism were continually called prudential. Their particular organization was not a model for the centuries, but a pattern of fellowship and discipleship related to their historical and cultural context." The prudential means of grace (as opposed to the instituted means of grace) "vary from age to age, culture to culture, and person to person; they reflect God's ability to use any means in addition to those instituted in accordance with different times and circumstances." It seems then, that Wesley is directing us not to blindly copy his practices, but to learn from the processes out of which the early

Methodist practices developed.

Wesley wisely discerned the pragmatic value of the practices of others. Much of the major aspects of Methodism did not originate in the mind of John Wesley. Field preaching was the practice of George Whitefield and Wesley was hesitant to agree to it. The formation of the society was at the beckoning of those who had responded to the field preaching and wanted to know what to do to save their souls. The class meeting evolved out of the suggestion of Captain Foy's solution to liquidate debt on the building in Bristol. Wesley adopted the practices and suggestions of others and adapted them to fit the needs of the people to whom he was ministering. Wesley's genius, therefore, was not his great ideas in how to go about bringing renewal to the church and to the nation. Wesley's genius was in his sensitivity and openness to how God was already working in the society. His genius was how he adapted practices and organized people to effectively participate in God's movement in society to transform lives.

### **A Contemporary Call to Return to Methodist Practice**

There is a call in the contemporary church, a yearning for a return to or a contemporary adaptation of the early Methodist practices. In his provocative book, *Generous Orthodoxy*, in the chapter entitled, "Why I am a Methodist," Brian McLaren credits the Wesleys as the first to "create a new system of spiritual formation and nurture to replace the richly developed Catholic system of spirituality that had developed during the Middle Ages."<sup>158</sup> In his assessment, however, redemption and lift robbed Methodism of its glory and genius. McLaren is hopeful, however, that a recent search for a theology that transforms will "yield a new Methodism, as catalytic and relevant to our day as the Wesleys' was to theirs."<sup>159</sup>

Snyder clearly identifies the need for a contemporary revival of Wesley's practices. He articulates the need saying,

Commitment to Christ, no matter how sincere, has a way of evaporating with time if not tied to and reinforced by specific commitments and discipline which undergird the corporate experience of the Christian community. This kind of commitment is necessary if the body of Christ is to live and maintain the values of the Kingdom of God within an antagonistic cultural environment.<sup>60</sup>

Snyder also emphatically suggests a solution,

Brian D. McLaren, *Generous Orthodoxy*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Press, 2004),

244.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 246.

<sup>160</sup> Snyder, 161.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 149.

The recovery of some functional equivalent of the class meeting with its intimacy, mutual care and support, and discipline is essential. Such a rigorous structure naturally goes against the grain in our lax, individualistic, live-and-let-live society. But this is precisely what is needed.<sup>161</sup>

A contemporary revival of Wesleyan practice recovers a communal commitment to discipleship.

### **Contemporary Discipleship Approaches**

The amount of literature currently available seeking to advise believers on how to deepen their faith is vast. Nearly every pastor who desires to lead his or her people in discipleship has multiple resources on the subject at any given time. Many of the contemporary practitioners of revitalizing discipleship have much to contribute to the theory and practice of discipleship. A brief examination of a select few of these will help to highlight the specific need for the Sofia Discipleship Project.

*Marjorie J. Thompson: Rule of Life*

<sup>62</sup> William Willimon et al., *The Pastor's Guide to Personal Spiritual Formation*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2005), 139.

<sup>163</sup> Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*.

(Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 138.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., 138.

Marjorie J. Thompson in *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* is vitally helpful in explaining the concept and purpose of a 'rule of life.' Historically, the rule of life was a set of commitments that bound together a monastic community, most notably the Rule of Benedict.<sup>162</sup> Thompson defines a 'rule of life' as "a pattern of spiritual disciplines that provides structure and direction for growth in holiness."<sup>163</sup> Not meant to be restrictive, the 'rule of life' instead is a daily rhythm in which new freedoms help one grow into holiness.<sup>164</sup> The intent is an ordering of life "to catch the wind of grace."<sup>165</sup>

Thompson helpfully compares a 'rule of life' to a trellis on which a tomato plant grows.

The trellis provides structure and direction for the plant to grow and produce fruit.

Without the trellis, the plant does not have the space and sun it needs to flourish, and its fruit rots in contact with the soil.<sup>166</sup> Echoing Shults and Sandage's concept of purgation,

the starting point of the process of transformation, Thompson notes,

It is a process that requires the death of much that seems natural to us, in order to allow a deeper mystery of our life in God to rise up. Maturation in faith is like the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a moth. The caterpillar must yield up the life it knows and submit to the mystery of interior transformation. It emerges from this process transfigured, with wings that give it freedom to fly.<sup>167</sup>

Thompson's idea here reflects Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of John, "Very truly, I tell

you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but

if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it."<sup>168</sup>

Thompson appeals for the construction of a framework upon which holiness can grow. Discipleship in this form, however, is still the sole responsibility of the individual.

Through the individual's toil of establishing a defined set of spiritual practices, a trellis is constructed on which holiness can grow. Shults and Sandage capture the essence of the argument against Thompson's approach stating, spirituality that transforms is "not gaining more knowledge about spiritual issues, or even adding to our repertoire of practices, but developing qualitatively more complex ways of holding and being held in relation to

<sup>165</sup> Willimon et al., 140.

<sup>166</sup> Thompson, 137-38.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 138-39.

<sup>168</sup> John 12:24-25bNRSV.

<sup>169</sup> Shults and Sandage, 18.

others and the Other." <sup>69</sup> Thompson's approach is too individualistic and does not make

adequate space for a communal approach to discipleship.

### *The Upward Call*

In *The Upward Call*, authors Tracy, Freeborn, Tartaglia, and Weigelt take on the task of bringing together spiritual formation and Wesleyan holiness. They define the task as "the whole person in relationship with God, within the community of believers, growing in Christ likeness, reflected in a Spirit-directed, disciplined lifestyle, and demonstrated in redemptive action in our world."<sup>170</sup>

The quartet of authors offers deep and thoughtful insight into the practice of spiritual formation. They make a strong appeal defending the necessity of living the holy life in community. They even go so far as to say helping each other on the highway of holiness, "is not a frill, it is a requirement."<sup>171</sup> Even with this strong statement affirming discipleship in community, the target of the book is clearly aimed at the

individual. The authors give creative and innovative ideas to connect with others on the journey, but they stop short of identifying community as the ideal, fertile soil in which holiness and discipleship develop in maturity.

*Floyd L. Schwanz: Small Groups*

<sup>170</sup> Wesley Tracey, E. Dee Freeborn, Janine Tartaglia-Metcalf, and Marris A. Weigelt. *The Upward Call: Spiritual Formation and the Holy Life*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 12.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

Floyd Schwanz makes a strong case for the place of small groups in the church today. He challenges the current phenomena that the church is an audience. Instead, the

church is to be an active, healthy body with many parts.<sup>172</sup> Schwanz makes a powerful appeal for small groups in the local church by correctly declaring, "To tell people, by our preaching and teaching, that these are the things they should be doing, without providing a way to do them, is cruel. They become overdosed with guilt because of everything they should be doing. They are frustrated with their Christian lives because they are so unprepared for ministry."<sup>173</sup> *Growing Small Groups* is a deep well of ideas and advice on the organization and operation of small groups in the local church that can provide the support and direction needed in the local church.

Schwanz notes that the purpose of small groups is to give the congregants in the local church an opportunity for koinonia. The small group is the place where the sharing of life that God desires for His people occurs.<sup>174</sup> The suggested curriculum for the group is 5-6 well-worded dialogue questions,<sup>173</sup> but the



goal of the group is fellowship and sharing Christian life together.

<sup>172</sup> Floyd L. Schwanz *Growing Small Groups: Everything You Need to Start and Lead a Small Ministry that Make a Big Difference*. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 1995), 19.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>175</sup> See Schwanz, *Growing Small Groups*, chapter 13.

<sup>176</sup> Schwanz, 12.

Schwanz is careful not to elevate the importance of small groups, but to clarify their correct function in the church. He emphatically states that only the Holy Spirit and small groups enable dramatic growth in the church. Small groups provide an opportunity, an avenue, for the growth that only the Holy Spirit can bring.<sup>176</sup> Gregory Clapper affirms the importance of small groups, noting, "In small groups our repentance is made more

permanent in very real and concrete ways. Our faithfulness and love are also quickly demonstrated when we talk about what really has been going on in our lives. Mutual trust, humility and a loving sense of being accountable to all the members of the group are obviously important."<sup>177</sup> He goes on to note, "the crucial ingredient is a group of people committed to God, each other, and the process of Christian growth. Wesley knew that when these elements were present, God's Holy Spirit would use them for the cause of sanctification."

#### *David Lowes Watson: Covenant Discipleship*

David Lowes Watson developed his covenant discipleship concept while he was a doctoral student

and pastor at the Holly Springs United Methodist Church, North Carolina."<sup>179</sup> In doing so, he has been credited with "the retrieval of the intent and structure of the early Methodist class meetings and a revival of the small-group structure for spiritual growth."<sup>180</sup> A covenant discipleship group is no more than seven people who agree to meet together for one hour per week in order to hold themselves mutually accountable for their discipleship. They do this by affirming a covenant which they themselves have written. Watson makes it clear that covenant discipleship groups are not where discipleship happens, but an outlet where people give an account of how it happens.

Gregory S. Clapper, *As if the Heart Mattered: A Wesleyan Spirituality*. (Nashville: Upper Room, 1997), 92.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>179</sup> Watson, *Accountable Discipleship*, vii.

<sup>180</sup> Matthaeci, 29.

The process of Watson's covenant discipleship begins at a weekend retreat of

instruction and prayer. At the conclusion of the retreat, the participants develop a covenant document, a statement of 8 -12 commitments which the entire groups agrees to put into practice. The covenant statement is an adaptation of Wesley's organization of the spiritual practices; namely "works of mercy" and "works of piety." Watson contends that the 18<sup>th</sup> century meaning of these terms has been lost. He further redefined each of these terms into two new categories.

The first aspect of "works of mercy" is "acts of compassion." Watson defines these as "those simple, basic things we do out of kindness to our neighbor, and our

neighbor is anyone who is in need, anywhere in the world."

Following the lead of Wesley, Watson retains the commitment to address the underlying sources of the outward forms of the presenting needs. In describing "acts of justice," (the second element of Wesley's "works of mercy") Watson notes, "we must not only minister to people in need, but ask why they are in need in the first place. And if they are being treated unjustly, then we must confront the persons or systems that cause that injustice." Acts of justice probe deep into the systemic cause of injustice.

<sup>181</sup>David Lowes Watson *Forming Christian Disciples: The Role of Covenant Discipleship and Class Leaders in the Congregation*. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1991), 9.

Peter Senge, a contemporary writer in the area of organizational structure and systems analysis, confirms Wesley and Watson in their commitment to get underneath the surface social issues. Senge identifies a destructive pattern into which compassionate ministries can easily fall. He titles the pattern as "shifting the burden" archetype. This pattern is described as a short term solution that is used to correct a problem, with seemingly positive results. As this correction is used over and over, more fundamental, long-term corrective measures are used less and less. Over time, the capabilities for the fundamental solution may "atrophy or become disabled" which leads to a greater reliance on the symptomatic solution.<sup>183</sup> By engaging in "act of justice" we seek to destroy the root cause of injustice.

Watson redefines Wesley's "works of piety," first of all, as "acts of worship" or the means of grace that we exercise corporately. Specifically, these are "the ministries of word and sacrament. Not only do they affirm the indispensable place of the church in Christian discipleship, they also enable us to build each other up in the Body of Christ."<sup>184</sup>

The second redefinition of Wesley's "works of piety" is "acts of devotion." Watson described these as "the private spiritual disciplines of prayer, reading the Scriptures and inward examination that bring us

face to face with God most directly, when no one else is present."

<sup>183</sup> Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization*. (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 391.

<sup>184</sup> Watson, *Forming Christian Disciples*, 9.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Watson, *Accountable Discipleship*, 68.

At the conclusion of Watson's Covenant Discipleship retreat, after the group has agreed on a covenant statement, each participant signs the document as an agreement of commitment. Watson stresses that the commitment should be indefinite as opposed to being limited to a specific period of time. He asserts, "This is not a group activity to be tried for a period, nor is it subject to feelings of personal fulfillment. It is a 'watching over one another in love,' and covenant groups cannot function unless this mutual accountability is understood by all members at the outset."<sup>186</sup> The participants then gather

together weekly to give an accountability report before the rest of the group of how they have kept the commitments listed in the covenant statement. As each participant regularly reports their progress in keeping their discipleship commitments, the group affirms or admonishes in order to encourage their continued progress.

### **Social Network Media**

The participants of the Sofia Discipleship Project (SDP) have enjoyed a close and strong connection for many years. They have shared life and ministry together in the Sofia church. There is a shared desire among the participants to maintain and deepen that connection despite the fact that the ebb

and flow of life and ministry has recently brought distance between them. Can the SDP's utilization of social media techniques provide an adequate forum for the participants to significantly influence each other's lives? Before blindly leaping into this new media forum, the possible benefits and pitfalls of social media must be carefully explored.

To do so, several knowledgeable voices are consulted to glean valuable insights from their recent experience with social media. Larry D. Rosen reminds us that social media is an undeniable current reality. He sees great potential in the utilization of social networks in the realm of education and gives several positive affirmations for its usage. In contrast, Jesse Rice outlines the limitations and downfalls of social media by exploring the nature of community online. He wisely differentiates between the community we need and the connection we receive through social media. Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown advocate a new style of learning to correspond with (and take advantage of) the constantly changing culture we now live in. Shane Hipps takes a cautious stance toward

the utilization of social media. Hipps explores how the media we employ transforms us as well as the message we convey. He examines how historical media shifts have transformed culture and uses this as a basis to draw analysis and give advice about the transformation social media is having on today's culture.

### **Larry D. Rosen**

In *Rewind: Understanding the iGeneration and the Way They Learn*, Rosen makes an appeal to "rewire education based on teaching a new generation of students who are

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radically different than any before." Although neither his target audience (educators); nor his context of study (the iGeneration) neatly correspond to the Sofia Discipleship

Project, Rosen makes some general observations about the utilization of social networks

which are very helpful. Rosen describes social networks as

More than simply chatting back and forth about boyfriends or girlfriends, television shows, and movie stars. It is a multifaceted, multisensory environment where communication and content are the two key ingredients. Although social networks are not immersive learning environments, per se, they are platforms for creating a sense of realism particularly in the development and presentation of content and in their use of communication tools that students find engaging, and therefore more realistic.

He notes that social networks provide two critical outlets for the iGeneration: a source of

friends and a forum for social interaction with people who share common interests.

<sup>187</sup> Larry D. Rosen, *Rewind: Understanding the iGeneration and the Way They Learn*. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 218.

Although Rosen is specifically dealing with the realm of education, his insights can also be transferred to the area of discipleship. Following Rosen's thought, why then should a Covenant Discipleship group utilize social media? The most obvious justification for utilizing social media is that people are already there, they have already chosen social media as their avenue of connection. Rosen notes, "Preteens, teens and young adults find that they consistently consume media upwards of 20 hours a day. They do this through multi-tasking."<sup>91</sup> He goes on to point out that most of the new generation have never experienced a world without the Internet, cell phones, video games, and more media (including countless cable TV channels) than they could possibly consume. Rosen comments, "Yet they gobble it up, spending more hours a day using media than they do sleeping or attending school." Social media has quickly become the primary source of connection for the new generation.

A second rationale Rosen offers for the utilization of social media comes from its

ability to engage the student to more fully participate and contribute in learning than in the traditional classroom setting. Rosen comments,

Children and teenagers feel a sense of safety being 'behind the screen,' and this leads to disinhibition, or the willingness to provide more personal self-disclosure, which in turn, leads to more closeness to others. In a classroom setting, many students are hesitant to speak up and express their opinions due to shyness, self-consciousness, or an awkwardness that is part of teen development. Online, however, and particularly in social networking environments, shy students are no longer self-conscious, and the environment itself, with its personality traits, wall postings, music, video, and other personal self-representations, promotes honesty and bonding.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 12.

Social networks encourage more involvement from more people than the traditional classroom. In online setting, students are no longer able to slip in late to the back of the

classroom and sleep through the remaining lecture. Instead, everyone must participate in the online setting. Collaborative learning, multiple modalities of transmission of information, access to unlimited sources of information are further benefits which social media offers and easily employs.

In light of the positive possibilities for social networks in the realm of education, Rosen makes the following plea, "Social networking can and should be a strong, effective educational tool for the presentation of material in a variety of multimedia formats that can be viewed and reviewed at any time, and for extensive social interaction that facilitates collaborative projects." He then makes the following proclamation,

If we continue to try and reach them (the next generation) on our terms, using traditional teaching tools, we will fail them . . . The longer educators wait to appreciate and integrate [the next generation's] cyber worlds, the more students will be bored with traditional classroom learning, and the more we will miss out on opportunities to reach them within environments where they have already shown us that they are happy to reside and learn.

Rosen's proclamation is also true when considering discipleship for the next generation.

We must enter their world and employ their forms of communication to effectively reach them with the call to become like Christ. The longer we wait to engage the new generation through social media, the longer we miss connecting with them where they are.

### **Jesse Rice**

While Rosen offers a positive appeal to utilize social media, Jesse Rice effectively points out the downfalls of the media. In *The Church of Facebook: How the Hyperconnected are Redefining Community*, Rice presents the negative side of social

media by exploring the nature of community which occurs online. Rice sets the stage for his argument by citing a 2002 study conducted at the University of Illinois. Dr. Edward Diener along with Martin Seligman showed that students who tested with the highest level of happiness and the fewest signs of depression all had one foundational thing in common: significant social ties to friends and family.

Rice then goes on to further explore the nature of the significant social ties that produce happiness. Rice concludes,

The kind of connection we're longing for—whether consciously or unconsciously—is the kind that creates a sense of belonging within us, a sense that we are 'safe, cared for, protected, and loved.' In other words, we feel most at home—most *ourselves*—around people with whom we experience . . . deep and authentic connection . . . As such, we know that, whatever else connection means, it

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has to include the qualities that most make us feel 'at home' in the world.

Rice then employs psychologist Janet L. Surrey to describe authentic connection;

Authentic connection is described as the core psychological well being and is the essential quality



of growth-fostering and healing relationships. In moments of deep connection in relationship, we break out of the isolation and contraction into a more whole and spacious state of mind and heart.

With this understanding of the importance of authentic connection, Rice then questions the validity and depth of the connection through social media. Does online community really satisfy our relational needs? Can there be an experience of authentic community without face-to-face interaction? What are the consequences of spending more and more time

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 28.

relating online and less frequent time relating in person?

Rice comes to a conclusion that what happens online is *connection*—not *community*. He notes,

Virtual community occurs primarily on one frequency of the human experience: it is mostly a disembodied, and largely cognitive, connection . . . It's just not as valuable as unmediated community, which involves the entire range of human experience—physical, non-verbal, intuitive sense, subtle energies, visual cues, acoustic tone, etc.<sup>200</sup>

Rice continues by pointing out that the more connected we are, the more the quality of our connections suffer. The reason for this is that social networks consist of a network of mostly weak ties.<sup>201</sup> According to Rice, then, social media substitutes a weak sense of connection for authentic community. In his view, social media is an inadequate forum to enable the authentic community we need.

**Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown**

In *A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change*,

Thomas and Brown do not make a positive or negative case for the use of social media. Social media is simply a current reality and should be utilized and embraced.<sup>202</sup> They advocate a new type of learning to fit the constantly changing environment we currently live in.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 168-69.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>202</sup> Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown, *A New Culture of Learning: Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change*. (CreateSpace, 2011), 48.

Thomas and Brown offer a reason for the current state of constant change in which we now live. They write, "Our ability to produce, consume, and distribute knowledge in an unlimited, unfiltered, and immediate way is the primary reason for the changes we see

today." They go on to state,

If the twentieth century was about creating a sense of stability to buttress against change and then trying to adapt it, then the twenty-first century is about *embracing* change, not fighting it. Embracing change means looking forward to what will come next. It means viewing the future as a set of new possibilities, rather than something that forces us to adjust.

Embracing change with innovation and imagination yield the best outcomes for effective learning in the current culture of constant change.

Thomas and Brown then advocate a new culture of learning to correspond with the current culture of change. The new culture of learning is based on three principles:

- (1) The old ways of learning are *unable to keep up* with our rapidly changing world.
- (2) New media forms are making *peer-to-peer* learning easier and more natural.
- (3) Peer-to-peer learning is amplified by emerging technologies that shape

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the *collective* nature of participation with those new media. Thomas and Brown

explain how learning happens in the new culture of learning they advocate,

In the new culture of learning, people learn through their interaction and participation with one another in fluid relationships that are the result of shared interests and opportunity. In this environment, the participants all stand on equal ground—no one is assigned to the traditional role of teacher or student.

To facilitate the overall learning of the group, then, the role of teacher and student are

blurred as each journeys together on the path of learning. Thomas and Brown further

explain,

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 50.

Learning should be viewed in terms of an environment—combined with rich resources provided by the digital information network—where the context in

which learning happens, the boundaries that define it, and the students, teachers, and information within it all coexist and shape each other in a mutually reinforcing way. Here, boundaries serve not only as constraints but also, often times, as

<sup>^07</sup>  
catalysts for innovation.

Specifically about social media, Thomas and Brown outline its positive benefits, "Digital

networked environments do not provide only an extension of real world interaction; they

also provide an enhanced environment for sharing information and engaging in

meaningful social interaction." Collaboration through social media technologies is also

enhanced. Thomas and Brown note,

The learning that happens through blogs, social networks, and other new media may be deeply grounded in experience and personal expression, but also arises from the contributions of multiple people and voices. Expertise and authority are dispersed rather than centralized, and once a digital space hits a point of critical mass, it is very likely that some member of the community will have valuable expertise to share about a given topic.

The new learning advocated by Thomas and Brown embraces social media, innovatively trying to harness the potential to engage learning in a new and more effective way. The new media creates a new form of community. Social media is a powerful, unbounded destination on the learner's quest for learning.

### **Shane Hipps**

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 35.

Shane Hipps probes deeply into the realm of media usage and how it affects the message, the messenger, and the recipient. He offers thoughtful insight, advancing a cautious but balanced view of the benefits and pitfalls of social media. He indicates that

*Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith* was written, "to apply insights

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about media and technology to some of the basic issues of faith and life." In doing so, he hopes to help the readers view the world in a new way.

Hipps begins by noting that Christianity is fundamentally a communication event. He explains,

Religion is predicated on God revealing himself to humanity . . . God wants to communicate with us, and his media are many: angels, burning bushes, stone tablets, scrolls, donkeys, prophets, mighty voices, still whispers, and shapes traced in the dirt. Any serious study of God is a study of communication, and any effort to understand God is shaped by our understanding—or misunderstanding—of the media and technology we use to communicate."<sup>2</sup>

Hipps asserts that the various media through which we acquire information are not neutral.

Instead they have power to shape us, regardless of content, and we cannot evaluate them

based solely on their content.<sup>212</sup> Technology both gives and takes away, and each new

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medium introduced into our lives must be evaluated.

Hipps builds his thought heavily on the foundation of the theory of Marshall McLuhan, the oracle of the electronic age. McLuhan asserts that the medium is the message; whenever our method changes, our message automatically changes along with it. You can't change the methods without changing your

message—they're inseparable.<sup>214</sup>

<sup>210</sup> Shane Hipps, *Flickering Pixels: How Technology Shapes Your Faith*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 7.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

Considering social media, Hipps adds caution to the current culture's addiction, "The convenience factor is just too high. We love the efficiency of our interactions; they

allow us to be in touch more often. However, there is a big difference between being 'in touch' and truly connecting with others."<sup>215</sup> With the addition of this new media in our lives, according to McLuhan's theory, changes also come to the messages that are carried by it. If social networks are the new media for connection and community, we can expect then, that the nature of that communication to change.

Hipps exposes several problematic changes that come with the electronic culture or social media.

First of all, electronic culture disembodies and separates us from those closest to us. Most of us are quite unaware of this phenomenon and, in fact, believe our technology is bringing us closer.<sup>216</sup> Second, the Internet encourages only the knowledge-

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gathering stage without considering coordination or meaningful connections." Hipps explains the danger of this noting,

Information alone is strength without coordination. We become a danger mostly to ourselves when we have it. Understanding is the ability to coordinate that raw information in meaningful ways. Understanding creates a certain enthusiasm. We can direct our knowledge toward potentially useful ends—but we may also be a danger to others. Wisdom, however, is knowing how, when, and why we use our understanding; wisdom is settling into our understanding without being too enamored by it.<sup>218</sup>

Third, Hipps states, "The Internet has a natural bias toward exhibitionism and thus the erosion of real intimacy. There is nothing exclusive about it, yet it creates, paradoxically,

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid.

a kind of illusion of intimacy with people we've never met in person." Hipps explains the strange effect of this anonymous intimacy, saying,

It [anonymous intimacy] provides just enough connection to keep us from pursuing real intimacy. In a virtual community, our contacts involve very little risk and demand even less of us personally. Vulnerability is optional. A community that promises freedom from rejection and makes authentic emotional investment optional can be extremely appealing, remarkably efficient, and a lot more convenient.<sup>220</sup>

Fourth, Hipps notes the physical separation a dependence on social networks can bring. He notes, "Digital

social networking inoculates people against the desire to be physically present with others in real social networks—networks like a church or a meal at

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someone's home. Being together becomes nice but nonessential." The negative outcomes on an over reliance on social media are substantial and demand careful attention.

The caution that Hipps offers should not equate to an understanding that he completely rejects the place and validity of social networks. Instead, he advocates the informed use of social networks, understanding how the media interacts and shapes the message it conveys. Hipps notes,

By understanding the forces that shape us, no outcome is inevitable . . . When we realize, for example, that digital space has the extraordinary ability to create vast superficial social networks, but is ill-suited for generating intimate and meaningful

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human connection, we may treat it more like a desert than the main course.

Hipps furthers his thought saying,

Media and technology have far less power to shape us when they are brought into the light and we understand them. Perhaps the thing that prevents understanding is premature judgment. We are too eager to assign a value to things: we want to call something 'good' or 'bad' long before we understand what it can do and undo.

""Ibid., 113-14.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

Hipps contributes to the discussion of the utilization of social media by bringing pause to

its unexamined use. He gives powerful evidence to the theory that media does effect the

message in ways that need to be thoroughly accounted for and understood.

Hipps builds upon the thought of the previous book in *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church*. In describing the purpose of the book, Hipps notes,

This book seeks to provide the tools to help us interpret our electronic culture and understand the implications for our faith and our corporate life together. Behind everything that follows is a conviction that within the *forms* of media and technology, regardless of the *content*, are extremely powerful forces that cause changes in our faith, theology, culture, and ultimately the church.<sup>224</sup>

Hipps notes that when viewing the value and effect of social media, we often have a problem with depth perception; we are able to see, but we have great difficulty perceiving.<sup>225</sup> We are unaware of the limitations and dangers of our disability. Hipps then advises,

To perceive media and technology with both eyes open . . . the task before us requires an entirely different approach to analyzing media, recognizing them not simply as conduits or pipelines (i.e., neutral purveyors of information), but rather as dynamic forces with power to shape us, regardless of content.<sup>226</sup>

When considering whether or not to utilize social media we must then ask better questions than merely what are its pros and cons. We must consider how its use transforms the message conveyed and the people to whom the message is directed.

Hipps again turns to Marshall McLuhan to frame the discussion of how to approach the new media of social networks. McLuhan asserts, "All forms of media (i.e.,<sup>224</sup> Shane Hipps, *The Hidden Power of Electronic Culture: How Media Shapes Faith, the Gospel, and Church*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 17.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid., 27.

any human invention or technology) extend or amplify some part of ourselves. They



either extend a part of our body, one or more of the senses, some function of our mental processes, or some social process." McLuhan developed a theory, called Laws of Media, which consists of four questions designed to tune in to what he believed to be the four inevitable effects of all media. Those questions are;

—What does the media extend? —What does the medium make obsolete? —What do the media reverse into? —What does the media retrieve?

McLuhan then outlined the effect of other media shifts through history. He notes, "The broad introduction of literacy into an entire culture completely alters the way a culture

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thinks. Writing has the power to restructure the worldview of an entire society." He further adds that, "The printed book added much to the new cult of individualism. The private, fixed point of view became possible and literacy conferred the power of

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detachment, noninvolvement."

McLuhan moves on to describe the effects of the Graphic Revolution on contemporary culture saying,

In many ways the Graphic Revolution returned us to the iconic world of the Middle Ages, only the images were recast at the speed of light and invaded our vision from every direction. Over time, this iconic symbol system has been

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 72.

dissolving our dependence upon literacy."

McLuhan goes deeper in explaining the effects of the Graphic Revolution;

Because it is dependent on right-brained thinking, image-based communication actually reduces our capacity for abstract and critical reasoning skills, regardless of what is conveyed. As iconic communication has caused our thinking to become more concrete and intuitive, Western culture has embraced elements of Eastern thought patterns.

With this shift comes a new appreciation for the Eastern Orthodox practice of incorporating images and icons into worship practice. Both of these shifts in media usage are accompanied by major changes in society as a whole. These are powerful confirmations of McLuhan's theory.

Building on McLuhan's historical analysis, Hipps points out some insightful implications the current media shift has on the church. He comments,

As images displace the written word for communication, our thinking patterns and preferences change. A photograph cannot create categories; it just provides an impression of reality. An image shows the world as it is—an array of ambiguity and mystery. It does not explain or organize the world the way language can. As a result, we become increasingly tolerant of ambiguity and mystery—the very things images can best depict. As printing wanes, so also does our preoccupation with creating categories.

The shift in media usage precipitates a shift in how we understand theology. For instance,

Hipps contends that a media shift toward image is transforming how we view entrance

into the kingdom. He explains,

Because images are fast becoming the dominant symbol system by which our culture makes meaning, the emerging church is less likely to view conversion in binary terms. The strict cognitive categories of 'believer' and 'nonbeliever,' 'saved' and 'unsaved,' 'the elect' and 'the non-elect' were intensified and codified during the age of print. But in an electronic age conditioned by images, we have begun to believe that categories oversimplify the complex mystery of God's relations to God's people and the dynamic reality of a life of faith.

The shift in media toward image even transforms the understanding of the Gospel. Hipps

asserts,

The emerging gospel of the electronic age is moving beyond cognitive propositions and linear formulas to embrace the power and truth of story. It revives the importance of following Jesus holistically rather than simply knowing Jesus cognitively. It had reintroduced us to a corporate understanding of faith that has powerful implications for this life, not just the next. It recovers the importance of ancient imagery, rites, and rituals in celebrating the mystery of the kingdom of God. However, it may be at risk of losing the power and grandeur of Paul's ideas and contributions and the very real propositional truth claims of Scripture.<sup>233</sup>

The contemporary media shift away from the printed word and toward the visual image is

bringing a profound transformation of the message.

Hipps contrasts the two historical media shifts above to form the following insight,

If the modern era of print caused an explosion that fragmented the Western world into a collection of private individuals, the electronic era has done the opposite. It has caused an implosion, throwing individuals together with a force never seen before. While some have responded to this implosion with a heightened desire for privacy . . . others have moved in the opposite direction, intentionally giving up private space in order to gain a sense of intimate community with others.

Hipps sees the hand of God at work in the current media shift to reconnect us to aspects of

the faith that have long been suppressed under the left-brained tyranny of the print age.~

Hipps also concedes that there may be unintended consequences of our efforts to utilize

images. He asserts,

We may be in danger of undoing some of the most valuable aspects of modernity's influence on Christian faith, such as dependence on the medium of Scripture or the development of leaders who are well versed in our sacred texts. We need to be intentional and deliberate about how we use imagery, being careful not to supplant

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 77-78.  
the tyranny of the left-brain with the tyranny of the right brain."

With any change comes both gain and loss. It would seem then, that the best approach is to hold these two distinct media in equilibrium, allowing each to enrich the delivery of the message they carry.

With his thought solidly grounded in McLuhan's historical analysis, Hipps then turns the discussion directly to social media. He makes the following insightful analogies,

A virtual or electronic community functions a bit like cotton candy: it goes down easy and satiates our immediate hunger, but it doesn't provide much in the way of sustainable nutrition. It spoils our appetite for the kind of authentic community to which Scripture calls us . . . If virtual community functions like cotton candy, then authentic community is more like broccoli. It may not always taste good but it provides crucial nourishment for the formation of our identity. Authentic community will undoubtedly be marked by conflict, risk, and rejection. At the

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same time it offers the deepest levels of acceptance, intimacy, and support. Even with these strong contrasting analogies, Hipps does not completely dismiss the utilization of social media. Hipps concludes, "I am not morally opposed to virtual community; it also serves an important and limited function in our electronic culture. The problem is that virtual community is slowly becoming the preferred means of relating, even in the church." According to Hipps then, there is a proper limited place for social media. The

danger is the relative ease in which social media can assume a greater consuming and more isolating role in our lives.

In light of the pitfalls present in the realm of social media, Hipps offers the following helpful advice,  
<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 111.

The experience of virtual community can feel just as real as physical community, but the social, spiritual, and emotional realities do not provide the same kind of

connections. This means we must be discerning about the way we use information technologies to make decisions or build and maintain relationships in the church.

He furthers his advice asserting,

We must develop an awareness of our unconscious tendency to be seduced by our virtual communities so we can use them more intentionally rather than be used by them. Our subtle addiction to electronic community is not like an addiction to drugs where the only solution is to stop using entirely. It is more like an addiction to food or money, where we must learn to regain power over something we cannot do without. We need to develop healthy relationships with our technologies. This means nurturing a conscious awareness of their power, our longings, and the way both of these shape us.

Taking the time to think through the implications of using social media and understanding its power to transform will minimize the negative, unintended outcome that can come with its over-usage.

An 'eyes-wide-open' approach to the utilization of social media then, is its intentional, limited use. We must avoid being swept into its usage so much that it isolates us from each other and robs us of the direct, authentic connection with each other we need. We must understand that the shift to such a media will usher in profound change on the messenger, the message, and the recipient alike. Social media, however, is here. It is a form of connection and communication that people more and more are utilizing. To completely ignore the role of social media in the effort to call this generation to

discipleship is to lose out on the most prevalent forum to connect with them. Instead, with imagination and innovation we must cautiously and thoughtfully embrace the shift toward social media in order to communicate the message of Christ where people are.

### **CHAPTER 3: THE PARTICIPANTS AND PROCESS OF THE SOFIA DISCIPLESHIP PROJECT**

#### **The Genesis**

The genesis of the Sofia Discipleship Project (SDP) arose out of the painful realization that our attempts to encourage the discipleship development of our leaders in Sofia have largely failed. The haunting aspect of this confession was not that one of our leaders had not been in the Word for an extended period of time, but rather it was the realization that we as a group had been blind to our brother's need for too long. How could this have been? Why were we content with not really knowing what was happening in each other's lives? Furthermore, how could we have been content so long with a situation that perpetuated our ignorance of each other's real needs? As we lived and ministered together, we thought we were close, and we thought we knew each other well. But we really did not. Should we not have been able to notice other signs or manifestations of the struggle in the life of another? Yet week after week we continued on in life and ministry together, oblivious of our brother's need. We should have noticed, but we did not.

The trauma of this realization sparked in us a passionate discontentment with the way discipleship has been done. We had not been for each other what we each needed in order to thrive in discipleship. A change was needed. We desired to be a part of something better. If we were going to be more effective in discipleship growth we must find a different, more effective approach. The SDP was conceived to find a way to address the discipleship needs of the Sofia leadership team amidst the challenges of

contemporary society and ministry.

### **Recruiting and Educating Potential Participants**

The Sofia Discipleship Project (SDP) began with recruiting participants and educating them about the basics of the project. In order for them to be able to decide whether or not to participate in the project, they needed to have a relatively accurate conception of the project to know what their participation would entail. The potential participants were informed that what they were invited to participate in was a group discipleship project. Responsibility for progress in discipleship would not be their sole responsibility, but the entire group would care for each other's growth and progress. The project would be a contemporary expression of the Wesley class meeting. Specifically, the structure of the SDP would follow David Lowes Watson's adaptation of Wesley's "works of mercy" and "works of piety" in a covenant discipleship format. Instead of physically meeting together each week, we would be exploring the effectiveness of being connected throughout the project through social media.

As indicated in chapter 1, ten people were approached with an invitation to participate in the SDP. Of the ten people invited, six accepted the invitation to participate in the project, and four chose to decline. The four people who declined comprised two Bulgarian married couples. Their non-participation reflected not so much a lack of desire to be involved in the project but rather the inconvenience of the timing of the project. They wanted to be a part of the project, but conflicting work and family commitments made their attendance at the initial weekend seminar impossible. It had been determined that the initial weekend seminar was an essential aspect of the project which should not be

skipped. If someone was not able to attend the initial weekend seminar, it was better if they not participate in the entire project. After completing the project with six persons, it became evident in hindsight that six

participants was a much more manageable group than a group of ten persons would have been.

### **Description of the Participants**

The participants' freedom to openly express their opinions and experiences in the personal matters was essential to the success of the project. In order to encourage honest discussion, the names of the participants were omitted to protect their privacy. Instead, each participant was assigned a number and is only referred to by that number throughout the project. The homework assignments, the questionnaires, and communication between the participants was determined to be too intimate for published work such as this. Although that body of material is referred to often in the following chapters, it was not included in this manuscript. Those interested in the confidential material may make a request to the author.<sup>243</sup> The author reserves the right to disseminate that material at his discretion with the interest of the privacy of the participants as first consideration.

<sup>243</sup> Inquiries for more information can be sent to the author by e-mail [JSunberg@aol.com](mailto:JSunberg@aol.com).

Each participant came to the project with various discipleship challenges and needs. While the participants' challenges were unique in the small group of participants, their needs represent many others outside the SDP participant group who have the similar challenges. The SDP aimed to address the various needs of the group and encouraged them to overcome their discipleship challenges. How the SDP addressed each participant's challenges presented an important opportunity to learn lessons to apply to a

wider group.

#### **Participant 1**



Participant 1 (Pi) is a Bulgarian male in his late 20s. He and his wife, participant 2, currently live in another country. PI studied Computer Science in high school, and is very proficient in anything having to do with computers. After a period of disappointment and disillusionment with the church and college, PI completed a BA in religion. PI currently holds a district minister's license. PI currently works as a photo editor for an online company and has a demanding, but flexible work schedule. PI has expressed a call to ministry and has served in the local Sofia church in various ways.

The other SDP participants described PI as someone who is honest and sincere. He fully gives of himself to serve others, often forgetting about his own needs. He is an idealist who refuses to accept the status quo and settle for mediocrity. The SDP participants identified Pi's spiritual gifts as generosity, helps, preaching, leadership, wisdom, and discernment.

The hopes and prayers expressed by SDP participants for PI before the SDP were that the time he invested in this project would be returned to him several fold and that he would feel the love and affirmation of God and the other participants. They hoped that the intentionality of the project and the encouragement of the participants who love him would help PI overcome a dry period in his life and usher him into a long period of peace, joy, and contentment in the Lord. They prayed that he would be able to relax in the abundance of God's grace to give him strength to not just survive but to also thrive.

P1 noted that the biggest need in his life at this time is consistency in his discipleship practices. He recognized that he often is able to begin good things, but consistently fails to keep them going for an extended period of time. PI assessed that less significant parts of life often gain the wrong priority at the cost of more significant ones. He desires for this to change.

Pi's expressed hope and prayer was that the SDP would help him to gain momentum speeding up

the healing from his spiritual low, improve on his daily discipleship activities, as well as encourage his faith. In the past, P1 noted that group activities have been helpful for getting more out of his efforts than he has been able to on his own. He hoped that in ten weeks from now he would be able to look back and say that he has made progress.

PI represented the discipleship challenges of consistency, time management, moving away from home and those who have had significant influence in his life. Did the SDP provide the accountability and encouragement that PI needed to be more consistent in his discipleship practices? Did intentional, group attention help discipleship squeeze its way into a more consistent and more prevalent place in Pi's hectic schedule? Did participation in the SDP help PI stay connected to those who have been influential in his life? PI also represented those who have been disillusioned by the church. Did the SDP provide the support needed for PI to deepen his discipleship practice despite his previous disappointments?

## **Participant 2**

Participant 2 (P2) is a female in her late 20s. She is married to PI, and has a BA in Religion. P2 currently works as a nurse in a nearby clinic. While P2 has not expressed a definite call to ministry, she does have a strong desire to serve in the local church. P2 has served in a local Sofia church.

Participant 2 was described by the other SDP participants before the SDP as a kind-hearted person with a gentle spirit. She is a loving accomplisher who has a great heart to serve others. She is organized and able to accomplish many things. P2 is a giver and cares much for those who are in a less fortunate situation than her. She was described as a person who is always ready to help, even when she is already overloaded.

P2 has deep desire to follow God wherever He takes her. The SDP participants identified P2's spiritual gifts as music, compassion, encouragement, and prayer.

The hopes and prayers of the SDP participants for P2 were that she would be able to find and spend more time in meditation on God's Word, as well as in prayer. They prayed that she would not be exhausted as she takes on new tasks in the local church. They hoped that she would draw closer to God and that she more consistently would feel the love and encouragement of the other participants. They prayed that God would grant her the desire of her heart to grow in him.

P2 confessed that her spiritual life at the beginning of the SDP was not as good as she would like it to be. She expressed that in many ways she still feels like a lukewarm Christian. Furthermore, P2 asserted that she did not feel worthy to be loved by God, because she has let him down so often. She expressed a desire to be closer to God again. Although she has tried very often to come back to God and to live fully for Him, P2 has found it very difficult to stay close to God.

P2's expressed hopes and prayers were that she would have a place to talk with other Christians about her spiritual life, to have a place to go for help and support, as well

as to help others to stay close to God. She desired to study the word together and pray together, to learn from God, and to teach each other.

P2 represented the discipleship challenges of moving away from those who have had significant spiritual influence in her life, and the need for maintaining deep relationships. Did the SDP help P2 stay connected to those who have become important in her life? Was the SDP be an adequate format for the relational aspects of discipleship that P2 needs?

### **Participant 3**

Participant 3 (P3) is a female in her late 30s. P3 has a master's degree in Chemistry. She is currently completing a Christian Ministry certificate. P3 was sent out to church plant. P3 expressed a call to ministry and currently holds a district license. P3 has served in the local Sofia church.

P3 was described by the other SDP participants as a person who is not afraid to get her hands dirty. She is very practical and cares much for those in need. P3 is a woman that speaks truth, works hard, and is a committed minister of the Gospel. The SDP participants recognized that P3 has the spiritual gifts of leadership, evangelism, compassion, giving, and service.

The hopes and prayers the SDP participants had for P3 at the beginning of the SDP were that this project would be an encouragement to her and help her to grow deeper in Christ. They prayed that her consistency in discipleship would be the source of strength for her ministry. They prayed that she would feel encouraged and that the SDP would help her feel less isolated from the other participants. They prayed that she would take the

time away from all the busyness, and all the projects and activities to enjoy God's presence to recharge. They prayed that she would remain strong in her ability to look ahead positively as the inevitable challenges come, having the energy to manage all tasks for which she is responsible. P3's expressed hope and prayer was simply to have more time alone with God.

P3 represented the discipleship challenge of isolation. P3 is single and has served alone in a remote place among people who are significantly different from her in culture, education, and spiritual development. An important question for P3 was could the SDP be an adequate support for her in her isolated location?

#### **Participant 4**

Participant 4 (P4) is a single woman in her late 30s. She has an MDiv. degree and is an ordained elder. P4 has served in the local Sofia church.

P4 was described by the other SDP participants at the beginning of the project as energetic and passionate about her beliefs. She is a self-starter who accomplishes anything to which she sets her mind. She is very committed to prayer and worship. P4 is a very social person with the ability to quickly make friends, make peace and push for a way forward in the life of the church. The SDP participants saw that P4 has the spiritual gifts of tenacity, organization, prayer, and worship.

The hopes and prayers of the SDP participants for P4 were that the project would be an encouragement to her. They hoped that the commitment to the spiritual practices and the regular positive feedback from the other participants would build her confidence in who she is as a person as well as who she is as a minister. They prayed that she would

project were that she would be able to find peace and rest to sit down and enjoy the presence of God during the middle of the day. They prayed that this project would be a special time for her in the Lord, that the rhythm of the project will become a joy for her and that she will grow in Christ. They prayed that the effort she put into the project would be fulfilling and fruitful. They prayed that she would not be too bored throughout the project, but instead would find richness in the constancy of disciplines together with the other participants.

P5 desired to be more disciplined in her spiritual life, and to find answers for her future in the process. P5's expressed hope and prayer was to develop a dynamic and stable daily relationship with the Lord through the project. She noted that she has a keen awareness of God's desire to meet with her daily.

She feels that and as she is faithful to meet with him consistently, her spiritual life would deepen significantly.

P5 represented the discipleship challenges of sharpening focus, busyness, relocation and distance from significant relationships. Did the SDP help P5 focus her priorities? Did the SDP challenge her to keep discipleship practice in an important position amidst a busy schedule? Did the project keep her connected to those she has move away from who have had a significant spiritual influence in her life?

### **Participant 6**

Participant 6 (P6) is a male in his early 40s. P6 holds an MDiv. degree and is an ordained elder. P6 has been involved in the local Sofia church. P6's current ministry assignment requires extensive travel.

The SDP participants described P6 as a wise leader who leads with love and care.

P6 is person who strives to remain focused on the essentials of living the Christian life. He is a good listener and generous helper, both spiritually and materially. He makes sure that everyone around him feels cared for and loved. P6 is a gentle, but strong man who is gifted in diplomacy and relationship building. The SDP Participants saw that P6 had the spiritual gifts of encouragement, prayer, preaching, helps, wisdom, pastor/leader, and diplomacy.

The hopes and prayers of the SDP participants for P6 at the beginning of the project were that he would find energy during his travel schedule to continue using his spiritual gifts in new ways. They prayed that he would be able to go beyond that which is familiar for him now in his spiritual life. They prayed that would have wisdom and peace. P6's expressed hope and prayer was to become more consistent in various discipleship practices. His desire was that the disciplined practice of discipleship would become filled with

joy and not duty.

P6 represented the discipleship challenges of traveling, moving away from those who have had significant influence in his life, and busyness. Did the fact that P6's ministry responsibilities require him to travel, disqualify him from the opportunity of having consistent regular group accountability? Did the SDP help P6 stay connected to group of people who have become important in his life? Did the accountability of the group help P6 to keep discipleship practices at a high priority amidst a busy schedule?

### **Setting of Dates**

After the six participants committed to take part in the SDP, the dates of the initial weekend seminar and the 10-week project were negotiated. In order to fit the initial weekend seminar into the already crowded schedule of the SDP participants, the group agreed to have the initial weekend seminar on Thursday evening, May 26<sup>th</sup> and Saturday, May 28<sup>th</sup>. Since P1 and P2 no longer live in Sofia, it was arranged for them to participate in a separate initial weekend seminar condensed into one evening session through SKYPE. They contributed their ideas for the covenant statement through e-mail.

### **Initial Assignments**

The participants were given two short assignments to complete by the end of the first week of the ten-week project. The purpose of these assignments was to add to the body of information about the participants and to develop a starting point from which to measure the effectiveness of the project. The participants were given the option of submitting the assignment either through the SDP website, or sending them through an e-mail attachment.

### **Spiritual Autobiography**

<sup>244</sup> See Appendix 5 for instructions given to the SDP participants for the spiritual autobiography.

The first of the initial assignments was the participants' spiritual autobiography.<sup>244</sup> The purpose of the spiritual autobiography was to give the participants the opportunity to articulate how they have seen God's hand at work in their lives. The participants were asked to think about how God had previously worked in their lives by reflecting upon and

contrasting between the high moments and low moments in their discipleship experience. Through the spiritual autobiography assignment, the participants were given an opportunity to make an affirmative statement about whether or not they felt a call to ministry. They were also asked to give an assessment of their current spiritual lives. Finally, the participants were asked to speculate on how they thought God might work in their lives through the SDP.

### **Initial Week Activity Log**

The second initial assignment given to the SDP participants was the week activity log.<sup>245</sup> Although the SDP participants do not have regular schedules, the week activity log captured one week of how participants allocated and prioritized their time. All the participants claim to be very busy. Does the data from the week activity log support their claim? Is the travel time required for urban life and work truly prohibitive enough to warrant the hesitation the participants have to give time to another meeting in the week? And finally, what does the week activity log indicate about the priority of spiritual practice in the life of the participants?  
See Appendix 5 for instruction given to the SDP participants for the week activity log.



The participants' initial assignments were made available to all the other SDP participants. They were then given the opportunity to respond to each other's assignments with words of encouragement or admonition as necessary.

### **Initial Weekend Seminar**

The first SDP event was the initial weekend seminar. Although the best approach is to have an entire weekend for this event, due to the changing of the participants' schedules beyond their control, the initial weekend seminar was condensed to four hours on Sunday morning, May 29<sup>th</sup>. Since PI and P2 live in another country and not Sofia, the condensed initial weekend seminar was conducted with them separately through SKYPE on Saturday evening, May 28<sup>th</sup>. Although the compression of the initial weekend seminar into one evening or morning was not ideal, the purposes of the initial weekend event were achieved with the SDP participants.

### **The SDP's Biblical Definition of Discipleship**

The initial weekend seminar was comprised of five main components. The first component explored a Biblical definition of discipleship. It is nai've to assume that even among a group of theologically trained people like the SDP participants that there would be unity of understanding on something as basic as discipleship. To explore their functional understanding of discipleship, the SDP participants were given an opportunity to express their thoughts on discipleship. This seminar component, therefore, began with two basic questions; "What does it mean to live the Christian life?" and "How does God expect us to live as Christians?" These questions explored the participants' existing understand of discipleship and laid the groundwork for coming to an agreed biblical definition of discipleship.

The Biblical passage which has shaped the SDP's functioning definition of discipleship is James 1:27.~ This verse asserts that discipleship requires the combination and intersection of compassion and holiness.

### **Wesley's Theology and Practice**

The second component of the initial weekend seminar looked at five aspects of Wesley's theology and practice. First of all, it is important to realize that all of Wesley's thought and practice flowed out of, and was fueled by, his deep personal piety. The second aspect discussed was the class meeting, and the class members' commitment to watch over each other's spiritual development. The third aspect discussed was the band meeting, noting that this was a more intense and intimate form of group accountability. Fourthly, Wesley's organization of discipleship practices into "works of mercy" and "works of piety" was discussed. Finally Wesley's insistence on the importance of visiting the poor was discussed.

### **Wesley Contemporized for Today**

The third component of the initial weekend seminar examined how Wesley's practice has been contemporized for today. David Lowes Watson's work is very helpful in this area. He redefined Wesley's "works of mercy" as "acts of compassion" and "acts of justice," and Wesley's "works of piety" as "acts of worship" and "acts of devotion." Watson also recovered the group accountability of Wesley's class meeting through his concept of covenant discipleship.

' See Appendix 9 for a further explanation of the definition of discipleship in James 1:27.

### **The Sofia Discipleship Project Procedures**

The fourth component of the initial weekend seminar explained how the SDP would work. Participants were expected to complete all assignments thoroughly and honestly, knowing that their identity would be protected beyond the confines of the group. They were expected to keep the commitments of the covenant statement to the best of their abilities throughout the course of the project. The participants were expected to report honestly on their progress each week by "checking in" on the SDP website on the Saturday or Sunday at the end of each week. Finally, the participants were highly encouraged to engage their fellow participants each week with either encouraging or admonishing comments on the website as necessary.

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### **Working Out the SDP Covenant Statement**

The final component of the initial weekend seminar dealt with the working out of the specifics of the covenant statement. The participants were encouraged to think about what specific discipleship practices

they considered to be most essential in each of Watson's four categories. Through group discussion, the participants then selected one to three vital practices in each area to comprise the statement. The SDP participants then confirmed their commitment to the newly created covenant statement by either signing the document itself, or by sending an e-mail indicating their affirmation of the statement.

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See Appendix 5 - Sofia Discipleship Project Participant Expectations See Appendix 7.

### **Personal Commitments**

In addition to the covenant statement, the SDP participants were also given two further opportunities. The first was the possibility to add personal commitments to the covenant discipleship statement. Personal commitments are tasks individual participants identified as important matters on which they desired to be held accountable. Just as for the group discipleship commitments in the covenant statement, the participant also reported on their weekly progress on the website for these personal commitments. The other participants were asked to respond regularly with comments of encouragement or admonishment as necessary. Three participants chose to add personal commitments to their weekly reports on the website.<sup>249</sup>

### **Responsibility Pairs**

See Appendix 7 - Personal Commitments.

The idea of "Responsibility Pairs" arose out of a discussion with Dr. Brent Peterson.

The second additional opportunity offered to the SDP participants was to partake in responsibility

pairs.<sup>250</sup> The responsibility pairs concept was conceived to utilize the Wesley band meeting in the SDP.

These pairs would consist of two people of the same gender. The responsibility pairs were meant to add a deeper confessional aspect to the SDP by allowing another participant greater and more intimate access into the discipleship life of the participant. Responsibility pairs were to speak truth into each other's lives by asking each other direct questions about areas of struggle and temptation each other was facing.

Unfortunately, none of the SDP participants chose to incorporate this option into

the project.

### **Ten-Week Group Discipleship**

The ten-week group discipleship aspect of the SDP began on Monday, June 5<sup>th</sup>. From this day, empowered by the Spirit and mutual support and encouragement, the participants committed to do their best to keep the discipleship commitments they had made in the covenant discipleship statement and to record their progress on the website at the end of each week. They were also strongly encouraged to dialog weekly with the other participants with encouragement or admonition as needed. An e-mail was sent to each participant at the beginning of the first week to remind them of their commitments, to instruct them again of what was expected of them, and to encourage them to do their best throughout the coming week.

### **Initial Questionnaire**

<sup>51</sup> The participants' hesitation to the "Responsibility Pairs" was unfortunate but not completely unexpected. Bulgarians' hesitancy to willfully engage in intimate accountability is an understandable reaction to their recent history.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 8 ~ Initial Questionnaire: Questions 1 - 39.

By the end of the first week of the project, the two initial assignments were due for completion as well as the initial questionnaire.<sup>252</sup> The initial questionnaire was designed in a way for each participant to describe and evaluate their current discipleship practice in each area of the discipleship covenant statements. The questions also prompted the participants to assess their level of satisfaction with their current practice for each of the covenant statements. Additional questions were included in the initial questionnaire to

probe the participants' perception of busyness, to find out their ideas about discipleship, and to measure their exposure and influence of both Orthodoxy and Wesleyanism.

### **Weekly "Check ins"**

At the end of the first week, the participants had their first "check in" on the website. The accountability of the "check in" was similar to a report at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. The participants were simply to check a box if they adequately completed the discipleship task for that week. They were then encouraged to write an overall comment about their experience for the week. Since speaking about successes and failure in discipleship practice is a private personal matter, the SDP website was a closed site accessible by password only. With the permission of the SDP participants, four people were invited to monitor the site as guests. They could see all the assignments, "check ins," and comments of

all the participants, but could not see the participants' names. The guests of the site also did not have access to respond to participants themselves on the website. The invited guests included Dr. David Lowes Watson, upon whose work much of the concept of the SDP was based; Dr. Brent Peterson, the SDP first reader; Dr. Douglas Hardy, the director of the NTS DMin Program; and Dr Judi Schwanz, the research consultant.

At the beginning of the second week of the project, the participants were again sent an e-mail to commend them for what they had done well in the first week, and to clarify instructions for what had been misunderstood or left undone. Similar e-mails were sent most weeks of the project to encourage the participants as well as to give further instructions as needed.

### **Additional Questions**

By the fourth week of the project, the participants were given questions designed to encourage them to think more about the other participants. These questions asked the participants to describe the other participants, identify the other participants' spiritual gifts, and outline the hopes or prayers they have for the other participants.<sup>253</sup> The participants were given an additional set of questions in the fifth week of the project.<sup>254</sup> By this time, the participants could already begin to identify patterns in their discipleship practice through the previous weeks' reports on the website. The participants discovered that some of the discipleship commitments seemed easy to keep while others seemed to be more difficult. The participants were asked questions through the SDP website which were designed to help them to identify those developing patterns. They were also asked to reflect on any lessons that could be drawn from those patterns.

### **Meeting with David Lowes Watson**

At the **beginning** of the sixth week of the project, I had the tremendous privilege of having an in-

person meeting with David Lowes Watson in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. We met at his church with his covenant discipleship group who asked many questions about the design and future possibilities of the project. We then went back to Dr. Watson's home for a wonderful, two-hour time of fellowship and Christian conference.

<sup>253</sup> See Appendix 8 - Week 4 Questions: Questions 40 - 57.

<sup>254</sup> See Appendix 8 - Week 5 Questions: Questions 58 - 60.

I assumed that Dr. Watson would have serious reservations about the SDP. In

several locations throughout his writing, Dr. Watson strongly pleaded that discipleship programs should never be for a determined period of time (such as for ten weeks!). Instead, a commitment to discipleship should be open ended and last a lifetime. I was also pessimistic how he would respond to the social media aspect of the project. I was pleasantly surprised, however by Dr. Watson's enthusiastic response to the SDP. He indicated that he considered the SDP to be evidence of "a fresh wind of the Holy Spirit." He was also very enthusiastic about the social media aspect of the SDP noting that we had achieved a high level of accountability in a short period of time. I was very encouraged by Dr. Watson's affirmative words.

### **The First SDP Participant Face-to-Face Meeting**

Near the middle of the project, in the sixth week, the first "face-to-face" SDP participant meeting occurred. Since participants were in three different countries at the time of the meeting, the meeting was done through the technology of SKYPE. The purpose of the face-to-face meeting was to personalize the project, to give the participants an opportunity to "check in" personally, to encourage the participants'



efforts, and to answer any remaining questions that existed. The participants expressed frustration with their SDP experience due to the busyness of their schedules. Other tasks and responsibilities were demanding so much of their time and energy that they felt like they could not participate in the project as they had hoped. After about 45 total minutes of discussion, we prayed together and concluded the meeting.

### **Final Week Activity Log**

During the final week of the project, the participants were given the closing assignments. The first closing assignment was another week activity log.<sup>253</sup> The purpose of repeating this assignment was to see if the SDP had made any measurable effects on how the participants prioritized their time. Could it now be displayed that spiritual practice had assumed a greater and more prominent priority in the participants' lives?

### **Final Questionnaire**

<sup>253</sup> The instructions given to the SDP participants for the final week activity log were the same as the instructions given to them for the initial week activity log. See Appendix 5.

<sup>256</sup> See Appendix 8, questions 61-104.

The second assignment in the last week of the project was the final questionnaire.<sup>256</sup> Most of the questions in the final questionnaire were exactly the same as in the initial questionnaire. These questions asked the participants to describe and evaluate their current discipleship practices in each of the discipleship commitments of the covenant discipleship statement. The assignment also gave the participants an opportunity to assess their satisfaction with their current practice. Obviously, the purpose of repeating these questions was to measure the participants' perception of the progress they had made through the duration of the project. Other questions in the closing questionnaire asked the participants about their closeness with God and the other participants, their perception of their own progress, their assessment of the overall

effectiveness of the project, the effectiveness of using social media, and their evaluation of the level of their own participation in the project. On Sunday, August 14<sup>th</sup> the Sofia Discipleship Project officially came to a close.

### **The Second SDP Participant Face-to-Face Meeting**

On September 21, five weeks after the close of the project, a second SDP participant face-to-face meeting took place. Once again, the participants were scattered over three countries so the meeting took place through SKYPE. The purpose of this meeting was threefold. First of all, the meeting gave another opportunity for the participants to speak directly into the lives of the other participants. One by one, each participant spoke words of encouragement and affirmation to each of the other participants.

The second purpose of the final face-to-face meeting was to check on the participants' progress in discipleship after the conclusion of the project and without the benefit of weekly group accountability. The responses of the group fell into two categories. Two of the participants (P4 and P6) indicated that their discipleship practice following the project had decreased. Without the obligation to report to the group weekly, the demands of life and ministry had overtaken the consistent practice of discipleship. Four of the participants (P1, P2, P3, & P5) however reported an opposite effect. They indicated that their post-project discipleship practice had actually improved. P1 said that SDP laid the groundwork for the future improvement, and that the results following the project would be better than the results during the project. P5 indicated that the intentionality of the project shaped the way she thought and approached discipleship.

The third purpose of the final face-to-face meeting was to ask the question, "Where do we go from here?" One participant made a strong plea for group interaction in some form to continue. He made this plea

because of his own need for group discipleship

accountability. He also desired to continue some form of regular group interaction because he could not accept the likely probability that time and distance would eventually draw the group completely apart.

Everyone in the group expressed the desire to stay in each other's lives the best way possible. In the end it was decided that the group would take a month to pray about what God would have us do in the future.

Around the end of October the SDP participants will meet again through SKYPE to plan the next phase of their group discipleship interaction.

#### **CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND TRENDS OF THE SOFIA DISCIPLESHIP PROJECT**

The results of the Sofia Discipleship Project are reported in two different ways. First, the experience of each individual participant is explored to measure the effects the SDP had on each of the participant's discipleship practices. Second, the experience of the participant group as a whole is examined to measure the overall effect on the group. The effectiveness of the SDP is also examined through the project experience of the participants in light of the five SDP Main Questions for Exploration, as defined and explained in chapter 1.

##### **The Participants' Experience in the SDP Individually**

Many variables differentiated the participants' experience in the SDP. The SDP participants neither started nor completed the project at the same points or in the same manner. The perceived adequacy of the participants' discipleship practice, and their satisfaction level with their practices varied significantly from participant to participant at the start and the conclusion of the SDP. Some participants entered the SDP

actively involved in full-time ministry assignments, while other participants entered the project working professional jobs outside the church. The participants' activity level in the SDP as well as their commitment to fulfill the discipleship commitments agreed upon in the SDP Covenant Statement also varied. These variables and others added to the diversity of the project and expanded the scope of its potential influence.

The first task to determine the effect of the SDP on the participants individually, then, was to establish a good understanding of the condition of each individual participant as they entered the SDP. Selected questions from the questionnaire as well as information from the Week Activity Logs shed light on each participant's discipleship life as they entered the project. How each participant allocated the hours of their weeks gave insight into the lives of the participants. Each participant's discipleship satisfaction level and discipleship adequacy level were measured at the beginning of the project. These indications formed the baseline against which the effectiveness of the project will be measured.

The second task to understand the effect the SDP had on the individual participants was to examine each participant's experience in the SDP. How active was the participant in the project? How committed was the participant in fulfilling the discipleship commitments the entire group agreed upon in the SDP Covenant Statement at the Initial Weekend Seminar? What patterns developed throughout the ten-week project, and what lessons did the participants glean from those discovered patterns? How did the encouragement and admonition of the other participants influence each participant throughout the project? How did the participant evaluate their involvement in the project?

Finally, the third task was to determine what results can be seen in the participant over the duration of the project. Did the perceived adequacy of the discipleship practices of the participant increase over the course of the project? Did the participant's satisfaction with their discipleship practice increase at the end of

the project? What resulted in light of the questions identified in chapter 3 that each participant faced as they entered the project? Based on all of the above data an overall assessment will be determined about the effectiveness of the project on each individual participant.

### **Participant 1 (PI) and the SDP**

#### *PI's entrance into the SDP*

PI sees himself as very busy, living at a level of busyness beyond that with which he likes or feels comfortable. He was willing to commit time to the SDP, but was concerned with how the project will fit into his full schedule.

<sup>257</sup> See Mayo Clinic. How many hours of sleep are enough for good health? <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/how-many-hours-of-sleep-are-enough/AN01487>. (accessed December 14, 2011). Timothy Morgenthaler, M.D., a Mayo Clinic sleep specialist, recommends an average of 7-9 hours of sleep per night for adults.

In the Initial and Final Week Activity Logs, PI outlined how his time was spent for a week at the beginning of the project and a week at the end of the project. These logs reveal some interesting and important characteristics of PI's life. PI works at home and has no need to travel. Most of the hours of PI's week, then, are spent inside the walls of his apartment. PI is not currently involved in education and does not participate in social media. PI's time is dominated by two activities; work and sleep. PI's recorded work hours are above a regular 40-hour work week in both the Initial Week Activity Log (47 hours) and the Final Week Activity Log (42 hours). PI recorded an average of 8.43 hours of sleep per day in the Initial Week Activity Log, and an average of 7.29 hours of sleep per day in the Final Week Activity Log. PI's recorded hours of sleep in both the activity logs fell well within the recommended average amount of sleep for adults.<sup>257</sup> PI's sleep and work patterns, though, are erratic. PI often, but not always, worked through the night and slept during the day. He recorded blocks of sleep ranging from 3 to 15

continuous hours. P i did participate in discipleship practices, but those practices were confined to Sundays only. Most of P i discipleship time consisted of attending church. The Week

Activity Logs also indicated that P I had consistent family time, but inconsistent recreation time.

P i entered the SDP with a very low level of satisfaction with his discipleship practices. In his Spiritual Autobiography, P i attributed his dissatisfaction to a long period of disillusionment with the church, as well as to his inability to be consistent in his spiritual life. P i 's answers to the satisfaction questions in the Initial Questionnaire further outlined his dissatisfaction with the state of his spiritual life at the beginning of the project. Only twice in the Initial Questionnaire did P I checked "Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is."

P i 's assessment of the adequacy of his discipleship practices at the beginning of the project was quite varied. P I recorded the highest adequacy level of "Consistent" for the practice of compassionate giving of resources and "Adequate" for the practice of worship. He recorded "Non existent" for five of the discipleship practices. P I, with a few exceptions, viewed his discipleship practices as very inadequate at the beginning of the project.

#### *P I 's experience in the SDP*

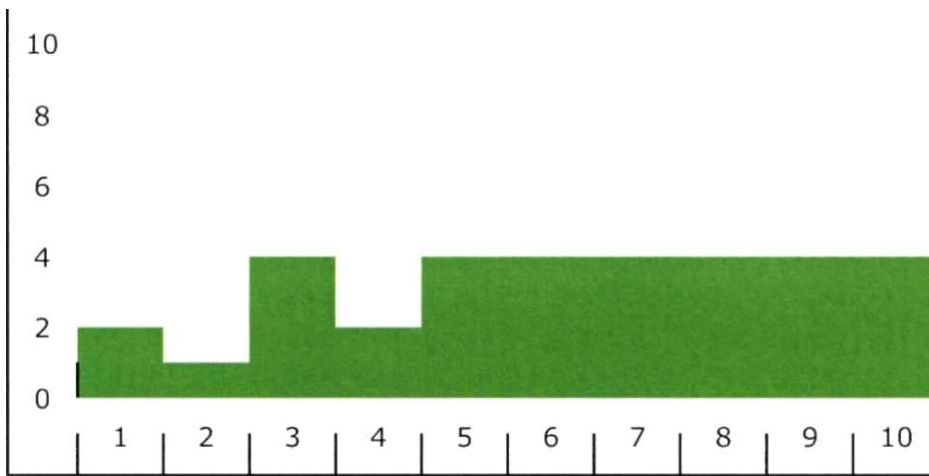
P i was very active in the Sofia Discipleship Project. He completed all the homework assignments on time, completed all the weekly checkins on time, and commented often on his own as well as on others' posts on the website. Participant 1 's weekly checkins indicate that P i either strongly committed to a discipleship practice or did not engage in the practice at all. This is evidenced by the fact that seven of the

discipleship practices were not checked in any of the checkins over the ten-week period of

the project.

Chart 1 below shows the number of checks PI reported each week, indicating how many discipleship commitments he fulfilled in each particular week.

**Chart 1 - Participant I's Number of Checks Weekly**



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**Week Number**

Chart 1 indicates that Pi's discipleship practice stabilized over the duration of the project. By the middle of the project, Pi established a pattern of discipleship and remained consistent with that practice through the end of the project. From Week 5 on, Pi fulfilled four discipleship practices weekly. From Week 7 through the end of the project, Pi's discipleship practices were exactly the same (worship, Sabbath rest, compassionate giving of resources, and prayer for each other).

Beyond the group discipleship commitments, Pi added a Personal Commitment to the SDP Covenant Statement decided upon by the group. Pi requested that the group hold him accountable for extended Bible reading. Pi indicated that he fulfilled the extended Bible reading commitment in three of the ten weeks of the project.

When asked in the middle of the SDP to identify the discipleship commitments which were easiest or most natural to keep, Pi identified sharing resources and helping others. Pi's explanation of this was, "Sharing resources and helping others seem to be the easiest because I somehow manage to always do that, it's been like this even before I became a Christian. To some extent I've made it a part of my routine. I also always look forward to helping with what I can, so it makes it easier to accomplish." Since Pi had already assimilated these practices into his regular routine, they were not difficult for him to continue during the project.

In contrast, Pi identified ministry to the poor and community service as the commitments most difficult for him to keep. Pi explained, "These are very difficult to even figure out in practice because the society where I'm at right now is so well organized in these areas that little is necessary. On top of that, I don't meet anyone besides my immediate family during most of my days; sometimes I only leave home on Sunday. So, I'm quite isolated from the world. My 'at home' work hasn't allowed me much exposure to the



people in my area." P i is very isolated and has difficulty of finding way to connect with and ministering to others outside of his home.

When asked what lessons he learned about himself through the realization that some discipleship practices were easy to keep and some were hard, P I noted, "I'm constantly very busy and at the same time exhausted. The little free time I find I try to use for relaxation, so this makes it difficult to do new things which aren't part of my routine."

The group interacted with P I through the comments on the weekly checkins. In the first week of the project, P I noted the difficulty of keeping all the commitments. He explained, "This is going to be interesting in the long term . . . So far I've discovered that certain commitments easily overtake others. In practice, I spend a lot of time on ensuring

and giving resources which at the end of the day, translates into less time for relaxed Bible reading and prayer which isn't rushed (as well as anything else, really)." P6 encouraged P i to do what he could, suggesting, "maybe at first concentrate on a few things which you see as most important (maybe Bible reading and prayer?)."

A few weeks into the project P i expressed discouragement in his inability to see any "stable improvement" in his spiritual life. P i voiced frustration saying, "Active discipleship is still quite sporadic for me and is easily influenced by simple things from my everyday life (i.e. work, family responsibilities, tasks I've promised to complete)." P6 encouraged P1 to not be so hard on himself, and directed him to see the positive growth the data already was indicating.

By week 9, P6 again tried to encourage P I, noting, "You have improved from the first weeks and have been consistent in the last few weeks, good job." P I acknowledged this saying, "Yes, at least I

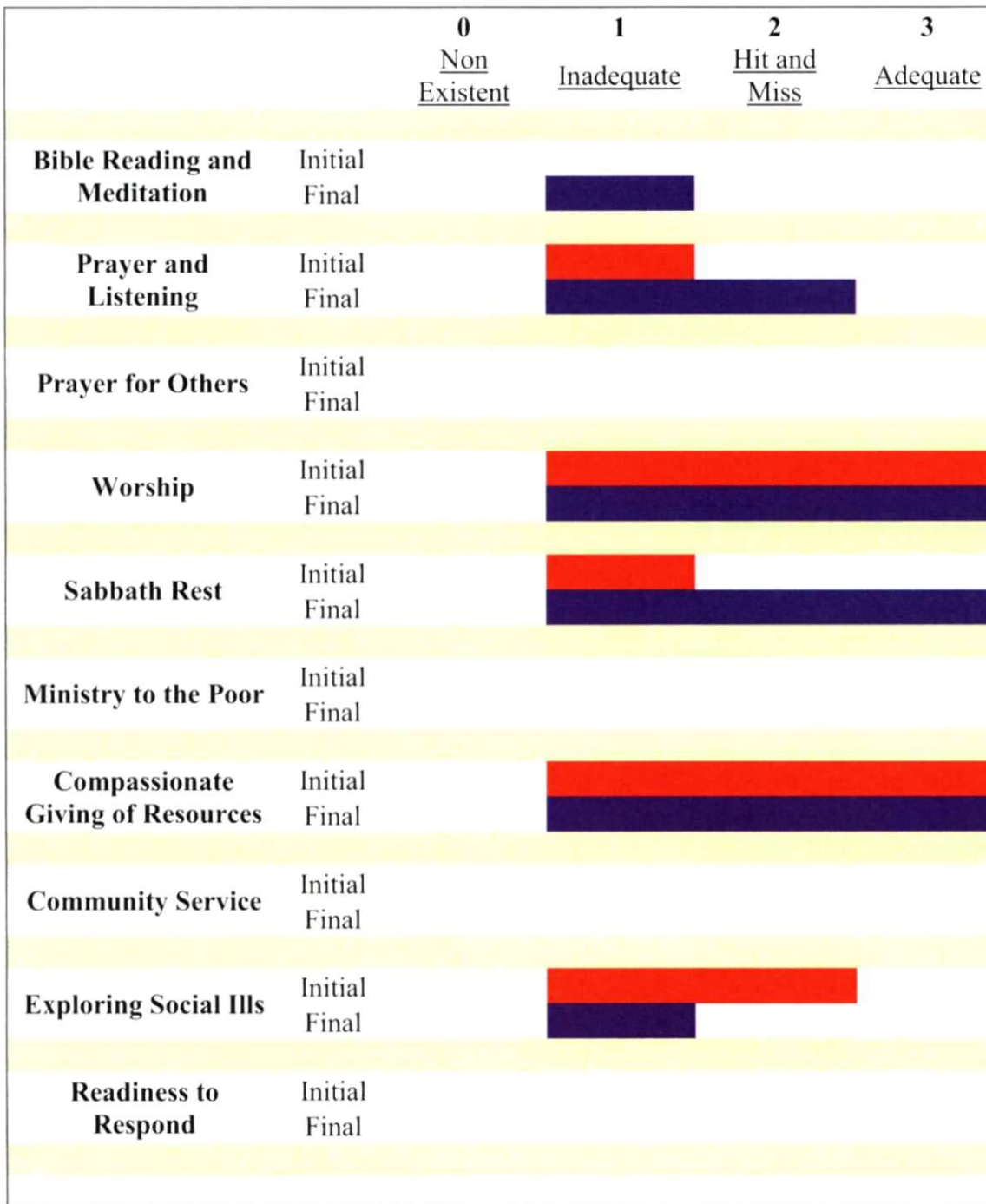
managed to keep up in a few areas, it's progress."

In his final comment, P1 noted, "Thank you for your support! It means a lot to me and in the past weeks as things have slowly started to improve I can feel God's answers to your prayers for me."

When asked to evaluate his participation in the SDP, P I noted, "In terms of completing the commitments I knew from the second week on that I will need to focus on a few of them only and try to do my best. In this regard I didn't participate fully. In terms of communication, in the beginning I tried my best to comment more but as I saw that not everyone was able to spend much time on writing comments and engaging in online discussion I was discouraged to do it myself and slowly drifted away from it." *PI's results*

Did participation in the SDP produce any measureable results in Pi's discipleship life? Chart **2** below indicates Pi's assessment of the adequacy of his discipleship practices at the beginning and at the end of the SDP.

**Chart 2 - Participant I's Discipleship Practice Adequacy Indication;  
Initial & Final**



Assessing a point value to Pi's adequacy data, Pi's combined Initial Adequacy Indication received 11 points. The average score of 1.1 per discipleship practice falls into the very low "Inadequate" range. Pi's

Final Adequacy Indication improved to 15 points. The average of 1.5 per discipleship practice increased to the middle "Inadequate" range. Pi's discipleship practice adequacy indication remained the same or slightly increased for five of the discipleship commitments. Exploring social ills decreased from "Hit and Miss" to "Inadequate." Four of the practices remained at "Non Existent."

Pi's Satisfaction Indication increased significantly at the end of the project. PI indicated that he was pleased with six of the discipleship practices at the end of the project as opposed to just two practices at the beginning of the project. Interestingly, PI even noted satisfaction with some discipleship practices which did not receive any checks throughout the ten-week project. Pi explained this in his specific response to the community service practice saying, "I'm trying to work on my daily routines, tasks and busyness in general, so for a while I will most likely purposefully avoid such activities." PI does not have time or energy to fulfill all the discipleship practices.

When asked if he grew in the areas of discipleship more effectively through the project than his would have on his own, PI responded, "Not in all areas, but in the few which I did focus on I have become more regular and intentional. The prayer support from other participants was very encouraging. I wish I would have received more feedback on my progress and a deeper discussion would have taken place." In the final SKYPE, participant group meeting, PI reported that the SDP sowed seeds in his life which were better realized after the project completed. He went on to say that his discipleship practices continued to improve after the project officially concluded. Pi

acknowledged that some progress had been made during the project when asked if he felt closer to God. He replied, "I do feel that I am going back on the right track. Overall I would say that I am closer to God but in certain details of my spiritual life I feel that a lot more progress needs to be made." Pi expressed

disappointment when asked if he felt closer to the other participants, stating, "Unfortunately, no. I believe the online communication wasn't completely natural for the other participants and it isn't for myself. I'm sure this would have been different if it was all done in an old fashioned face-to-face way."

Several important questions were identified as Pi entered the SDP. At the beginning of the project, Pi identified consistency in his discipleship practices as the greatest need in his life. He explained this noting, "I find that I can start good things but often fail to keep them going for however long it's necessary." PI further stated, "Less significant parts of life often gain the wrong priority at the cost of more significant ones. This has to change . . . somehow." The SDP data clearly indicates that there was progress in this area. Pi was able to come to a place of consistency with his discipleship practices and maintain it through the end of the project. Pi acknowledged that in the few areas where he focused, his practice became more regular and intentional.

A second issue PI faced coming into the SDP was the need for Pi to heal from spiritual discouragement and disillusionment with the church. PI hoped that the SDP would help him recover from a spiritual low, help him improve on his daily discipleship practices, and encourage his faith. In the ten weeks of the project, inertia toward this was beginning to accumulate. PI voiced a hopeful outlook for his discipleship practice, "I think the efforts and multiple attempts that went into these ten weeks will continue to

produce the most important results after the project is done. In the past days especially, I noticed that I didn't have to be super intentional about rest and prayer to make them happen, so they're becoming more a part of the day. I like that." He also stated, "I do feel that I am going back on the right track. Overall I would say that I am closer to God but in certain details of my spiritual life I feel that a lot more progress

needs to be made."

A third question P1 faced at the beginning of the project was whether or not the SDP could address Pi's need to return to a more healthy schedule of work and sleep. Comparison of Pi's Final Week Activity Log to Pi's Initial Week Activity Log revealed no measurable change in how PI allocated the hours in week schedule. The raw data does not indicate a change in P1 's work and sleep habits. However, since the conclusion of the SDP, Pi has committed to regulate his schedule, sleeping at night and working in the daytime hours.

A fourth question facing PI at the onset of the SDP was whether or not the project could help PI remain connected to those whom he moved away from who had a significant spiritual influence on his life. P i voiced disappointment in this aspect of the project and expressed that he had hoped that this aspect of the project would be stronger. P1 affirmed that the prayer support of the other participants was very encouraging, but he wished that he could have received more feedback on his progress and that deeper discussions would have taken place. Yet his overall assessment of whether or not he felt closer to the other participants through the project was, "Unfortunately, no."

PI was active in the SDP, but only engaged with a few of the discipleship commitments. Consistency developed over the project with the discipleship practices with which PI engaged. Increases in both Pi's Adequacy Indication and Pi's Satisfaction

Indication support the conclusion that the SDP was having a positive effect on Pi's discipleship practices. In the short duration of the project, most of the discipleship questions PI was facing at the beginning of the project were starting to be addressed.

### **Participant 2 (P2) and the SDP**

*P2's entrance into the SDP*

P2 sees herself as very busy and feels the weight of trying to adequately fulfill all the roles in her life. She explained, "I always feel busy, trying to meet all requirements of being a good wife, a good employee and a good Christian. I feel like there is little time left to relax." When asked if she was willing to give two hours a week on an evening each week for the sake of discipleship accountability, P2 hesitated, "I'm not sure. I think this is a lot. It feels like a lot of valuable time is being taken away when I would rather spend it being close to God. I do not like to just talk about changing my life with God, as to actually doing it. But I can see that it would help to actually change my life to spend more time with God, and to live intensely for Him."

The Initial and Final Week Activity Logs reveal what P2's weekly schedule looks like. P2 had little or no recreation and was not involved in education. Her week was dominated by sleep and work. P2 recorded 68 hours of sleep (9.71 average hours per day) in the Initial Week Activity Log, and 57 hours of sleep (8.14 hours of sleep per day) in the Final Week Activity Log. This amount of sleep is above the Mayo Clinic's recommended amount of sleep for adults. Although P2 has a significant amount of sleep, her sleep patterns are somewhat irregular. In a few instances, P2 woke up after a long block of sleep, engaged in another activity for an hour, and went back to sleep for another hour of sleep or more. In both logs P2 recorded work hours above a regular 40-hour work week; 46 hours of work in the Initial Week Activity Log, and 51 hours of work in the Final Week Activity Log. P2 recorded consistent work hours, but her work hours came at various times during the day. P2's travel time to work was significant, about an hour of travel each way. She engaged in discipleship practices nearly every day, but at different times during the

day. P2 recorded consistent family time.

P2 entered the SDP with a zero satisfaction level with her discipleship practices. P2 answered, "Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve" for every discipleship practice satisfaction question in the Initial Questionnaire.

P2's assessment of the adequacy of her discipleship practices at the beginning of the project was varied. P2 recorded "Hit and Miss" for all the discipleship practices that did not require interacting with other people with the exception of prayer for others. For the discipleship practices that required interaction with other people, however, P2 marked "Non existent" for every practice. P2 shed some insight into this when asked how the other participants could hold her accountable. P2 noted, "It's difficult for me to know how to accomplish some of the commitments here, but also concerning the time that I have to accomplish these commitments. It would be good for others to ask me questions and to give ideas on how to help me to achieve the commitments." On average then, P2 assessed the adequacy of her discipleship practices at the beginning of the project as "Inadequate."

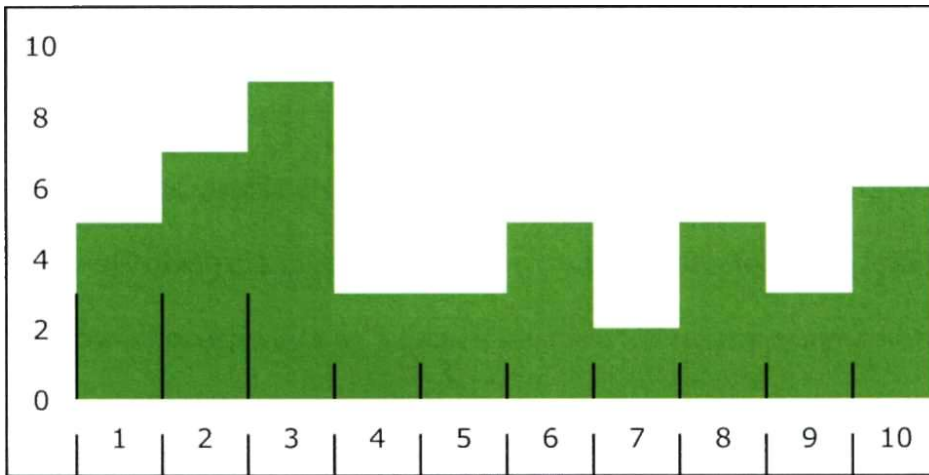
#### *P2's experience in the SDP*

P2 was active in the Sofia Discipleship project. She completed all of the homework assignments on time, completed most of the weekly checkins on time, but made seldom comments on her own and other's posts on the website. Participant 2's Weekly Checkin chart confirms P2's isolated discipleship practices. The top of the chart, which reflects the personal discipleship practices, contains many green check marks. The section of the chart that indicates the discipleship practices involving other people, however, is mostly red X marks. P2 did make a few attempts to connect with others in her discipleship practices in week three.



Chart 3 below shows the number of checks P2 reported each week, indicating how many discipleship practices she was able to fulfill in each particular week.

**Chart 3 - Participant 2's Number of Checks Weekly**



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**Week Number**

Chart 3 indicates an interesting pattern in P2's commitment to keep the agreed upon discipleship practices. The first three weeks show that P2 had an increasing commitment, likely from her initial enthusiasm for the project. This seemed to follow a period of discouragement beginning in week **4**. It seems that there were attempts to reengage as the project continued, which created a slight upward trend at the end of the

project.

Beyond the group discipleship commitments, P2 added a Personal Commitment to the SDP Covenant Statement decided upon by the group. P2 added "Songs of Worship" as a discipleship practice to be report on and for which to be held accountable by the group. P2 fulfilled this practice five of the ten weeks of the SDP, all five of those weeks were within the first six weeks of the project.

When asked in the middle of the project to identify the discipleship practices which were easiest for her to keep, P2 answered, "Personal time with God, reading the Bible and praying are the easiest for me to keep. I think it's easiest to keep because I can do them on my own time, and I do not need others in the process for it. My circumstances are not as [dependent] on this, as reaching out to others is in need." In her answer, P2 alluded to the trend of gravitating away from discipleship practices involving other people in favor of the practices completely dependent on herself.

When asked which discipleship practices were the hardest for her to fulfill, P2 continued with a similar explanation, "I think it's hardest to keep my commitments towards others because I cannot do them on my own time, and I do need others for it in the process. It's also hard because I depend on the circumstances around me, and people in need are much harder to find here in a village, than in the city. Poverty and other needs here are also much more hidden. It's hard to see whether someone is really in need or not."

P2 seemed to recognize this trend as something that needed to change in her answer to the question about what lessons she was learning from the realization that some discipleship practices are harder than others. P2 noted, "I learned from this that I really

need to step out in the community to learn about the people, and try to find needs that are there. [I want to] really make a difference in this world around me, but I'm still trying to figure out how to do this best."

The group interaction with P2 did try to address this issue. In week 4, P2 commented on the difficulty she was experiencing in identifying discipleship practices which connected her to other people. P2 noted, "Last week I really tried to work hard on finding something I [could] do here in the community. But [everything I thought of] seemed to be long-term commitments, like doing volunteer work with organizations. It's hard for me to find something to do for the poor and needy with the amount of time I have to spare, as well as with the irregular shifts that I have. [Does] someone have an idea of what I could be doing? Please help me." Both Participant 4 and Participant 5 responded with encouraging words within the next few days. P6 offered a suggestion, "Thank you for wrestling with the idea of ministry to the poor. I pray that God will reveal to you something that is right for you and fits your schedule. Is there something you could do connected with the hospital you are working in?" P6 also tried to expand P2's understanding of what ministry to the poor could mean in her country. P6 noted, "You mentioned that you are not sure how to do the commitments there. Ministry to the poor can be anything to help others in need. It could be older people, sick people, refugees, etc. Maybe there is something you could do through your work as a nurse which would minister to these people."

When asked to evaluate her participation in the SDP, P2 noted, "I feel I have not been able to fully commit to doing everything. I just didn't feel I had the energy for it."

#### *P2's results*

Did P2's participation in the SDP produce any measurable results in her discipleship practices? Chart 4 below indicates P2's assessment of the adequacy of her discipleship practices at the beginning and

at the end of the SDP.

		0	1	2	3
		<u>Non</u> <u>Existent</u>	<u>Inadequate</u>	<u>Hit and</u> <u>Miss</u>	<u>Adequate</u>
<b>Bible Reading and Meditation</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Prayer and Listening</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Prayer for Others</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Worship</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Sabbath Rest</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Ministry to the Poor</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Compassionate Giving of Resources</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Community Service</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Exploring Social Ills</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Readiness to Respond</b>	Initial				
	Final				

P2's combined Initial Adequacy Indication received 9 points. The average of 0.9 per

discipleship practice placed P2's combined Initial Adequacy Indication in the high

"Non Existent" range. All of these points came from the top portion of P2's chart for the discipleship practices which do not require interaction with other people. The practices of Bible reading and meditation, prayer and listening, worship, and Sabbath rest each received a "Hit and Miss" Adequacy Indication from P2. Ministry to the Poor, compassionate giving of resources, community service, exploring social ills, and readiness to respond were recorded as "Non Existent" in P2 Initial Questionnaire.

P2 entered and exited the SDP with zero satisfaction with all her discipleship practices. She checked "not pleased and would like it to improve" for every discipleship practice satisfaction question in the Final Questionnaire.

When asked if she grew more through participation in the SDP than she would have on her own, P2 gave a guarded response, "Some areas I think I grew more [than] I would have on my own . . . It takes time to develop certain things [such as how] to serve people in a community. I would have started to work on that anyways. But I think it has given me a push in the right direction, being part of the discipleship group." P2 affirmed that she did indeed feel closer to God at the end of the project. She also confirmed that she felt closer to some of the other participants through participating in the SDP.

Coming into the SDP, P2 faced the discipleship challenges of moving away from those who have had significant spiritual influence in her life, and the need for maintaining deep relationships. She articulated these in her Initial Questionnaire, "I would like to have a place to talk with other Christians about my spiritual life, and to have a place where to go for help and support as well as to help others to stay close to God. To pray for them and to encourage them in word and deed, as well as to be encouraged. To study the word together and pray together to learn from God and to teach each other." Unfortunately, the

SDP did not become that place for her. For P2, the project was not personal enough. She commented, "I think it became more an individual thing for everyone. I didn't feel like I was in contact with the others a whole lot."

P2 showed some improvement in her adequacy indications, but no improvement in her satisfaction indications. Although she expressed that she felt closer to God and to some of the participants, P2's experience in the SDP is a reminder that this type of format is not conducive for all people. She has a high need for personal contact and the format of the SDP did not meet that need. P2's participation in the SDP only minimally began to address the questions P2 faced in coming into the project. The SDP did not provide enough thrust for P2 to move beyond her complete dissatisfaction with her discipleship practices.

### **Participant 3 (P3) and the SDP**

#### *P3's entrance into the SDP*

P3 is busy. In her Spiritual Autobiography, P3 expounded upon her schedule, "I am so busy doing stuff, [I do not have time to] spend time with God. I pray and hope this changes." Even with this realization, P3 expressed her willingness to give two hours per week to devote to discipleship accountability.

P3 submitted identical reports for the Initial and Final Week Activity Logs. When questioned about this, P3 confirmed that both were accurate. While it is highly unlikely that every hour in both weeks were spent in exactly the same way, it can be assumed that both weeks were at least very similar. P3's allocation of time reflect the realities of a

single person in ministry, living a significant distance away from her family. P3 reported more than a regular 40-hour work week (45 hours). Her travel time reflected a significant time commitment, averaging 1.57 hours each day. P3 had a flexible work schedule caused by the reality of church planting in multiple locations. P3 reported consistent blocks of sleep, averaging seven hours of sleep per night. P3 was involved in recreation, but mainly as a large block of time on Friday evenings.

P3 entered the SDP with a low level of satisfaction with her discipleship practices. She recorded, "Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is" on only three of discipleship practice satisfaction questions in the Initial Questionnaire.

P3's assessment of the adequacy of her discipleship practices at the beginning of the project was relatively high, the highest of all the participants in the SDP. Unlike most of the other participants, P3's practices were rather balanced at the beginning of the project; only one discipleship practice (Sabbath Rest) was denoted below the "Hit and Miss" range. The discipleship practices which received the highest designation of "Consistent" were the practices of prayer for others and ministry to the poor.

#### *P3's experience in the SDP*

P3 had a low activity level in the Sofia Discipleship Project. She completed few of the homework assignments on time, completed about half of the checkins on time, and had few comments on her own and others' posts on the website. Chart 5 below shows the number of checks P3 reported each week of the project.

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### Week Number

Chart 5 indicates that P3 was very committed to fulfilling the discipleship commitments despite her busy ministry schedule. P3 recorded the two highest numbers of checks in any of the weeks of the participants. In Week 1, P3 recorded 10 checks, and in week 9, she fulfilled all the discipleship commitments. This was the only time that this occurred throughout the project.

When asked in the middle of the project which discipleship commitments were easiest to complete, P3 replied, "All the commitments that are connected with service to others, because I love them." To the reverse question of what discipleship practices were most difficult to keep, P3 answered, "Bible reading and meditation and Sabbath rest. These two are not very "natural" for me, because I have to force myself to do them. Sometimes I even think that the Sabbath rest is waste of time, but I know it is not." P3 explained her experience with the discipleship practices, saying, "I realize some things are easier, because I like them. If I don't pay close attention to the difficult ones and not include them on my daily priority list, I have major problems." P3's discipleship practices

are integrated with her passion of ministry. She is often with people, but realizes the importance of retreat with God.

The group interaction with P3 mainly consisted of the participants encouraging P3 for the good things she had been doing. P6 encouraged P3 to invest time alone with God saying, "What a great report!! Awesome!! The time you invest in prayer, listening, Bible reading, meditation, and Sabbath rest will continue to be the strength out of which you minister in your challenging setting. It is wonderful to see how God has and is shaping you and how he is using you to reach out to people for Christ." P2 followed with a



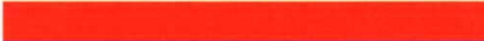



















similar comment a few weeks later, "I pray that God will renew your strength, and fill you with His love. I recognize that when you are tired, it's so difficult to still sit down and spend time with God. I really pray that God will help you in this area." P5 also offered words of support saying, "[I] just want to encourage you today. Love you a lot and I am praying for you. Let me know if I can help from afar."

When asked about her participation in the project, P3 stated, "I wish I had spent more time writing comments and encouraging others."

### *P3's results*

Chart 6 below indicates P3's assessment of the adequacy of her discipleship practices at the beginning and at the end of the SDP.

		0 <u>Non</u> <u>Existent</u>	1 <u>Inadequate</u>	2 <u>Hit and</u> <u>Miss</u>	3 <u>Adequat</u>
<b>Bible Reading and Meditation</b>	Initial Final		 		
<b>Prayer and Listening</b>	Initial Final		 		
<b>Prayer for Others</b>	Initial Final		 		
<b>Worship</b>	Initial Final		 		
<b>Sabbath Rest</b>	Initial Final		 		
<b>Ministry to the Poor</b>	Initial Final		 		
<b>Compassionate Giving of Resources</b>	Initial Final		 		
<b>Community Service</b>	Initial Final		 		
<b>Exploring Social Ills</b>	Initial Final		 		
<b>Readiness to Respond</b>	Initial Final		 		

P3's combined Initial Adequacy Indication was 27 points. The average score of 2.7 placed P3's overall Initial Adequacy Indication in the high "Hit and Miss" range. P3's

Final Adequacy Indication fell slightly to 25 points. This fell within the mid "Hit and Miss" range. P3's adequacy indications remained the same for eight of the discipleship practices. The practice of Sabbath rest slightly improved, while the practice of praying for others fell sharply.

Although P3's Adequacy Indication went down slightly, her Satisfaction Indication improved significantly. In the Initial Questionnaire, P3 indicated that she was pleased with only three of the discipleship practices. In the Final Questionnaire, P3's indicated that she was satisfied with seven of the discipleship practices.

When asked if she grew in areas of discipleship more effectively through the project than she would have on her own, P3 listed what she benefitted from the project. P3 noted that the most important aspects of the project for her were, "Spending more time with God through Bible reading and meditation, and prayer for others. [I also realized] how vital and spiritual the Sabbath rest can be, [as well as] praying and listening to your partners."

P3 noted that she hoped she had grown closer to God through the project, and that she felt closer to the other participants. She indicated that she wanted to repeat the project in her local ministries.

The question facing P3 at the beginning of the project was related to her isolated location. Was the SDP able to help P3 feel adequately connected to and supported by the other participants? P3 contributed some helpful insights from her perspective on this question. When asked if she felt closer to the other participants, P3 simply answered, "Yes." Expounding on this further, P3 noted, "This project gave me the opportunity to get to know the other participants better. We started as individuals, now I feel we are a team."

P3 focused on this aspect of the project when asked generally to assess the effectiveness of the project. She answered, "I liked it. I don't feel alone on that journey." Yet P3 also indicated that the SDP was not completely adequate in providing the connection she desired.

Although P3's Final Adequacy Indication fell slightly, her Final Satisfaction Indication rose significantly. P3's comments reveal that the SDP was able to address the isolation of P3's situation, although not entirely or completely. P3 felt closer to God and the other participants through her participation in the SDP. Overall then, the SDP data suggest that P3's involvement in the project had a positive effect on her discipleship practices.

#### **Participant 4 (P4) and the SDP**

##### *P4's entrance into the SDP*

The busyness of P4's life and ministry was noted by P4 throughout the SDP. P4 indicated that she is "incredibly busy," noting that the summer season was especially a busy time for her. Even with this realization, P4 said that she would be willing to give two hours per week for the sake of discipleship accountability.

P4 completed the Initial Week Activity Log, but was unable to submit the Final Week Activity Log. The Initial Week Activity Log was sufficient to get a picture of P4's weekly schedule as a single missionary, disconnected by distance from her family, and driven by her work. P4 recorded no time given for school, family or social media. Her week very much was dominated by work and sleep. P4's recorded 60 work hours were

one-and-a-half times a regular 40-hour work week. The amount of time P4 dedicated to her work totaled 8.57 average hours a day or 35.93% of her week. She often recorded long, uninterrupted blocks of work (14 hours and 11 hours). P4's week was also dominated by her sleep time. She recorded 62 hours of sleep which equaled an average of 8.86 hours of sleep per day. This amount of sleep is at the upper level of the Mayo Clinic's recommended average amount of sleep for adults. P4's sleep was relatively consistent and regular. P4 also recorded consistent daily discipleship time, but irregular time for recreation.

P4 recorded a relatively average level of satisfaction with her discipleship practices at the beginning of the SDP. P4 indicated that she was pleased with her practice and was content that they continued the way they are for four discipleship practices.

P4's assessment of the adequacy of her discipleship practices at the beginning of the project fell in the middle range of "Hit and Miss" range. P4's recorded the highest rating of "Content" for the practices of worship and Sabbath rest. Her lowest entries were "Inadequate" for both community service and readiness to respond.

#### *P4 's experience in the SDP*

P4 had a low activity level in the SDP. She was late in completing most of the homework assignments, and failed to complete one of the assignments. She entered less than half of the weekly checkins on time, and had few comments on her own and others' posts on the website. P4 most consistently fulfilled the discipleship commitments of prayer and listening, worship, and ministry to the poor. She fulfilled each of these commitments in nine of the ten weeks of the project. The discipleship practice least fulfilled by P4 was exploring the source of social ills. P4 had no checks in this category through the

project.

Chart 7 below shows the number of checks P4 reported each week of the project, indicating how many discipleship practices she fulfilled weekly.

**Chart 7- Participant 4's Number of Checks Weekly**

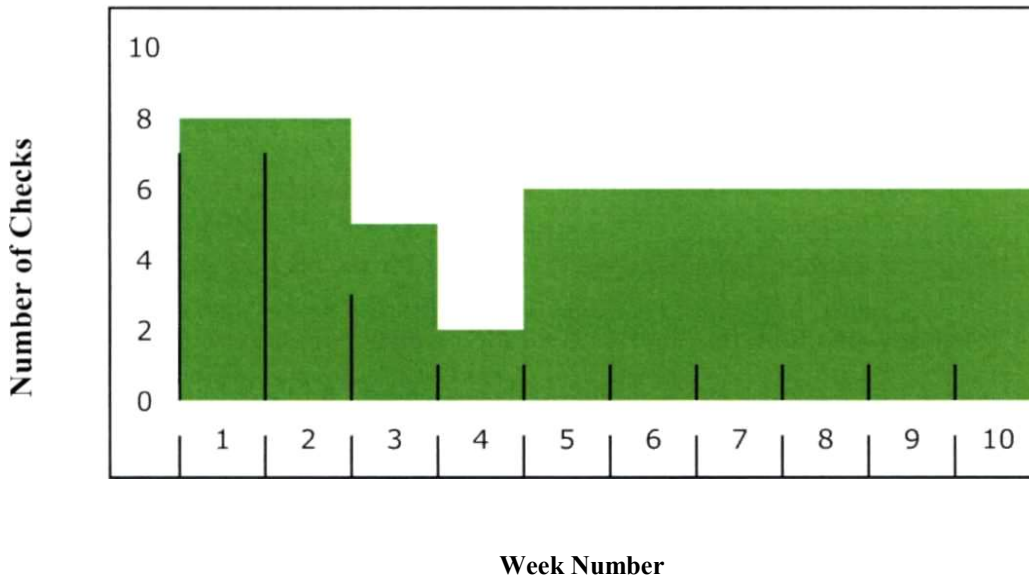


Chart 7 indicates that P4's discipleship practices stabilized over the course of the project. After a major decline in the first four weeks, P4 entered a pattern in week six that remained through the duration of the project. For week six through the end of the project, P4 fulfilled the exact same discipleship commitments.

When asked in the middle of the project to identify the discipleship practices which were easiest or most natural for her to fulfill, P4 replied, "Sabbath rest and corporate worship." P4 identified Bible reading and prayer for others as the most difficult to keep. The lesson that P4 took from these realizations was, "I'm really not very disciplined."

Most of P4's comments on her weekly checkins included details of her busy summer ministry schedule. The participants tried to encourage her to gain strength for her

busy ministry through her discipleship practices. P6 noted, "Good report!! You have committed significant time and effort to the commitments this week even in the midst of a very busy schedule, awesome!!

Hopefully, you will be able to see that this was time well spent. Hopefully, you will see that the investment in discipleship has been a source of strength for you this week." P2 added, "I understand that life is hectic and busy for you at the moment to say the least. I really pray that God will fill you, and lift you up amidst this all. Stay close to Him, He will give you the strength that you need. Hope you will experience His love and strength this week." Pi recognized the consistent pattern that P4 established and he praised her for it, saying, "I wanted to say that it's very good that you've been able to remain constant with the activities/commitments you listed in your comment for the past few weeks. I learned that this is often more important than the amount of accomplished work/commitments. In the long term consistency pays off the most."

P4 assessed her involvement in the SDP as "minimal."

#### *P4 's results*

Chart 8 below indicates P4's assessment of her discipleship practices at the beginning and the end of the SDP.

		0	1	2	3
		<u>Non</u> <u>Existent</u>	<u>Inadequate</u>	<u>Hit and</u> <u>Miss</u>	<u>Adequate</u>
<b>Bible Reading and Meditation</b>	Initial		[Red bar from 1 to 3]		
	Final		[Dark Blue bar from 1 to 2.5]		
<b>Prayer and Listening</b>	Initial		[Red bar from 1 to 2]		
	Final		[Dark Blue bar from 1 to 2]		
<b>Prayer for Others</b>	Initial		[Red bar from 1 to 2]		
	Final		[Dark Blue bar from 1 to 3]		
<b>Worship</b>	Initial		[Red bar from 1 to 3]		
	Final		[Dark Blue bar from 1 to 3]		
<b>Sabbath Rest</b>	Initial		[Red bar from 1 to 3]		
	Final		[Dark Blue bar from 1 to 3]		
<b>Ministry to the Poor</b>	Initial		[Red bar from 1 to 3]		
	Final		[Dark Blue bar from 1 to 3]		
<b>Compassionate Giving of Resources</b>	Initial		[Red bar from 1 to 3]		
	Final		[Dark Blue bar from 1 to 3]		
<b>Community Service</b>	Initial		[Red bar from 1 to 1.5]		
	Final		[Dark Blue bar from 1 to 2.5]		
<b>Exploring Social Ills</b>	Initial		[Red bar from 1 to 2]		
	Final		[Dark Blue bar from 1 to 2]		
<b>Readiness to Respond</b>	Initial		[Red bar from 1 to 1.5]		
	Final		[Dark Blue bar from 1 to 2.5]		

P4's combined Initial Adequacy Indication was 25. The 2.5 average score per discipleship practice placed P4 score in the mid "Hit and Miss" range. P4's combined



Final Adequacy Indication increased minimally to 27 points, remaining in the mid "Hit and Miss" range. P4's Adequacy Indications remained the same or rose slightly for every discipleship practices except exploring social ills and Bible reading and meditation.

P4's Satisfaction Indication rose slightly at the end of the SDP from four to five of the discipleship practices. P4 indicated that she was pleased with her practice of readiness to respond in addition to the four discipleship practices she identified at the beginning of the project.

When asked if she grew in her discipleship practices better through the project than she would have on her own, P4 commented, "No, because I didn't have time. It was a season of giving out of the infilling that I had received over the winter and spring." P4 expressed that she did not feel closer to God through the project. She did indicate, however, that she felt somewhat closer to the other participants.

The identified issues for P4 upon entry of the SDP were busyness, being able to have healthy balance and pace in her life. P4 certainly felt the demands of a busy season of ministry. Summer is a time of frantic ministry which P4 considers to be not conducive for a group discipleship accountability project, or growth. P4 indicated that the winter and spring are the times to store up "infilling" for the time of "giving" in the summer. P2 expressed that it was not possible for her to feel closer to God through participation in the SDP during the period of the summer weeks. Her busy schedule would not allow it. The busyness of P4's life and ministry was certainly confronted during the project. Several of the participants noted it and encouraged P4 to draw strength from her discipleship practices for her ministry.

Overall, the data would support a minimal positive effect of the SDP on P4. There was very slight improvement in both her adequacy and satisfaction indications. She also was able to

establish a consistent rhythm of her discipleship practices in the midst of her busy ministry schedule. The other participants engaged P4 throughout the project with the questions she faced upon entry of the SDP. P4 remained driven to meet the unrealistic demands of ministry by allocating unhealthy amounts of time and energy to her work obligations. This approach left P4 little time and energy for participation in the SDP. Yet the time P4 was able to invest in the project seemed to yield in her discipleship practices as noted above.

### **Participant 5 (P5) and the SDP**

#### *P5's entrance into the SDP*

P5 indicated that she was busy, but also willing to commit time in her week for discipleship accountability. The Initial and Final Week Activity Logs reveal some important characteristics of P5's weekly schedule. P5 spent little or no time on school, social media, or travel. In both logs, P5 recorded a high number of hours in the "Other" category; 37 hours in the Initial Week Activity Log, and 43 hours in the Final Week Activity Log. P5 recorded 25 work hours in the Initial Week Activity Log and only 12 work hours in the Final Week Activity Log. P5's allocation of hours in these weeks represents a typical schedule for a mother in ministry at the beginning and end of the summer. P5 recorded a consistent amount of sleep in both logs. She recorded 59 hours of sleep in the Initial Week Activity Log which averaged to 8.43 hours of sleep a day, and 60 hours of sleep in the Final Week Activity Log which averaged 8.57 hours of sleep a day. P5 recorded a good amount of time for recreation and for her family in both logs. She also had consistent discipleship time in both the logs.

P5 entered the SDP with a very low satisfaction level for her discipleship practices. She only marked "Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it is" for only two discipleship practices.

P5's assessment of the adequacy of her discipleship practices at the beginning of the project was average. Eight of the practices received a "Hit or Miss" rating. The only discipleship practice receiving a "Non Existent" rating was the readiness to respond practice.

#### *P5's experience in the SDP*

P5 had an average active level in the SDP. She completed half of her homework assignments on time, completed the majority of her weekly checkins on time, and commented on her own and other's posts on the website. Her weekly checkins revealed that she was stronger in the discipleship practices which did not involve other people. The exception to this trend was her report for the compassionate giving of resources practice which received a check in six of the weekly checkins.

Chart 9 below shows the number of checks P5 reported each weeks indicating how many discipleship practices she fulfilled in each particular week.

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**Week Number**

Chart 9 shows that P5 had a general trend of increased involvement. She was increasingly fulfilling more of the discipleship commitments at the end of the project. She ended the project with three strong weeks of fulfilling a majority of the discipleship commitments.

When asked in the middle of the project to identify which of the discipleship practices were easiest for her to fulfill, P5 replied, "I think the Bible reading and prayer has been easiest because, in some sense, [because] it takes the least effort to complete. That said, my criticism would be that the important factor is also the quality of the time I spend, not just the quantity." When asked which practices were the most difficult to fulfill, P5 answered, "Ministry to the poor. Being on the road, it has been hard to engage." To explain these realizations, P5 noted, "I am learning that I really need to look at the commitments I make because my excess busyness effects my ability to really concentrate and care for my spiritual life."

The group interaction with P5 mainly consisted of encouraging P5 in to be consistent in her discipleship practices in the midst of her erratic and busy schedule. P6 commented, "This was a pretty good start considering the craziness and your stress of last week. Good job! This week will also be a challenge as you have a lot of travel ahead of you, but at least this week should end a bit less stressful. The challenge is how to keep the commitments (and more importantly, how to consistently participate in the spiritual practices which shape the character of Christ in you) during a busy and/or irregular schedule." P2 echoed this encouragement noting, "Life really must be crazy right now, in the midst of traveling, moving, and trying to comfort your girls. I'm sure these times must be very hard for you. I pray that the Lord will bless you, and help you. I'm glad to hear that you are getting into a rhythm again and that you find time to spend with God." P5 articulated the struggle of her situation in the middle of the project saying, "Again, [I am] feeling like I can't really give my spiritual growth the attention I would like while we are on the road."

Perhaps this is our life - frequent travel but it is definitely more intense this summer."

When asked to evaluate her participation in the SDP, P5 replied, "I missed some postings, which bothered me. I was very mindful of the project."

#### *P5's results*

What resulted from P5's participation in the SDP? Chart 10 below shows P5's assessment of the adequacy of her discipleship practices at the beginning and end of the SDP.

		0 <u>Non</u> <u>Existent</u>	1 <u>Inadequate</u>	2 <u>Hit and</u> <u>Miss</u>	3 <u>Adequate</u>
<b>Bible Reading and Meditation</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Prayer and Listening</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Prayer for Others</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Worship</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Sabbath Rest</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Ministry to the Poor</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Compassionate Giving of Resources</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Community Service</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Exploring Social Ills</b>	Initial				
	Final				
<b>Readiness to Respond</b>	Initial				
	Final				

The point value of P5's Initial Adequacy Indication was 19. The 1.9 average score per discipleship practice placed P5's Initial Adequacy Indication in the high "Inadequate"

range. Ten weeks later, P5's Final Adequacy Indication increased to 26 points. The 2.6 average score per discipleship practice moved P5's Final Adequacy Indication into the mid "Hit and Miss" range. P5's Adequacy Indication remained the same or improved for every discipleship practice.

P5's Satisfaction Indication increased significantly throughout the project. In the Initial Questionnaire, P5 indicated that she was pleased with only two of her discipleship practices. This increased to six practices by the end of the project.

When asked if she grew in her discipleship practices better through the project than she would have on her own, P5 commented, "Yes. Knowing that others were watching my answers and knowing I had to be honest really made me aware of my actions. It added to my feelings of guilt, too, when I was not doing as I should." P5 indicated that she felt closer to God and the other participants through participation in the project.

The questions that P5 faced on entry of the project included consistency in the midst of busyness and remaining connected to those who had moved away from who had been significant in her spiritual life. The first question was most openly dealt with throughout the project. P5 indeed had a busy, erratic summer of travel and speaking. Several of the participants encouraged P5 in the midst of this busy schedule to be consistent in her discipleship practices. The increasing trend in P5's weekly checkins indicates that participation in the SDP did have some positive effect on the consistency of P5's discipleship practices. These positive trends of P5's data show that the connection with the group was helpful to her. P5 indicated that the fact that the other participants were watching her progress, helped her become more aware of her actions. She felt both positive and negative pressure to improve in her discipleship practices.

P5 was active in the SDP and committed to fulfilling a majority of the discipleship commitments. The significant increase in both P5's Adequacy Indication and Satisfaction Indication strongly reveal the positive effect her participation in the SDP had on her discipleship practices. She felt closer to God and closer to the other participants at the end of the SDP. P5 affirmed this conclusion and requested to repeat the project during another season of the year.

### **Participant 6 (P6) and the SDP**

#### *P6's entrance into the SDP*

P6 considers himself to be busy. He explained his frustration with his busy schedule, "I always feel like I am running to get caught up. I rarely feel that I am giving proper time, energy, and attention to the various roles I have in ministry and at home." When asked if he would be willing to give two hours a week for the purpose of discipleship accountability, P6 cautiously replied, "Yes. It would be difficult though to find a consistent time weekly for this, though."

The Initial and Final Week Activity indicated that P6's weeks were dominated by sleep and travel. In the first week, P6 traveled 54 hours which comprised 33.14% of his week. In the second report, P6's travel time decreased significantly to only 12 hours. P6's sleep hours fell within the Mayo Clinic's recommendation for sleep for adults, averaging 7.71 hours and 9.0 hours of sleep in each week. P6's recorded work hours at around half a regular 40-hour work week in both logs. P6's recreation time and family time increased significantly from the first to the final week of the project. This reflected the difference between a travel week for the first week and a vacation week for the final week. In both



reports, **P6** had fairly consistent discipleship time.

**P6** entered the SDP with a very low level of satisfaction with his discipleship practices. **P6** indicated that he was pleased with only the discipleship practice of prayer and listening.

**P6**'s assessment of the adequacy of his discipleship practices at the beginning of the project was inadequately low. His highest Adequacy Indications were for the discipleship practices of prayer and listening, prayer for others, and worship. The practices of exploring social ills and readiness to respond received "Non Existent."

#### *P6's experience in the SDP*

**P6** was very active in the SDP. He completed all the assignments on time, completed all the weekly checkins on time, and commented often on his own and others' posts on the website. The top of **P6**'s weekly checkins chart contains many green checks, while the middle of the chart contains mainly red Xs. This indicates that **P6** was consistent in fulfilling the discipleship practices which did not involve other people, but struggled to fulfill the discipleship commitments which involved connecting with other people.

Chart 11 below shows the number of discipleship commitments **P6** fulfilled in each particular week of the project.

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### Week Number

Chart 11 does not reveal a strong trend in P6's weekly checkins. Although the checkins were not consistent, the chart shows a moderately flat trend of flat to slightly downward for the majority of the project. There is a slight upward trend at the end of the project.

Beyond the group discipleship commitments, P6 added two Personal Commitments. P6 asked the group to hold him accountable for watching his tongue; not having harsh words for his wife and children. He was able to fulfill this commitment in nine of the ten weeks of the project. He also reported to the group on his exercise habits. He was able to have a minimum of three robust workouts in only three of the ten weeks of the SDP.

When asked in the middle of the project which were the easiest or most natural discipleship practices to fulfill, P6 identified Bible reading and prayer. He identified ministry and outreach as the most difficult practices to fulfill. P6 explained the lesson that he learned from these revelations saying, "I am concerned about what I am learning about

myself through this process. Traveling certainly plays a role in this, but it is easiest for me to do the things within myself and hardest to do the things with other people. Am I an ingrown Christian? Is my life and ministry not reaching out to others enough? I am praying about this. I will try to work through these issues and try to do the components which require reaching out to others this week. Also, I think I am so far away

from addressing the "acts of justice" aspects. This also concerns me."

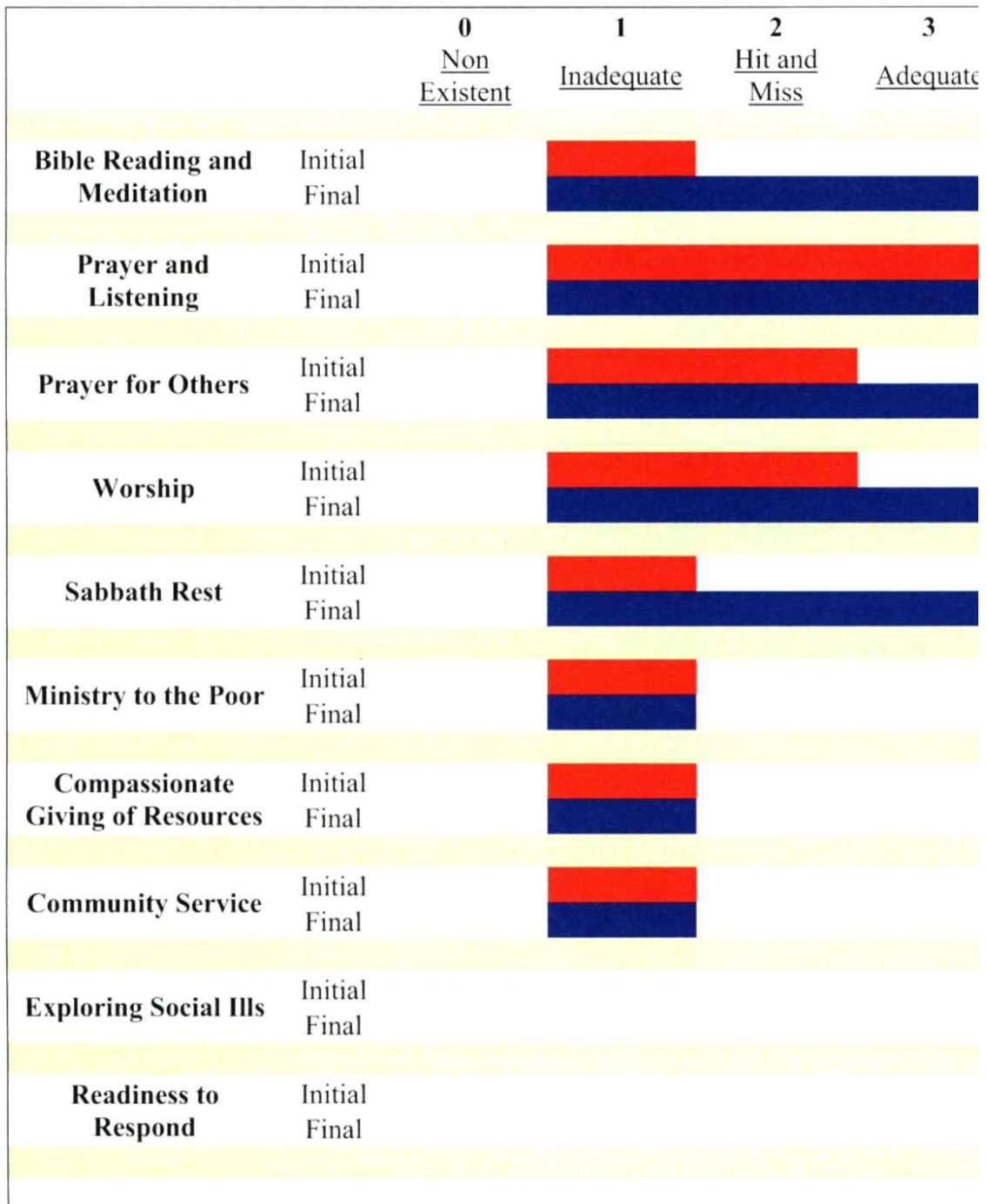
The group interaction with P6 included trying to help him figure out creative ways to keep the discipleship commitments while traveling. P2 commented, "I can imagine it being difficult to work on the commitment that involves ministry. (Maybe joining a program from the church, that you attend might work, just a thought) Traveling for sure really makes it harder. I pray that God will help you to see the needs that are in the people around you." P6 responded, "Thank you for the encouragement and ideas. It is a good idea to join with a local church's outreach. We will look into this more. I wish I would have thought of this before." P6 took P2's suggestion, noting, "This was a bit better week for me. I took the advice from a few weeks ago and asked to participate in a local ministry where we were traveling. It was very good." P6 also encouraged P6 saying, "I see from your activity report for week 10 that you're managing to keep up with the recreation activities in spite of the stress and many tasks before you. I can imagine the past few weeks have been very crazy, but it's good to see that when things quiet down even a little bit you're able to start exercising again."

When asked to evaluate his participation in the project, P6 noted, "I would estimate that I participated at about 70%. I was able to post every week and almost every week was able to post on the other participants' reports. I do not think I fully participated

in the commitments, though. As I have noted in other places, the project revealed to me that my life is not as intersected with those in need as much I [had hoped]. I need to change some things in my life and be more intentional so that those in need are not so distant."

*P6's results*

Chart 12 below shows P6's assessment of the adequacy of his discipleship practices at the beginning and end of the SDP.



P6's combined Initial Adequacy Indication was 12 points. The 1.2 average per discipleship practice placed P6's Initial Adequacy Indication in the low "Inadequate"

range. P6's combined Final Adequacy Indication improved to 21 points. The 2.1 average placed P6's Final Adequacy Indication in the low "Hit and Miss" range. P6's improvement however was only in the top of the chart, in the discipleship practices which did not include connection with others. These improvements were only in the discipleship practices which had higher Adequacy Indication in the Initial Questionnaire. There was no change in the Adequacy Indication of the discipleship practices which required connection to others.

P6's Satisfaction Indication increased significantly throughout the project. P6 recorded satisfaction with only one discipleship practice in the Initial Questionnaire, but indicated satisfaction with five discipleship practices in the Final Questionnaire. Again, the improved satisfaction occurred with the discipleship practices in which P6 was relatively strong at the beginning of the project.

P6 represents the discipleship challenges of traveling, moving away from those who have had significant influence on his life, and busyness. P6 was away from home and traveling for most of the ten weeks of the SDP. This contributed to the trend of P6 to improve in the discipleship practices which he could fulfill on his own, while not showing progress in the discipleship practices which involved interaction with other people. The group accountability was beneficial to P6, helping him to consistently fulfill several of the discipleship practices and to seek creative ways to minister to others in various unfamiliar locations. Social media made it possible for the SDP participants to provide accountability to P6 while he traveled.

P6 was very active in the SDP and fulfilled an average of slightly more than half of the discipleship commitments. P6 had significant increases in both the Adequacy

Indication and the Satisfaction Indication at the end of the project. Participation in the project helped P6 begin to address the discipleship questions he faced as he entered the SDP, but not completely. The SDP data reveal that the SDP had a significant, positive influence on P6's discipleship practices.

### **The Participants' Experience in the SDP Collectively**

While it is appropriate and important to explore the effect of the project on the individual participants, the SDP was designed as a group project. What does the combination of all the participants' data, therefore reveal about the effect of the SDP on the group as a whole? Collectively, how did the SDP participants allocate their time? How active was the participant group in the SDP? How committed were they in fulfilling their discipleship commitments? How did the Group Combined Adequacy Indication and the Group Combined Satisfaction Indication change throughout the project? What was the participants' assessment of the effectiveness of the project? What did the participation of the group reveal about the five Main SDP Questions for Exploration? Based on the SDP data, what is the overall assessment of the effect of the SDP on the group?

### **SDP Group Combined Week Activity Logs**

Every participant indicated that they were busy. For many, the busyness of life and ministry was and continues to be a significant frustration and irritant in their lives. Appendix 1 contains three charts; Chart 14 is the combination of the Initial Week Activity Logs of all six participants, Chart 15 is the combination of the Final Week Activity Logs of five of the six participants (P4 did not submit her Final Week Activity Log), and Chart

16 is the combination of all the Initial and Final Week Activity Logs submitted by the participants. Caution should be used to avoid over analyzing this data due to the significant variables which affect the various participants. Such variables include the participant's family situation (single and living removed from family vs. being married and having children) and the participant's work situation (having a full time ministry assignment vs. working a secular job). With caution noted, it is still interesting to note that the group generally received a healthy amount of sleep. Collectively, the group is not overworked. Slightly more time is spent on recreation than on discipleship. Travel does require a significant amount of time.

### **SDP Group Activity and Participation Levels**

The activity and participation levels of the participants are important factors in determining the effectiveness of the SDP. There was a wide range of activity level among the participants. P6 and PI were the most active in completing assignments on time, completing checkins on time, and posting frequently on their own and other's posts on the website. P4 was the least active, frequently apologizing for tardiness and commenting that her busy schedule hampered her involvement in the project.

The group committed to fulfill the discipleship practices agreed upon in the SDP

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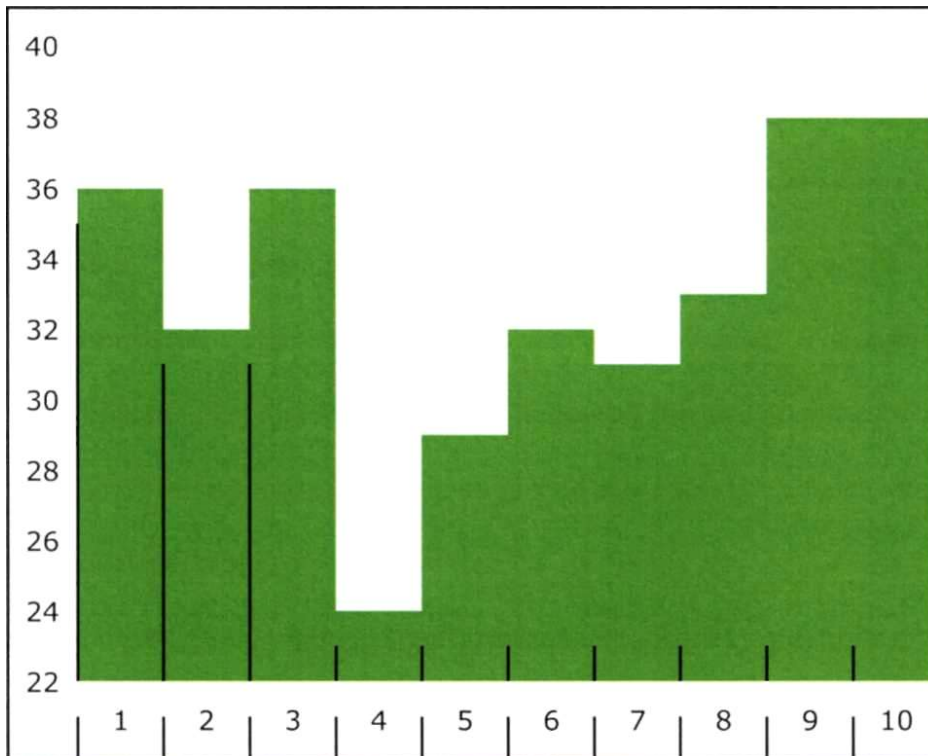
<sup>258</sup> See Appendix 7.

<sup>259</sup> See Appendix 4.

Covenant Statement at the Initial Weekend Seminar. Chart 21 indicates how many participants fulfilled each discipleship practice in each week.<sup>259</sup> Over the course of the project, the participants fulfilled an average of five of their discipleship commitments per

week. Chart 13 below indicates the total number of checkins the participant group as a whole reported each week of the SDP.

**Chart 13 - Group Number of Checks Weekly**



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### Week Number

Chart 13 shows that the trend of the participants fulfilling their discipleship commitments through the project was relatively flat. The trend dipped in the middle of the project and slightly increased at the end of the project. The discipleship practice most often fulfilled by the group was worship, followed by prayer and listening, and Sabbath rest. The discipleship practice least frequently fulfilled was exploring the source of social ills, followed by community service, and ministry to the poor."

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**Ibid.**

### **SDP Group Combined Adequacy Indication**

Appendix 2 contains two charts; Chart 17 is the Group Combined Initial Adequacy Indication, and Chart 18 is the Group Combined Final Adequacy Indication. The participants of the SDP entered the SDP with low confidence in the adequacy of their discipleship. The average Adequacy Indication of all the participants in the Initial Questionnaire was 1.72 points per discipleship practice. This score fell in the mid "Inadequate" range.<sup>261</sup> The participants indicated that the practices of worship, prayer and listening, and compassionate giving of resources were most adequate. These three practices fell within the "Hit and Miss" range. The lowest adequacy reported was for the practice of readiness to respond. The group combined score was 0.5 points which fell into the mid "Non Existent" range.

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix 2 - Chart 17: Group Combined Initial Adequacy Indication.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 2 - Chart 18: Group Combined Final Adequacy Indication.

The participant group reported significant in their adequacy questions in the Final Questionnaire. The Group Combined Final Adequacy Indication rose to 2.15 points per discipleship practice at the end of the project, marking a 25.0% increase.<sup>262</sup> This score placed the participant group in the low "Hit and Miss" range for its Group Combined Final Adequacy Indication. Every participant except P3 had an increase in his or her Final Adequacy Indication. Nine of the discipleship practices showed increases in Adequacy Indications. The largest Adequacy Indication improvements were reported for Sabbath rest, worship, and readiness to respond. Exploring social ills was the only discipleship practice which had a lower Group Combined Final Adequacy Indication.

### **SDP Group Combined Satisfaction Indication**

Appendix 3 contains two charts; Chart 19 is the Group Combined Initial Satisfaction Indication, and Chart 20 is the Group Combined Final Satisfaction Indication. The participants entered the SDP reporting satisfaction with an average of 2.0 of their discipleship practices. The discipleship practice which received the highest Satisfaction Indication by the group was worship. None of the participants indicated that they were satisfied with the practices of Bible reading and meditation, exploring social ills, or

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readiness to respond in the Initial Questionnaire.

Significant increase was reported by the participants in the Satisfaction Indication questions in the Final Questionnaire. The Group Final Satisfaction Indication rose to an average of 4.67 points per discipleship practice. This reflected an increase of 133.5% over the ten weeks of the SDP. The participants reported increased satisfaction for eight of the discipleship practices over the course of the project. Two of the practices, prayer for others and ministry to the poor, showed no change in satisfaction. Four of the participants indicated satisfaction with the practice of readiness to respond in their Final Questionnaires. Only P2 did not show increase in satisfaction over the course of the project. Four of the participants reported an increase in satisfaction of over 100%.<sup>264</sup>

### **SDP Participant Assessment**

<sup>263</sup> See Appendix 3 - Chart 19: Group Combined Initial Satisfaction Indication.

<sup>264</sup> See Appendix 3 - Chart 20: Group Combined Final Satisfaction Indication.

The participants had the opportunity to reflect on the effect of the project in the questions in the Final Questionnaire. The participants felt the limitations of the SDP and commented on them throughout the project. The main frustrations included the lack of personal contact in the SDP, the limited amount of time to complete the weekly checkins, the limited participation of some of the participants, and the timing of the project during the busy summer months.

The general overall assessment of the SDP by the participant group was positive. Although P1 expressed frustration with the low level of communication between the participants, he recognized how the SDP helped him with time management and setting priorities. He noted that the SDP was an "enriching experience." P3 stated, "I liked it. I don't feel alone on the journey." Although she did not like the timing of the SDP, P4 acknowledged that it could be quite effective. P5 concurred with P4. Five of the SDP participants indicated that they grew more through their involvement with the project than they would have on their own. Five participants expressed a desire to continue the project in some form.

### **SDP Main Questions for Exploration - Outcomes**

Before the SDP began, five questions for exploration were imagined. These five questions were listed and defined in chapter 1. How can these questions now be answered in light of the experience of the SDP? Unfortunately, there is not adequate data from the project to thoroughly explore all the questions. For some of the questions the changing circumstances of the project or the specific experience of the participants prevented adequate data to be gathered for explanation of the questions.

*Outcome of Question 1: Can the 18 century Wesley class meeting be effectively adapted to meet the discipleship/formation needs of the Sofia 1<sup>st</sup> leadership team?*

David Lowes Watson's contemporization of the Wesley class meeting in the form of a covenant discipleship group was appropriate and received with enthusiasm by the SDP participants of the Sofia 1<sup>st</sup> leadership team. The Wesley/Watson discipleship structure of "works of mercy" (acts of compassion and acts of justice) and "works of piety" (acts of devotion and acts of worship) as the framework for constructing the SDP Covenant Statement was also well received by the group. The utilization of the Wesley/Watson framework itself was beneficial in revealing the strengths and weaknesses of the participants' discipleship practices. The participants' self-discovery in these areas led the participants to more deeply consider the meaning and implications of their discipleship patterns. The Wesley/Watson discipleship framework, therefore, challenged the participant group in positive ways to expand and grow.

David Lowes Watson assessed the effectiveness of the Wesley class meeting, "It was a supportive structure for discipleship, grounded in the realities and the common sense of worldly living"<sup>265</sup> While it is not possible to say that the SDP achieved this in the ten short weeks of its existence, the trends of the SDP, however make it possible to envision how it could. The SDP, therefore effectively addressed the discipleship formation needs of the Sofia 1<sup>st</sup> leadership team who participated in the SDP.

*Outcome of Question 2: Will the combination of compassion and holiness result in more effective discipleship formation in the life of the participants?*

<sup>265</sup> David Lowes Watson *Accountable Discipleship: Handbook for Covenant Discipleship Groups in the Congregation*. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1984), 35.

The intention of this question was to explore the effect in the discipleship lives of

the participants of intentionally combining "works of mercy" with "works of piety." James 1:27 asserts that the combination of these practices is the essence of pure religion.<sup>266</sup> The utilization of the Wesley/Watson framework to construct the SDP Covenant Statement already addresses the question to some extent. The SDP, however, attempted to push the intentionality of this question through the inclusion of one of the discipleship commitments. The participants committed to fulfill the discipleship practice of ministry to the poor. This discipleship practice was defined in the SDP Covenant Statement as "A minimum of two hours of weekly ministry to the poor/needful infused with prayer."<sup>267</sup> Did the experience of the SDP demonstrate a positive effect on the participants through this practice? Unfortunately the SDP data for this practice was incomplete and inconclusive. The SDP participant group only fulfilled this discipleship practice 30% of the time.<sup>268</sup> The imbalance of several of the participants' discipleship practices hindered the exploration of this question.

*Outcome of Question 3: Will the changing of the approach to discipleship/formation from individual effort to a group project increase the effectiveness of discipleship formation in each of the participants?*

The goal of this question was to remove the responsibility for discipleship from each individual participant and to place that responsibility into the hands of the participant group. It was very clear prior to the SDP that the discipleship formation of the participants was not adequate. The discipleship lives of the participants did not thrive

<sup>266</sup> See Appendix 9.

<sup>267</sup> See Appendix 7.

<sup>268</sup> See Appendix 4 - Chart 21: Group Combined Weekly Checkins.

when the participants had the sole responsibility for their own discipleship practices. The

perceived adequacy and satisfaction of the group with their discipleship practices was very low at the beginning of the SDP.

The dramatic increase in both the Adequacy Indication (+25.0%) and the Satisfaction Indication (+133.5%) cannot be ignored. The intentional commitment to fulfill discipleship practices as well as the participants having to give an account of their progress to the group weekly are credited for producing these significant increases.

Some of the participants, however, were disappointed with the group aspect of the project. The SDP did not meet up to their expectation in this area. P1 noted, "Toward the middle of the project, as the communication among the participants increased I saw it had the potential to become a true group effort, but in my opinion it only remained with that potential. I believe the benefits from the project were more on a personal level, mainly due to the physical distance within the group and also because of the vast variety of responsibilities each of the participants had during the project." P2 added, "I think it became more an individual thing for everyone. I didn't feel like I was in contact with the others a whole lot."

The other participants' positive assessment of the group aspect of the SDP countered P1 and P2's comments above. P3 asserted, "This project gave me the opportunity to get to know the other participants better. We started as individuals, now I feel we are a team." P5 also saw the positive group aspect of the SDP, noting, "I was much more aware and felt really led to pray more specifically for the participants. I can say that the participants were more often on my mind, heart, and prayers."

Henry Knight assessed the effectiveness of group accountability within the Wesley's class meeting, noting, "Through their common struggle to live a disciplined life,

the members of the class or band helped each other to keep a 'single eye' on God in the midst of a world full

of distractions."<sup>269</sup> Ten weeks was not enough time for the SDP to develop a discipline among the participants of a 'single eye' on discipleship growth in the midst of distractions. But significant progress has been noted above. The SDP needs more time to develop, the project needs to be refined, and the participants need to strengthen their commitments to each other to deepen the discipleship practices of the group as a whole.

Although some of the participants accurately and appropriately highlighted the limitations and shortcomings of the group aspect of the SDP, the data clearly reveals that the group approach to discipleship accountability was much more effective than the participants' individual, sole responsibility for their discipleship practices.

*Outcome of Question 4: Will the utilization of social media methods overcome the perceived challenges of the leadership team while maintaining the necessary connectedness of the group?*

The challenges of contemporary urban life the participant group perceives include being busy and being isolated from each other. Did the SDP's utilization of social media adequately overcome these challenges?

<sup>269</sup> Henry H. Knight III, *The Presence of God in the Christian Life: John Wesley and the Means of Grace*. (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1992), 104.

All the SDP participants recognized the positive potential of utilizing social media for connection and group accountability. Even P2, who most struggled with the lack of personal contact the social media format enabled, acknowledged that the use of social media was helpful. P1 outlined both the benefits and drawbacks of utilizing social media, "It was helpful because it allowed us to post our status at any time. It [was] also helpful



because it offered an easy way to review what [was] already posted. It was limiting because of the nature of online communication, not everyone feels comfortable with it."

P6 recognized how the usage of social media benefitted him, "Basically it was helpful. We each were supposed to check in every week, so we had to give a full report on our progress each week. We could also see the progress of the others as well. With my travel schedule, I would not have been able to do this without the social media aspect of the project." P3 agreed noting, "Without [social media] we could not [have] participated in the project."

In thinking about utilizing social media to assist in discipleship, it is wise to hold in tension both the positive and cautious voices expressed in chapter 2. Because millions of people have already chosen social media as a way of connection, Larry Rosen's voice helps us realize that to overlook social media is to miss a significant contemporary format for communication connection. Yet Shane Hipps' application of Marshall McLuhan's theory to social media reminds us that going too far with social media can produce the opposite, undesired effect of further isolating people from each other. Social media, then, should be utilized for the purpose of discipleship, but combined with ample amounts of face-to-face contact. The SDP lacked an adequate amount of face-to-face contact. Having more face-to-face contact potentially could have addressed some of the hindering issues which developed over the course of the project. This would have further enriched the experience of the participants and further maximized the effectiveness of the SDP.

It also should be noted that using a social media format for group discipleship accountability is best suited for a group who already has established a sense of community between themselves and knows each other well. It is too easy for people in a social media

to be ingenuous in their portrayal of themselves. It is too tempting for people to report their practices

falsely. Participants who previously know each other well, however, can generally see through this and experience the other person more truthfully.

The utilization of social media for the purpose of group discipleship accountability was an attempt to follow the genius of Wesley described in chapter **2**. Wesley was able to adapt other people's ideas and practices to effectively meet the discipleship needs of the Methodists. Likewise, the experience of the SDP affirms that social media can be successfully employed to effectively connect an established community for group discipleship accountability.

*Outcome of Question 5: Can the Wesley class meeting be appropriately adapted within an Orthodox cultural context?*

The Orthodoxy element became less significant as the participant group formed. Four of the six potential participants who had grown up in an Orthodox cultural setting were unable to attend the initial Weekend Seminar. Because of this, only two Bulgarians participated in the SDP. Only two of the SDP participants currently live and minister in an Orthodox cultural setting.

While this may not be enough data to adequately examine the question, the positive participation of the two Bulgarians should be noted. PI was very active in the SDP. The SDP helped him become more consistent in his discipleship practices. He began to address the related issues he faced at the beginning of the project. At the end of the project, PI noted that he would like to continue with the SDP in some format.

**P3** also benefitted from the SDP. She felt more connected to the other participants and supported by them. At the end of the project **P3** noted that she would like to repeat the project in her

local ministry. PI and P3's positive involvement and their desire to continue to be involved in some form of the SDP indicate that such a project can be appropriate and effective in an Orthodox culturally setting.

### **Overall Group Assessment of the SDP**

The overall group assessment of the SDP was very positive. The participant group was not fully active in the SDP. Assignments and weekly checkins were often late. The interaction of the group through responses to each other's posts on the website could have been much better. The SDP participants only fulfilled 50% of the discipleship

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commitments they committed to fulfill. Even with the less than ideal performance of the SDP participants, the progress of the group was very encouraging. Both the Adequacy Indication and the Satisfaction Indication were significantly higher at the end of the project than they were at the beginning of the project. Although it could have been much better, the participants were able to achieve a level of spiritual conversation and accountability not previously experienced before the SDP. The participants began to address the issues that faced them at the beginning of the project. The data reveals that the SDP was effective in the lives of the participants.

See Appendix 4 - Chart 21: Group Combined Weekly Checkins.

### **CHAPTER 5: LESSONS LEARNED AND FURTHER IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOFIA DISCIPLESHIP PROJECT**

What do the results and trends of the SDP revealed in chapter 4 tell us? What insights into the

present condition and practice of discipleship formation does the experience of the SDP reveal? What recommendations do these insights raise for the broader church? How does the SDP relate to the insights and recommendations? What is next for the SDP?

### **SDP Insights**

While the SDP began with a confession, it concludes with a tear. As I poured through the copious amounts of data to complete chapter 4, I was filled with sadness over the tragic reality of several of the participants' discipleship lives. More troubling is the fact that the struggles of the SDP participants are not unique to themselves, but representative of many others with similar struggles. Although many insights can be gleaned from the SDP experience, three specific revelations need to be highlighted. Three troubling insights that emerged through the experience of the SDP were the dissatisfaction of the participants with their discipleship lives, the participants' pressure to succumb to the demands of busy ministry at the expense of discipleship accountability, and the unhealthy imbalance of the discipleship practices of the participants. These discipleship realities exist among the participants as the result of either the neglect of discipleship formation or the propagation of an inadequate or inauthentic discipleship formation. Fortunately, Jesus has words of encouragement for each of these discipleship realities which open the door for another way.

#### **P2's Complete Dissatisfaction**

I was saddened by P2's complete dissatisfaction with her discipleship practices. Certainly P2 would affirm that there was good that came out of her participation in the SDP, but her involvement in the project was unable to budge her satisfaction level. I do not think that the reason for this can be completely explained away by P2's preference for personal contact over social media. P2 is discontent with her

discipleship life and is in need of something better. P2's inability to be satisfied with her discipleship practice demands some sharp questions. Why is it like this for P2? How could her discipleship practices be so completely unfulfilling? Does discipleship for some people like P2 mean disciplining themselves to do the things they know they ought to do, but not benefitting from what they love to do? How much longer will P2 continue to struggle? How long will it be until P2 decides to give up?

Jesus had a different idea in mind for P2 and the rest of us. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"<sup>271</sup> P2's discipleship experience is far away from this. The contrast of what Jesus came to give and what P2 actually experiences highlights the fact that something different must happen for P2 and others like her.

#### **P4's Busyness**

With or without adequate justification, all the SDP participants considered themselves to be busy with the demands of life and ministry. P4 most clearly represents

the struggle of the participants with busyness. It was saddening to hear P4's reasoning for her inability to fully participate in the SDP, as she desired. The SDP took place in the wrong season. In effect, P4 said that the summer is so busy with ministry that there is not adequate time or energy remaining for group discipleship accountability. Other seasons of the year are for things like group discipleship accountability, but the summer is for ministry. The busy summer schedule does not leave room for much else. P4's busyness in ministry pushed out her discipleship accountability participation.

I very much appreciate P4's honesty. She is a fantastic, loved, valuable member of the team in

Bulgaria. Unfortunately though, I believe that P4's response to the pressure she feels to be successful in ministry accurately reflects too many others in ministry as well. P4's approach to discipleship practice is a recipe for burnout.

P4's struggle with busyness and discipleship accountability raises some more questions. How long will it be until P4 realizes that the demands to achieve a successful ministry never subside, but always asks for a little bit more? How long will it be before she decides to give up? Is it not true that the times of most intense ministry are precisely the times we need most need the grounding of consistent discipleship? Do we not need the strength of the grounding of consistent discipleship to effectively minister?

<sup>272</sup> See Luke 10:38-42 NIV.

P4's struggle represents the different approaches Mary and Martha took when Jesus came to their house in Luke 10. Martha felt the weight of doing things for Christ, and assumed the busy ministry of making sure everything was ready for Jesus to come. Jesus recognized that in doing so, this approach led Martha to be "worried and upset by many things."<sup>272</sup> Jesus removed all the clutter and narrowed the priority to one thing.

Mary had chosen better than Martha by deciding to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to Him. Being with Jesus trumps doing things for Jesus. Something different must happen for P4 and many others like her.

### **P6's Discipleship Imbalance**

I was also saddened by the imbalance in the discipleship practices of several of the participants. Unless an SDP participant was currently involved in a local level ministry assignment, his or her

discipleship practices heavily leaned toward the practices that did not require connection with others. This reflects an imbalanced preference of "works of piety" (acts of devotion and acts of worship) over "works of mercy" (acts of compassion and acts of justice). This was also evidenced by the fact that P2 struggled to see how ministry to the poor could happen here. P1 also could not envision this discipleship practice in their current setting.

P6's discipleship practices most clearly illustrate the groups' struggle with imbalanced discipleship practices. Even though P6 has the challenge of maintaining healthy discipleship while traveling, he still is not exempt from "works of mercy." The data in chapter 4 revealed the positive effect the SDP had on P6's discipleship life. The data also revealed, however, that the SDP had a polarizing effect on P6's discipleship practices. The SDP helped P6 improve only in the areas where he was strongest, the discipleship practices associated with "works of piety." His involvement in the SDP made no difference in the Adequacy Index or the Satisfaction Index for the practices associated with "works of mercy." P1 and P2 had similar experiences as well. P6 recognized this trend and lamented about it, "It is easiest for me to do the things within myself and hardest

to do the things with other people. Am I an ingrown Christian? Is my life and ministry not reaching out to others enough?"

P6's struggle with imbalance in his discipleship practices represents the danger of isolationism. Wesley categorized this form of discipleship as inward religion. Paul Chilcote paraphrased Wesley's thought noting, "Religion that is purely inward . . . is a subtle device of Satan. Christianity is essentially a social religion, and to turn it into a

solitary religion is to destroy it." ' According to Wesley then, remaining heavily weighted toward "works of

piety" in discipleship risks the destruction of discipleship. Discipleship practices that are weighted to either "works of piety" or "works of mercy" fall short of fully forming the character of Christ in us.

Jesus' words about this were, "Let your light shine before men that they may see you good deeds and praise your father in heaven."<sup>274</sup> What Christ does in us is meant to be reflected in what he does through us in the world. P6 and others like him need something different, they need to bring the light out from under the bowl and firmly place it on its stand.

#### **SDP Recommendations**

<sup>273</sup> Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 48.

<sup>274</sup> Matthew 5:16 NIV.

Not surprisingly then, both the Satisfaction Indication and the Adequacy Indication of the participants at the beginning the SDP were very low. From the sad insights outlined above, one could justifiably ask, does discipleship have to be devoid of satisfaction and

joy for people like P2? Does discipleship need to vie against the demands of ministry for the time and energy of busy ministers like P4 and others? Does an increased ministry responsibility for P6 and others have to perpetuate a discipleship disengaged with others?

The answer to all of the above questions is an emphatic "Of course not!" But this has been the tragic, sad reality of the SDP participants for a long time. Without a change in how discipleship is done, these tragedies will continue and worsen. The SDP participants are representative of many who are committed to ministry and discipleship, but desperately desire something different.



So what needs to change? The experience and insights of the SDP lead to four recommendations for discipleship formation.

**Discipleship formation needs a more central position in the preparation for and the practice of ministry.**

The Church of the Nazarene is blessed with excellent institutions of education.

These institutions place a high priority on the acquisition of knowledge and the perfections of skills of its students. Forming the character of Christ in these students is also important, but often not with the same high priority. The amount of attention given to educate and train students tends to push the formation of Christ to the responsibility of the individual students.

What if these priorities were turned upside down? What if those called into full time ministry came to an institution or entered a three or four year program whose highest priority was guiding the process of the intentional formation of Christ in their students? What if they helped the students develop habits of healthy discipleship formation? Acquisition of knowledge and perfecting skills were also valued at this new type of

institution, but the amount of time and effort allocated for discipleship formation pushed these endeavors to the individual student's personal responsibility. What if it became unthinkable to graduate student who did not habitually practice healthy discipleship? What difference would such an institution make in the life and ministry of the minister? What difference would it make in the church and the world?

The absurdity of this proposition confirms that discipleship formation does not currently enjoy the same priority as the acquisition of knowledge or the development of skills in the institutions which prepare

people for ministry. I am not advocating the demise of acquisition of knowledge or skill development. On the contrary, in the complexity of the world today, it is important to have the best educated and trained ministers. I am simply trying to raise discipleship formation to a higher, more central position in ministry preparation.

The words of Jesus to his disciples on their preparation for ministry were, "Do not

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leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised . . . you will receive power." The unschooled, ordinary men of the first church changed their world because they had been with Jesus.<sup>276</sup> Too often we send out educated and skilled men and women from our Jerusalem who have not spent adequate time with Jesus.

**Discipleship and ministry need to be measured in terms of faithfulness and fruitfulness instead of in the terms of success and accomplishment.**

We have bought into a non-Christian view of success in the church. We propagate  
<sup>275</sup> Acts 1:4-5 NIV.

<sup>276</sup> Acts 4:13 NIV.

the task-oriented success model that we learned outside the walls of the church. The

world says, "Stay busy, accomplish tasks." Success is completing all the tasks, and keeping the inbox empty. As the tasks grow and grow, the minister in the church is pressured to make compromises to meet the ever-growing demands of completing the tasks.

When a sharp person enters ministry, we get excited about the potential success that will most certainly come through his or her ministry. We load him or her down with various impressive roles and

numerous ambitious goals. We then sit back and applaud as he or she steals from the time and energy needed for discipleship formation in order to achieve success in ministry. We assume that if they are mature enough to be in ministry, they are also disciplined enough to be consistent in discipleship. This is a naive assumption which the experience of the SDP has proven to be false. As time progresses he or she becomes more and more hollow and weak, less and less satisfied with his or her discipleship lives, and inches closer to burning out and giving up.

Jesus' words to his disciples were, "Remain in me, and you will bear much

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fruit." Fruitfulness has little to do with success and accomplishment. Fruitfulness has everything to do with faithfully staying connected to the vine. If we are going to be effective in kingdom terms, a re-arrangement of priorities is necessary. Success and accomplishment need to be replaced by faithfulness and fruitfulness. We must have a strong connection to the vine through a healthy commitment to discipleship formation.

Discipleship and ministry should flow together in harmony to one another, not in tension pulling away from each other. Ministry must flow out of a strong base of consistent discipleship. For the health of our ministers, for the fruitfulness of their

ministries, and for the benefit of the people they minister to, we need to develop mechanisms to hold them accountable for this.

**Discipleship needs to be a group exercise as opposed to an individual responsibility.**

If anything was clearly revealed through the experience of the SDP, it was the sharp contrast between the effectiveness of discipleship as a group activity as opposed to the ineffectiveness of

discipleship as an individual's responsibility. The SDP loudly proclaimed that individual responsibility for discipleship has not and will not work. As explained in chapter 1, we often are not the best stewards of our own souls. When discipleship is hidden from the sight of others, we can too easily whitewash the reality of our experience. The involvement of others in our discipleship lives keeps us rooted and grounded in the reality of truth.

Furthermore, when the responsibility of discipleship is ours as individuals, we often too easily assume everyone else is Okay as well. We can continue weeks and months in surface and weak interaction with each other instead of peeling away the facade and doing heavy relationship work. We do not make the effort necessary to get beneath surface relationships. We do not really want to know how people are really doing. We hope everything is Okay so that we do not have to expend the energy to dig beneath the surface. The result is inevitable; ineffective discipleship.

If we care about our own discipleship and the discipleship of others we can no longer be content with the comfort of blind relationships. We need to know and be known. We need to get beyond the surface and share life and discipleship together. We can no longer afford to let PI go months on end without being in the Word. We cannot let

P2's complete dissatisfaction continue without trying to intervene.

The unfortunate situation the participants found themselves in at the beginning of the SDP painfully confirms that isolated, individualistic discipleship most often does not work. Discipleship instead needs to be intentional and accountable. The experience of the SDP also displays that group discipleship helps with consistency and increases the perceived adequacy and satisfaction with discipleship practices. Although the SDP was an imperfect group discipleship endeavor, its intentionality and group interaction

produced results. The discipleship practices of the participant group significantly improved over the ten-week project. The SDP revealed that individuals benefit more through group involvement.

**Discipleship practices need to be balanced between "works of mercy" practices and "works of piety" practices.**

This point was made clear previously through the discussion of P6's imbalanced discipleship practices. It is important to remember that not only did Jesus say, "Remain in Jerusalem," he also commanded, "Go into all the world."<sup>278</sup> Remaining in Jerusalem is important, but there comes a time when we need to go into the world. Our remaining in Jerusalem is for the purpose of powerfully going into all the world.

There is a need in the contemporary church to correct a proper tension between "Remaining" and "Going." I am not sure we are doing well with either of these commands. The command to remain should not be an excuse to retreat from the command to go. Remaining is not a safe enclave away from the evils of the world. It is an infilling of power to be fruitful in the world. We remain so that we can more

effectively go. The church sees the world and fears it. The world is bad, evil, dangerous, and should be resisted and avoided. But this is the same world that God loved so much that he gave his son to die for.

A discipleship that ignores "works of mercy" hides the light of Christ under the bowl. Conversely, a discipleship that neglects "works of piety" pinches off the life-giving nourishment needed from the vine. Balance between the two is essential.

**The SDP's Response**

So where does the SDP fit into all of this and how can it respond to the insights and

recommendations noted above? The SDP is not a perfect program. Even if it were, ten weeks would not have been enough time to adequately address all these issues. The duration of the SDP was long enough, however, to see the seeds of potential help the SDP, or something else like it, could offer.

One of the strongest aspects of the SDP was the improved satisfaction it produced in all the participants except P2. Over a longer period of time, with more consistent and loving encouragement from others, I believe discipleship satisfaction can improve for P2 as well.

As previously noted, the SDP made progress in confronting the busyness of P4 and the erratic schedule of PI. It would be interesting to see how group accountability would continue to confront and help these participants over a greater period of time.

The SDP also brought to light the imbalance of discipleship practices, most clearly identified in P6. The participants recognized this and began to struggle how to address it. The imbalance was lessened somewhat as the data was combined in the group. Over time,

the stronger participants in the "works of mercy" practices need to assist the others who are weaker in these practices.

The overall results of the SDP as outlined in chapter 4 are encouraging. Although the wisdom of hindsight would suggest some helpful adaptations for its usage in the future, the SDP demonstrated that the utilization of social media can be an effective approach to connect established communities for group discipleship accountability. Social networking, like the SDP, can help to overcome the perceived challenges of lack of time, the difficulty of urban transportation and consistent gathering, and isolation from significant spiritual influence. Furthermore, the intent of the SDP was not to determine whether a social media format was better or worse than a traditional face-to-face format for group discipleship

accountability. Such a determination was beyond the scope of the SDP. The intent of the project, rather was to demonstrate that the utilization of social media can be a viable and effective option for group discipleship. At minimum, the SDP results indicate that social media does not significantly deter effective group discipleship for most participants. On the contrary, most of the participants made significant, identifiable improvement over the short ten-week span of the project.

As a mid-level denominational leader in the church, the SDP has taught me that one of the most valuable things I can do for those with whom I serve is to provide space and time for them to participate in group discipleship. It is my responsibility to see that this happens. Doing so removes discipleship from the individual's sole responsibility. Doing so also battles against the success and accomplishment model that has crept into the church and invests in the faithfulness and fruitfulness of co-disciples. The SDP, or some adaption of it, will help in this endeavor.

### **Group Combined Week Activity Logs**

**Group Adequacy Indications Chart 17: Group Combined Initial**

**Adequacy Indication**

	Category	Indications						Total
		PI	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	
1	Bible Reading and Meditation	0	2	3	3	2	1	11
2	<b>Prayer and Listening</b>	1	2	3	2	2	3	13
3	<b>Prayer for Others</b>	0	1	4	2	3	2	12
4	<b>Worship</b>	3	2	2	4	3	7	16
							<b>Z</b>	



5	<b>Sabbath Rest</b>	1	2	1	4	2	1	<b>11</b>
6	<b>Ministry to the Poor</b>	0	0	4	3	2	1	<b>10</b>
7	<b>Compassionate Giving of Resources</b>	4	0	3	3	2	1	<b>13</b>
8	<b>Community Service</b>	0	0	3	1	1	1	<b>6</b>
9	<b>Exploring Social Ills</b>	2	0	2	2	2	0	<b>8</b>
10	<b>Readiness to Respond</b>	0	0	2	1	0	0	<b>3</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12</b>	
							17.2	
							<b>1.72</b>	

Average/Discipleship Practice:

**Chart 18: Group Combined Final Adequacy Indication**

**Group Satisfaction Indications Chart 19: Group Combined Initial**

**Satisfaction Indication**

	Category	PI	P2	1 3	P4	P5	Po	Total
1	<b>Bible Reading and Meditation</b>	U	AU	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
2	<b>Prayer and Listening</b>	0	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
3	<b>Prayer for Others</b>	0	0	1	0	1	0	<b>2</b>
4	<b>Worship</b>	1	0	0	1	1	0	<b>3</b>
5	<b>Sabbath Rest</b>	0	0	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
6	<b>Ministry to the Poor</b>	0	0	1	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
7	<b>Compassionate Giving of Resources</b>	1	0	0	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
8	<b>Community Service</b>	0	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
9	<b>Exploring Social Ills</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
10	<b>Readiness to Respond</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
		<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	
					A.v	•rage:	2.1)	
					<			

**Chart 20: Group Combined Final Satisfaction Indication**

**Chart 21: Group Combined Weekly Checkins**

Group i^omnmnis	week	week -> Z	week	week A 4	week 3	week pT 0	week l	week oO	week	week 1A 1U	Total
Bible Reading and Meditation	4	A			l	3	l	7	7		32
Prayer and Listening Prayer for Others	**%	4	J -t		1	4			7		43
Worship	4		4	7	J	-is		%			33
Sabbath Kest	7	6	4	s							54
Ministry to the Poor	J	j 7	7		©	A			/	ti	42
Compassionate Giving of Resources	**i		2	15 l?	5 1			I			18
Community Service	5	Mi	5	1	7	7 1	I	J		-i	26
Exploring the Source of Social Ills	7	J	0	0		.3	l		2	-<.7	15
Readiness to Respond			2	A						1)	7
Prayer for Each Other	7	C)	2		3		3			7	22
	2			3		-1 -if			4	3	37
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>38</b>	

### Initial Assignments - Participant Instructions Assignment

1—

#### Spiritual Autobiography Participant Instructions

Write a 1-2 page, double-spaced spiritual autobiography. Answer the following questions within your personal story:

- What was your life like before Christ?
- How did you come to Christ, what factors/people were influential in leading you to Christ?
- Describe some spiritual high points, breakthroughs since you came to Christ.
- Describe some spiritual low points since coming to Christ. —Do you have a sense of God's call on your life? Please describe. —How would you describe your spiritual

life today? -How do you hope to grow through this discipleship project?

## **Assignment 2—**

### **Week Activity Log Participant Instructions**

Keep track of your activity over an entire week. As you go through your day, record the time you spent on the various activities of life. Do not change your regular habits to alter, positively or negatively, your time management. Give particular attention to record the time spent each day on: -Work

-School/education —  
Recreation —Discipleship  
practices —Transportation —  
Social Media —Sleep  
—Family responsibilities -Other  
events

As you complete the activity log, would you say that this accurately represents how your time is spent during a typical week? Does this activity log include any unusual, out of the ordinary events? Please explain.

### **Sofia Discipleship Project Participant Expectations**

**-Complete all homework assignments  
honestly and accurately -Spiritual  
autobiography -Initial week activity log -  
Initial questionnaire -Concluding week  
activity log -Concluding questionnaire**

**\*\*All participant work will be included in the final writing project for purposes of analysis only. All material from the participants will exclude the names of the participants to protect the privacy of the participants.**

**-Possible initial and concluding interview**

**-Participation in the Initial Weekend Seminar,**

**contributing to the construction of the group covenant statement and committing to it through signature**

**-Contributing additional individual commitments as needed**

**-Consider becoming an accountability partner with another participant.**

**-Fully participating in the Covenant Statement commitments.**

**-Weekly reporting through the SDP website (Saturdays or Sundays)**

**-Checking on the progress of the other participants - speaking truth in their lives.**

### **Sofia Discipleship Project Covenant Statement**

As a group of believers desiring to help each other become better disciples of Christ, we covenant to encourage each other and hold each other accountable to the following commitments . . .

1. **Bible Reading and Meditation** - Daily Bible reading with time for meditating on the Word.
2. **Prayer and Listening** - Daily prayer including time for listening to God's voice.
3. **Prayer for Others** - Intentionally praying daily for the salvation of a minimum of three people.
4. **Worship** - Actively participating in worship weekly coming prepared and expectant to encounter God.
5. **Sabbath Rest** - Setting aside significant time each week for Sabbath rest.
6. **Ministry to the Poor** - A minimum of two hours of weekly ministry to the poor/needful infused with prayer.

7. **Compassionate Giving of Resources** - Compassionate giving of time, skills, or material resources for those in need.
8. **Community Service** - Doing something in the community weekly to make it better.
9. **Exploring Social Ills** - Exploring and educating ourselves on the source of the social ills to which we are ministering.
10. **Readiness to Respond** - Being ready to respond to the underlying causes of the social ills.
11. **Prayer for Each Other** - Praying daily for the other participants in the Sofia Discipleship Project and encouraging them to grow in discipleship.
- 12.

## **Personal Commitments-**

Participant 1—

1. **Extended Bible Reading** - Commitment of 30 minutes/day for Bible reading and prayer.

Participant 2—

1. **Songs of Worship** - Commitment to set aside 30 minutes 2 or 3 times a week to glorify God through songs of worship.

Participant 6—

1. **Watching My Tongue** - Not having harsh words for those close to me.
2. **Exercise** - A minimum of three robust workouts per week.
- 3.

## **Sofia Discipleship Project Questions**

Initial Questionnaire: Questions 1 - 3 9 Q1: Are

you busy?

Q2: Are you willing to give two hours a week on an evening or weekend each week for the sake of discipleship accountability?

Q3: What does it mean to live a Christian life?

Q4: What does healthy discipleship look like?

Q5: What do you desire for your discipleship practices?

Q6: What is your desire for ministry in the church?

Q7: Describe your experience with Orthodox theology and practice.

Q8: Describe your experience with Wesleyan theology and practice.

Q9: Describe your current practice in the area of daily Bible reading and meditation.

Q10: I would evaluate my current daily Bible reading and meditation practice as

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q11: In the area of daily Bible reading and meditation, I am;

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q12: Describe your current practice in the area of prayer and listening to God's voice

Q13: I would evaluate my current practice of prayer and listening to God's voice as

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q14: In the area of prayer and listening to God's voice, I am;

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q15: Describe your current practice in the area intentionally praying for the salvation of others

Q16: I would evaluate my current practice of intentionally praying for the salvation of others as

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q17: In the area of intentionally praying for the salvation of others, I am

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q18: Describe your current practice in the area of actively participating in worship weekly coming prepared and expectant to encounter God

Q19: I would evaluate my current practice actively participating in worship weekly coming prepared and expectant to encounter God as

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q20: In the area of actively participating in worship weekly coming prepared and expectant to encounter God, I am

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q21: Describe your current practice in the area of setting aside significant time each week for Sabbath rest

Q22: I would evaluate my current practice of setting aside significant time each week for Sabbath rest as

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q23: In the area of setting aside significant time each week for Sabbath rest, I am Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is  Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q24: Describe your current practice in the area of giving a minimum of two hours of weekly ministry to the poor/needful infused with prayer

Q25: I would evaluate my current practice of giving a minimum of two hours of weekly ministry to the poor/needful infused with prayer

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q26: In the area of giving a minimum of two hours of weekly ministry to the poor/needful infused with prayer, I am

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q27: Describe your current practice in the area of giving of time, skills, or material resources for those in need

Q28: I would evaluate my current practice of giving of time, skills, or material resources for those in need

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q29: In the area of giving of time, skills, or material resources for those in need, I am

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q30: Describe your current practice in the area of doing something in the community weekly to make it better

Q31: I would evaluate my current practice of doing something in the community weekly to make it better

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q32: In the area of giving doing something in the community weekly to make it better, I am

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q33: Describe your current practice in the area of exploring and educating yourself on the source of the social ills to which you are ministering

Q34: I would evaluate my current practice of exploring and educating myself on the source of the social ills to which I am ministering

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q35: In the area of exploring and educating myself on the source of the social ills to which I am ministering, I am

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q36: Describe your current practice in the area of being ready to respond to the underlying causes of the social ills



Q37: I would evaluate my current practice of being ready to respond to the underlying causes of the social ills \_ Non-existent  
\_ Inadequate  
\_ Hit and miss  
\_ Adequate  
\_ Consistent

Q38: In the area of being ready to respond to the underlying causes of the social ills, I am \_ Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is \_ Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q39: Describe the best way for the other participants to hold you accountable to these commitments.

Week 4 Questions: Questions 40 - 57 Q40:

Describe Participant 5. What is she like? Q41: What are

Participant 5's spiritual gifts?

Q42: What are your hopes/prayers for Participant 5 during this project?

Q43: Describe Participant 3. What is she like? Q44: What

are Participant 3's spiritual gifts?

Q45: What are your hopes/prayers for Participant 3 during this project? Q46:

Describe Participant 4. What is she like? Q47: What are Participant 4's spiritual gifts?

Q48: What are your hopes/prayers for Participant 3 during this project? Q49:

Describe Participant 2. What is she like? Q50: What are Participant 2's spiritual gifts?

Q51: What are your hopes/prayers for Participant 2 during this project? Q52:

Describe Participant 1. What is he like? Q53: What are Participant 1 's spiritual gifts?

Q54: What are your hopes/prayers for Participant 1 during this project? Q55:

Describe Participant 6. What is he like? Q56: What are Participant 6's spiritual gifts?

Q57: What are your hopes/prayers for Participant 6 during this project? Week 5

### Questions: Questions 58-60

Q58: Having been in the project for a few weeks already, which of the commitments do you find easiest or most natural to keep? Why?

Q59: Having been in the project for a few weeks, which of the commitments do you find to most difficult to keep? Why?

Q60: What lessons are you learning about yourself through the realization of which commitments are easy and difficult for you to keep?

### Final Questionnaire: Questions 61 - 104

Q61: At the end of the project, describe your current practice in the area of daily Bible reading and meditation.

Q62: At the end of the project, I would evaluate my current daily Bible reading and meditation practice as

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q63: At the end of the project, in the area of daily Bible reading and meditation, I am; \_\_\_ Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q64: At the end of the project, describe your current practice in the area of daily prayer and listening to God's voice.

Q65: At the end of the project, I would evaluate my practice of daily prayer and listening to God's voice as

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q66: At the end of the project, in the area of daily prayer and listening to God's voice, I am;

Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is \_ Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q67: At the end of the project, describe your current practice in the area of intentionally praying daily for the salvation of others.

Q68: At the end of the project, I would evaluate my practice of intentionally praying daily for the salvation

of others as;

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q69: At the end of the project, in the area of intentionally praying daily for the salvation of others, I am;  
Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is Not pleased  
with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q70: At the end of the project, describe your current practice in the area of actively participating in worship weekly, coming prepared and expectant to encounter God.

Q71: At the end of the project, I would evaluate my practice of actively participating in worship weekly, coming prepared and expectant to encounter God as;

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q72: At the end of the project, in the area of participating in worship weekly, coming prepared and expectant to encounter God, I am:

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve.

Q73: At the end of the project, describe your current practice in the area of setting aside significant time each week for Sabbath rest.

Q74: At the end of the project, I would evaluate my practice of setting aside significant time each week for Sabbath rest as;

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q75: At the end of the project, in the area of Setting aside significant time each week for Sabbath rest, I am;  
Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is  
Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve

Q76: At the end of the project, describe your current practice in the area of giving a minimum of two hours of weekly ministry to the poor/needful infused with prayer.

Q77: At the end of the project, I would evaluate my practice of giving a minimum of two hours of weekly ministry to the poor/needful infused with prayer as;

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q78: At the end of the project, in the area of giving a minimum of two hours of weekly ministry to the poor/needful infused with prayer, I am;

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve

Q79: At the end of the project, describe your current practice in the area of compassionate giving of time, skills, or material resources for those in need.

Q80: At the end of the project, I would evaluate my practice of compassionate giving of time, skills, or material resources for those in need, as; Non-existent

- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q81: At the end of the project, in the area of compassionate giving of time, skills, or material resources for those in need, I am;

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve

Q82: At the end of the project, describe your current practice in the area of doing something in the community weekly to make it better.

Q83: At the end of the project, I would evaluate my practice of doing something in the community weekly to make it better as;

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q84: At the end of the project, in the area of doing something in the community weekly to make it better, I am;

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve

Q85: At the end of the project, describe your current practice in the area of exploring and educating ourselves on the source of the social ills to which we are ministering.

Q86: At the end of the project, I would evaluate my practice of exploring and educating ourselves on the source of the social ills to which we are ministering as;

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q87: At the end of the project, in the area of exploring and educating ourselves on the source of the social ills to which we are ministering, I am;

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve

Q88: At the end of the project, describe your current practice in the area of being ready to respond to the underlying causes of the social ills.

Q89: At the end of the project, I would evaluate my practice of being ready to respond to the underlying causes of the social ills as;

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q90: At the end of the project, in the area of being ready to respond to the underlying causes of the social ills, I am;

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve

Q91: At the end of the project, describe your current practice in the area of praying daily for the other participants in the Sofia Discipleship Project and encouraging them to grow in discipleship.

Q92: At the end of the project, I would evaluate my practice of praying daily for the other participants in the Sofia Discipleship Project and encouraging them to grow in discipleship as;

- Non-existent
- Inadequate
- Hit and miss
- Adequate
- Consistent

Q93: At the end of the project, in the area of praying daily for the other participants in the Sofia Discipleship Project and encouraging them to grow in discipleship, I am;

- Pleased with my practice and am content to continue as it currently is
- Not pleased with my practice and would like it to improve

Q94: Overall, how would you assess the effectiveness of the project?

Q95: Did you grow in the areas of discipleship more effectively through the project than you would have on your own? Why or why not?

Q96: Did you notice growth in discipleship in the other participants? Please explain.

Q97: Would you like to continue the project in some form?

Q98: How could the project be improved?

Q99: Do you feel closer to God?

Q100: Do you feel closer to the other participants?

Q101: Do you feel like the project succeeded in becoming a group discipleship project? Please explain

Q102: Do you think the use of the social media/website was helpful or unhelpful? Please explain.

Q103: Do you have any additional comments?

Q104: How fully did you participate in the project? Please clarify.

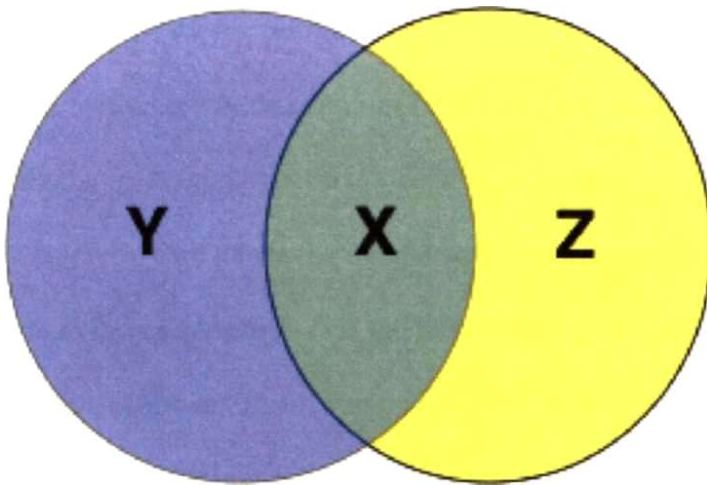
The Scriptural writer who arguably has the most to say about the relationship of what a Christian believes to what a Christian does is James, the brother of Jesus. James 1:27 reads; "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this, to look after the widows and orphans in their distress, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world." In this single verse, James gives a clear and direct answer to the question, "What are the essentials of the Christian life?" Further examination of the verse also explains the relationship of what a Christian believes to what a Christian does. James 1:27 can be viewed as a mathematical formula, a word problem, and an algebraic equation. Viewing it mathematically can illuminate the meaning of the verse.

James 1:27 fits into the equation  $X = Y \cdot Z$ .

X - "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless" = - "is this"

Y - "to look after orphans and widows in their distress" • fl - "and"

Z - "to keep oneself unspotted from the world."



James, in referring to "looking after orphans and widows in their distress" (Y), is not exclusively advocating these two compassionate ministries above all others. Instead, he is using these two ministries as representative activities of a more encompassing category. "Looking after orphans and widows in their distress" (Y) is representative of compassion, works, works of mercy, love of neighbor, serving others, being in the world.

The same is true of James' reference to "keeping oneself unspotted from the world" (Z). James uses the phrase to represent the broader category of holiness, faith, works of piety, love of God, knowing God, not being of the world.

The most important word in the James 1:27 word problem equation is the conjunction "and" because it instructs how both quotients relate to each other to achieve the desired sum.  $3 + 3$  is much different than  $3 - 3$ . Although the quotients in both equations are the same, the sum of each equation is quite different. It is the sign that informs the two quotients how to relate to each other in order to correctly arrive at the

desired sum. The conjunction "and" denotes the intersection of the two quotients.

The diagram of the equation, then, illustrates that (X) is not the sum total of (Y) and (Z), rather (X) is the portion of the diagram where both (Y) and (Z) exist in the same space. (X) is the intersection of (Y) and (Z). Pure religion (X) then, is not everything the Christian does in the realm of deeds (Y) and faith (Z); instead, pure and faultless religion accepted by God (X) is the intersection of compassion (Y) and holiness (Z), where both exist in the same space. It is the intersection of works (Y) and faith (Z), where both exist in the same space. It is the intersection of works of mercy (Y) and works of piety (Z), where both exist in the same space. It is the intersection of serving others (Y) and knowing God (Z), where both exist in the same place. It is the intersection of being in the world (Y) and not being of the world (Z), where both exist in the same place.

The Church of the Nazarene as a denomination has developed organizations around both quotients of the equation; (Y) is Nazarene Compassionate Ministries and (Z) is the Church of the Nazarene itself as a local church. Applying the logic of the equation to the two quotients of the Church of the Nazarene, then, asserts that pure religion (X) is the intersection of Nazarene Compassionate Ministries (Y) and the local church (Z), where both exist in the same location.

To increasingly become pure and faultless in the sight of God requires converging the circles of quotient (Y) and quotient (Z) upon themselves, and therefore expanding the area of (X). On an organizational level, this means not being satisfied with compassionate ministries and the local church existing and functioning separately of each other, but finding ways for compassionate ministries to naturally flow out of the life of the church. On a personal level this means being present "in the distress" of the world and



approaching that distress with passionate and sincere prayer. It requires an ear attuned to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the Christian is involved in the misery and distress of the world.

Converging compassion (Y) and faith (Z) will not be the same for each person in every situation. The starting point of that convergence, however, is always the same; bathing each compassionate event in intentional, specific prayer. Presence in the world combined with active prayer will help the believer grow increasingly sensitive to the distress of the world as God sees it. This will then lead the believer to other holy actions in response to the distress of the world as directed by God through prayer. Converging compassion and faith in this way will inevitably compel the believer beyond acts of compassion to acts of justice. Passionate prayer for the poor and marginalized will eventually lead the believer to question why the poor are in this dire condition, and what prevents the poor from overcoming their present condition.

Looking at a verse of Scripture through an algebraic lens may be considered a frivolous and silly exercise, but what is the message of the James 1:27? The believer's personal holiness alone is not equal to the pure religion that God desires and expects in us. The believer's personal holiness is not his/her own, but meant to be the source of a response of love in the misery and distress of the world. Acts of compassion in the world are good, but such acts alone do not rise to the level of pure religion in the sight of God. James 1:27 challenges the Christian to live out a holy life in the distress of the world. The Christian is to be in the world but not of it. The believer is required to be actively involved in the distress of the world without becoming polluted by the world.

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