

Please **HONOR** the copyright of
these documents by not
retransmitting or making any
additional copies in any form
(Except for private personal use).
We appreciate your respectful
cooperation.

Theological Research Exchange Network
(TREN)

P.O. Box 30183
Portland, Oregon 97294
USA

Website: www.tren.com
E-mail: rwjones@tren.com
Phone# 1-800-334-8736

ATTENTION CATALOGING LIBRARIANS

TREN ID#

Online Computer Library Center (OCLC)

MARC Record #

Digital Object Identification

DOI #

Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

FROM SUFFERING TO HOLINESS: A STRATEGY FOR INCREASING FAITH
THROUGH SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

Written by

PAUL GUEVARA

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:


William Hernandez


Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: August 30, 2013

FROM SUFFERING TO HOLINESS: A STRATEGY FOR INCREASING FAITH
THROUGH SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINAR

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

PAUL GUEVARA
JANUARY 2013

ABSTRACT

From Suffering to Holiness

Paul A. Guevara

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2013

This ministry project introduces the Oakland Spanish SDA Church to the practice of the spiritual disciplines of *Lectio Divina* and Bible study in the context of small groups. An inner-city Latino congregation of about four hundred members, the church has been tested by many adverse circumstances that have caused members to question the presence of God in their lives. The objective of this project is that by practicing communion and intimacy with God through these spiritual disciplines, holiness becomes a reality in this struggling congregation.

In order to achieve that, a step-by-step process has been established that begins with sharing the vision and implementing the specific aspects of the program, which include: recruiting, forming small groups, selecting small group leaders, and training. For the development of this program, a number of relevant books have been selected that will form and sustain all the aspects of this program. This literature includes titles from authors such as Richard Peace, Roberta Hestenes, Gareth Icenogle, Norvene Vest, and Jeffrey Arnold, among others.

The hopeful outcome of this ministry project is a congregation that sees its struggles in a new light and realizes that pain and suffering are opportunities to get more intimate with God, a congregation with a new perspective on life that has learned to trust God even in the midst of severe testing. The examples of the psalmist Asaph in Psalm 73 and the Apostle Paul in Philippians have served as models of how to achieve this new perspective.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD

Words: 247

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....1

PART ONE: THE MINISTRY CHALLENGE

Chapter

1. COMMUNITY CONTEXT: A SOCIOECONOMIC AND CULTURAL.....9
OVERVIEW OF THE CITY OF OAKLAND

2. A DESCRIPTION OF THE NATURE AND MINISTRY OF THE28
OAKLAND SPANISH CHURCH

PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

3. REVIEW OF RELEVANT SOURCES.....50

4. THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH.....67

5. SUFFERING THAT LEADS TO HOLINESS.....88

PART THREE: MINISTRY STRATEGY

6. GOALS AND PLANS FOR SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT.....115

7. PROCESS AND EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM.....145

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.....158

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....165

INTRODUCTION

The British novelist George Orwell once said, “Most people get a fair amount of fun out of their lives, but on balance life is suffering, and only the very young or the very foolish imagine otherwise.”¹ Many people could perceive this as a fatalistic way of seeing life, but it is an undeniable fact that suffering, without exception, is part of the human experience. Nothing exemplifies that better than the event that took place in Newtown Connecticut on December 14, 2012 where a twenty-year-old gunman entered Sandy Hook Elementary school and took the lives of twenty-six innocent people including, twenty young children. In his wake were left families in indescribable sorrow, a nation in grief, and even the president of the nation in tears. But Newtown is just an example of how humanity is susceptible to suffering, even in cases where people have done nothing to deserve it. Death, illness, poverty, social injustice, oppression, divorce, separation, hunger, addiction, abandonment, rejection, and disappointments, among other things, are all part of the human experience, and as tragic as it may sound, not even Christians are immune to these realities.

Just like everyone else, Christians become ill, and they can be victims of violence, persecution, and injustice. Christians also go through divorce, abandonment, and rejection. Suffering makes no exception. Celebrated Christian evangelist Billy Graham states it very simply when he says, "Suffering is part of the human condition, and it

¹ George Orwell, "Suffering," Brainyquote, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/g/georgeorwe159442.html#IITo1I6JIP572zbe.99> (accessed October 10, 2011).

comes to us all."² President Obama echoed that reality of suffering during his speech on December 12, 2012 in Newtown High School, when he addressed family and friends of the victims of the massacre:

We know our time on this Earth is fleeting. We know that we will each have our share of pleasure and pain, that even after we chase after some earthly goal, whether it's wealth or power or fame or just simple comfort, we will, in some fashion, fall short of what we had hoped. We know that, no matter how good our intentions, we'll all stumble sometimes in some way. We'll make mistakes, we'll experience hardships and even when we're trying to do the right thing, we know that much of our time will be spent groping through the darkness, so often unable to discern God's heavenly plans.³

Suffering has become an irreconcilable proposition for those who consider that affliction should have no place in a world where a loving God is supposed to exercise his dominion. In fact suffering has become one of the constant and biggest arguments against a loving God and against Christianity. People ask, "If there is a loving God why is so much suffering in this world? Why must there be cancer, hunger, poverty, social injustice, and the like?" The question becomes even more relevant for Christians who profess to believe in a God who promises to take care of his children and their personal needs. For many, it is difficult to reconcile suffering and Christianity. Some people believe that true Christians are not supposed to suffer. After all, they ask, "Has not God promised to protect from adversity those who trust him and obey him?" Christians constantly rely on promises such as the one in Psalms 91: 9,10, which states, "Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place—the Most High, who is my refuge— no

² Billy Graham, *Just as I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1984), 722.

³ CNN.com, "Text of Obama's Remarks in Newtown," December 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/12/16/politics/obama-newtown-remarks-text/index.html> (accessed December 28, 2012).

evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.”⁴

There is a kind of suffering that humans understand and even accept as a consequence of humanity own personal or collective wrongdoing, but it is difficult to understand or justify suffering that is manifested with no apparent reason in the lives of those who suffer. It is in this context where even some believers wonder about a God who has promised to protect his children and about the validity of Christianity as a religion. While recognizing the difficulty that suffering represents, it is proper also to recognize that the Bible has not claimed that the believer will be absent from suffering, nor that the absence of suffering is a sign of true Christianity.

In wrestling with these questions it should be kept in mind that the Bible does not explicitly state why suffering occurs, beyond giving a clear indication that humanity lives in an evil world where sin manifests itself in the lives of people and that God is not responsible for the suffering of human beings. As James and Evelin Whitehead in their book, *Holy Eros*, recognized, “Suffering is both a problem to solve . . . and a mystery to be savored.”⁵ One thing to recognize in this struggle is the fact that as frustrating as it may be, suffering has been part of Christianity through the ages. Christianity itself was founded on the suffering of Jesus Christ, as Father Joseph Cardinal explains, “If the Lord experienced pain and suffering, can we, as his disciples, expect anything less? No! Like Jesus, we too must expect pain.”⁶

⁴ All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted. This particular reference is taken from the English Standard Version.

⁵ James and Evelin Eaton Whitehead, *Holy Eros: Recovering the Passion of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 108.

⁶ Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, *The Gift of Peace* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1997), 46.

Suffering was not absent from the people of the Bible. The Old and the New Testament register the heartache and struggles of the people of God; Job, Joseph, and the Apostle Paul are a few examples. In the end, instead of providing clear answers as to why people must go through affliction, the Bible focuses on the importance of trusting a loving God who acts on behalf of his people in spite of the evil manifested in this world. Jesus himself told his disciples, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Suffering, however, is not limited to people in the Bible. It is also experienced by many Christians in the twenty-first century. From missionaries persecuted and killed because of their faith in hostile places, to people confronting the most difficult trials and tribulations in their lives, suffering is a reality for Christians today.

This reality has hit home for members of a small Christian congregation in Oakland, California. Currently, many people of this congregation have seen their faith impacted by a personal and socioeconomic crisis that has led them to pain and affliction. That congregation, which is the subject of this doctoral project, is the Oakland Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church (hereafter, Oakland Spanish SDA Church), an inner-city congregation of about four hundred people located in downtown Oakland, California, which is part of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

Several internal and external factors such as illness, death of relatives, poverty, unemployment, foreclosure, separation from family, and issues related to illegal documentation have been testing the faith of many individual church members and of the congregation as a whole. The violence of the city has also played a significant role in the pain of many members of the congregation who have either been victims of crimes

themselves, or whose close family members have been victims. A few brief examples of people tested by difficult circumstances will present an idea of the struggles of this congregation.⁷

The case of Ofelia will be a good place to start in describing those circumstances. Ofelia, a thirty-eight-year-old woman in the congregation who is the mother of two children, was diagnosed with terminal breast cancer about six years ago. Shortly after she was diagnosed with her disease, her mother was diagnosed with liver cancer as well. To make matters worse, her husband divorced Ofelia after he found out that she had cancer. Not being able to work due to her disease and not having any other financial support, she lost her house to foreclosure. The suffering of Ofelia was unimaginable as she endured her disease while she saw her life slowly and painfully ending. After six years of battling cancer, Ofelia died, leaving two children, her mother, and her family and friends in pain, and a local congregation in deep sorrow.

A second example is the case of Margarita, who lost Antonio her twenty-one-year-old son when he was killed by a gunman on the streets of Oakland. His death left an entire family in pain and a whole congregation mourning the loss of one of their young ones. That experience remains as one of the most tragic events that has taken place among church members.

The third case is that of sister Reinoso, an older lady of the congregation, who lost her husband after he committed suicide. Reinoso is living her with a dependent son and she carries a significant debt. As a result of her financial situation, she lost her house to

⁷ In the examples given, some names have been changed to protect the privacy of the persons involved.

foreclosure and had to move into a small apartment, leaving memories of her home behind, and being forced to give up her loving dog for adoption.

The fourth case is that of Danny, a very bright twenty-year-old in the congregation with great talent, vision, and tremendous potential. Danny has been suffering with diabetes since he was a child. Several times he has been admitted to the hospital for complications related to his diabetes. Sadly, Danny cannot obtain the medical care he needs because he is classified as an undocumented immigrant and he does not qualify for a medical program, in spite of the fact that he was brought to this country from Mexico when he was very young. To make matters worse, his mother Yolanda, a leader of the church with tremendous passion for Christ and who is also an undocumented immigrant, was recently diagnosed with breast cancer. All this makes Danny wonder what the future holds for him and his family. This situation has brought Daniel to a spiritual crisis and he is struggling in his relationship with God.

In addition to these examples many families of the congregation have suffered due to unemployment, foreclosure, and health issues. From this context, there is a need within the church for people to understand a proper way to handle heartache in the context of the Christian faith. This doctoral project presents a Bible-based strategy for how to handle adversity in the context of a supportive community.

The purpose of this doctoral project is to introduce members of the Oakland Spanish SDA Church to the practice of spiritual disciplines, particularly Bible study and *Lectio Divina*. These spiritual disciplines will be practiced in the context of small group communities that will help them to strengthen their faith in times of suffering. These two disciplines are Bible-based spiritual practices that have increased intimacy with God and

strengthened the faith of Christians through the centuries. It is hoped that they will do the same for the Oakland Spanish SDA Church today.

In order to achieve this purpose, the formation of small groups where these spiritual disciplines can be practiced will be essential. This project will require the involvement of the members in different levels and functions. The participants will understand that this program should not mark the end, but rather the beginning of a new spiritual journey with God, and that this will be the beginning of a process of holiness and peace for many.

This paper will contain three main parts. The first part will provide an overview of both the community context and the nature and ministry of the Oakland Spanish SDA Church. It begins with a demographic analysis, focusing in relevant socioeconomic factors that impact the life of the Latin community. The second chapter will provide an overview of the nature of the Oakland Spanish SDA church: its structure, ministry, and challenges. It will continue with an overview of how struggles have impacted the faith of many in the congregation, and it will end by making the case for the need to develop a program of spiritual formation at the church.

The second part begins with a literature review of the relevant sources on the topic of Christian community as it relates to Christian spirituality. It will also include an overview of key concepts in the theology of the Adventist denomination such as the community of believers, holiness, and mission. Although the ultimate goal of this doctoral project is to design a strategy to deal with suffering through the practice of spiritual disciplines in a community context, Chapter 5 will demonstrate that suffering is not separated from true Christianity, since great people of faith in the Bible did also face

suffering and adversity. This part will end by taking a closer look at the lives of the Psalmist Asaph and the Apostle Paul, as evidence that a life absent from suffering is not necessarily a mark of true Christianity, and that struggles and difficulties can actually lead to holiness and peace in God. This will serve as the theological foundations for a ministry initiative that develops a program of spiritual formation at the Oakland Spanish SDA Church.

The last part provides a strategy for developing a community-oriented program of spiritual formation that will strengthen the faith of suffering members at Oakland Spanish SDA Church. The strategy includes the formation of a small group ministry where the spiritual disciplines of Bible Study and *Lectio Divina* will be practiced and where mutual encouragement and biblical application re central. This section will also present a description of the process, timeline, and resources that provide the foundation to carry out this project, and it will end with a plan for evaluation and adaptation. It is hoped that this doctoral project be practical enough to be used by other communities in need of finding peace in the midst of struggles.

CHAPTER 1

A SOCIOECONOMIC AND CULTURAL OVERVIEW OF THE CITY OF OAKLAND

This chapter provides a brief background and key characteristics of the city of Oakland. It focuses on aspects relevant to the Latin community that lives in the area, with specific attention given to those elements that serve to inform the strategy of this doctoral project. Issues of crime, the recent economic recession, and family relationships will be discussed, particularly as they relate to Latinos in Oakland.

General Characteristics of Oakland

“What I like about cities,” states Joseph Brodsky, “is that everything is king size, the beauty and the ugliness.”¹ That can be said about Oakland, California, a city surrounded with immense beauty, a great landscape, breathtaking views, gorgeous hills, an incomparable Mediterranean weather. Oakland boasts to have a "bustling waterfront, two shimmering lakes, 19 miles of shoreline along the San Francisco Bay, unparalleled Bay views and more parks and open space per capita than any other city in the Bay

¹ Joseph Brodsky, Brainyquote.com, <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/josephbrod150206.html> (accessed March 10, 2012).

Area."² Oakland is also a city of importance. For one, Oakland is a port city. It is estimated that "the port of Oakland is the fourth largest container port in the U. S., and among the top 25 in the world."³ In addition, the 2011 encyclopedia states that "Oakland is the site of several institutions of higher education, including Mills College (1852), Holy Names University (1868), and California College of the arts (1907); the Berkeley campus of the University of California is just to the North"⁴

Oakland also shines in the area of sports teams. According to the Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, "Oakland is the only city in California with the 'big three' professional sport teams."⁵ The By City Light website lauds their successes: "The Oakland Athletics MLB club won three world series in a row from 1972 to 1974, the Golden State warriors won the 1974-1975 NBA championship; and the Oakland raiders of the NFL won Super Bowl XI in 1977"⁶ The beauty of Oakland however, cannot be limited to natural or physical components, when taken into consideration that "today, Oakland is one of the nation's most ethnically integrated cities in the world. Oakland speaks more than 100 languages and dialects."⁷

² Visit Oakland website, "About Oakland," http://visitingoakland.org/visiting_about_oakland.cfm (accessed January 10, 2012).

³ Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, "Oakland Facts," 2006, <http://www.oaklandchamber.com/relocation/facts.asp> (accessed October 15, 2010).

⁴ *Encyclopedia Britannica Deluxe Edition*, s. v. "Oakland," CD-ROM (2011).

⁵ Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, "Oakland Facts."

⁶ By City Light website, "Oakland, California: City History," <http://www.bycitylight.com/cities/us-ca-oakland-history.php> (accessed October 15, 2010).

⁷ Visit Oakland website, "About Oakland."

In spite of all these remarkable positive characteristics of this great city, Oakland also has a negative stigma. Throughout its history, Oakland has struggled with a number of internal and external challenges, including high unemployment, and high rates of poverty, violent crime, and drug use. Christ Rhomberg, in his outstanding work, *No There There*, a book dedicated to the history and sociopolitical development of the city of Oakland, observes that “issues of class and racial and social tensions have been from the start an integral part of Oakland.”⁸ Crime is without any question at the top of the problems that contribute to the bad reputation of the city. As Rhomberg puts it, “The city has an image problem.”⁹

Selected Demographic Statistics

Oakland, the eighth largest city in California, is the county seat of Alameda County.¹⁰ It has a privileged location on the east side of the San Francisco Bay. According to the 2010 records of the U. S. Census Bureau, the city has a total of 55.79 square miles of land area and a population density of 7004 persons per square mile.¹¹ Oakland's geography offers a central location to several of California's vibrant hubs. San Francisco is fifteen minutes to the east, Silicon Valley is forty-five minutes, and as mentioned above, the world famous UC Berkeley campus lies just a few miles to the north.

⁸ Christ Rhomberg, *No There There: Race, Class, and Political Community in Oakland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 25.

⁹ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁰ Oakland Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce, "Oakland Facts."

¹¹ U. S. Bureau of the Census, "State and County Quick Facts, Oakland City, California," 2010, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06/0653000.html> (accessed December 26, 2012).

Oakland is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in the country. According to the 2010 census, the total population of the city is 399,484. The population of Caucasians is 34.5 percent; Blacks or African Americans, 28.0 percent; Hispanics or Latinos, 25.4 percent, and Asians, 16.8 percent. According to official analysis obtained between 2007 and 2011, Oakland shows a 19.6 percent poverty level, compared to 14.4 percent for the State of California.¹² Among those, Hispanics or Latinos represent the group with the biggest index of poverty at 25.3 percent, followed by Blacks or African Americans with 25.0 percent, Asians with 21.2 percent, and Caucasians with 16.6 percent.¹³

Brief Social and Historical Background

The history of Oakland began in 1200 B.C. when the Ohlone Indians settled in the area that would later become Oakland. In 1772, Spanish explorers visited the East bay area and claimed that territory for the king of Spain.¹⁴ The encyclopedia entry for Oakland records, "In 1820 a Spanish land grant known as Rancho San Antonio was established there and during the California Gold Rush, it became a transit center for goods and people."¹⁵ Just as many cities in America, Oakland was born in the 1850s of

¹² U. S. Bureau of the Census, "State and County Quick Facts, Oakland City, California."

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Oakland Net.com, "Oakland History Time Line," <http://www.oaklandnet.com/celebrate/Historytimeline.htm> (accessed November 10, 2011).

¹⁵ *Encyclopedia Britannica Deluxe Edition*, s. v. "Oakland."

the speculation, during the days of the gold rush in California.¹⁶ On May 4, 1852, Oakland was established as a city by the legislature of the State of California.¹⁷

Rhomberg describes the narrative of the socio-economic development of Oakland. Although considered now a “Black” city, writes Rhomberg, Oakland began with a mostly White population. By 1920 the majority of the people living in Oakland were of Northern European origin,¹⁸ “but by 1960, more than 22 percent of Oakland residents were African American.”¹⁹ In the last five decades, Oakland has become more diverse in its culture and in its ethnicity, as Rhomberg observes again: “Latinos were the new group coming in the 1960s and very quickly jumped from a 9 percent in 1980 to 22 percent in 2000.”²⁰ Rhomberg continues, “Once nearly all white, in the ‘60s and ‘70s it had become mainly black and Latino, and in the ‘90s it was quickly absorbing a large population of new Asian immigrants.”²¹

There were a few major players in the development of Oakland as a city. One was the railroad system, and the other was The Pullman Company, which was related to the railroad system. The encyclopedia entry for Oakland states, “By 1869 Oakland was chosen as the western terminus of the first transcontinental railroad and began developing

¹⁶ Rhomberg, *No There There*, 25.

¹⁷ Oakland Net.com, “Oakland History Time Line.”

¹⁸ Rhomberg, *No There There*, 28.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

²¹ *Ibid.*, x.

its harbor."²² The creation of a railroad system was fundamental for the economic and social development of the city. The second major player was the Pullman Company. In their book, *The Pullman Porters and West Oakland*, Thomas and Wilma Tramble describe the impact that the creation of the railroad system by George Pullman had in the community of Oakland, especially in the Black community of West Oakland. They write, "Black west Oaklanders found a non-extinguishable and stable source of income to build their lives in California as Pullman Company Employees."²³ In the words of the Trembles, George Pullman created an American dynamic—the opulent railway sleeping car—and he inadvertently created fertile ground for the rich, and integrated the community of west Oakland.²⁴ Rhomberg summarizes the impact of the development of the railroad system in Oakland with the following words: "Black men employed as Pullman porters, railroad laborers, and service workers anchored this community in West Oakland."²⁵

The Impact of Crime

It has already been pointed out that crime and violence are two of the most identifiable characteristics of Oakland. Historically there has been tension between the Oakland police and the community. As Rhomberg notes, tension between minorities and

²² *Encyclopedia Britannica Deluxe Edition*, s. v. "Oakland."

²³ Thomas Tramble and Wilma Tramble, *The Pullman Porters and West Oakland* (San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing, 2007), 7.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁵ Rhomberg, *No There There*, 29

the police departments has been present in Oakland even before 1950.²⁶ This tension and subsequent claims of discrimination gave way to the formation of the Black Panther Party, founded in 1966 in Oakland by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. This organization was originally known as the Black Panther Party for Self-defense.²⁷ As this name suggested, the organization was formed as a response to brutality and discrimination carried on by the Oakland police in their dealings with minorities, especially Blacks. The tension between minorities and the police is sadly illustrated by two high-profile cases that have been in the national news in recent years. One of those is the notorious March 2009 case of four police officers who were killed in the line of duty by twenty-six-year-old Lovelle Mixon, a black wanted parolee. "That event was described by the San Francisco Chronicle as "The single deadliest loss of life in Oakland Police Department History."²⁸ This tragic case did put Oakland in the spotlight as a whole nation grieved the deaths of these officers. The other high-profile case represents the other side of the coin. That was the killing of Oscar Grant, an unarmed twenty-year-old Black train rider killed by Johannes Mehserle, a White BART police officer who shot Grant in the Back on New Year's Day of 2009.²⁹ The tension surrounding this event was heightened by the fact that Mehserle was found guilty of no more than involuntary manslaughter instead of second degree murder, as some members of the community expected. Cases like these have

²⁶ Ibid., 121-22.

²⁷ *Encyclopedia Britannica Deluxe Edition*, s. v. "Black Panther Party," CD-ROM (2012)

²⁸ Henry K. Lee, "Oakland Police Funeral Set for Today," *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 27, 2009.

²⁹ Demian Bulwa, "Mehserle Convicted of Involuntary Manslaughter," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 9, 2010.

contributed to the fact that for years the city of Oakland has been listed among the top ten most violent cities in America. Oakland has ranked between number four and number six in previous years, but according to analysis of the FBI data done by *Forbes* magazine, Oakland took the third place for the most dangerous city in the U. S. for 2012.³⁰ According to the *Oakland Tribune* there was a 20 percent increase in violent crime in 2012 over 2011, and according to the same report there were 131 people murdered in Oakland in 2012, compared to 110 in 2011.³¹ These figures clearly and sadly illustrate the fact that Oakland remains as one of the most dangerous cities in the U. S.

The Oakland Spanish SDA Church has not escaped this wave of violence. Some members of the congregation have sadly been victims of crime themselves, and other members have had relatives who were victims of crime. Many members have been robbed or assaulted in the street, and others have had their homes broken into or their cars vandalized. Even more tragically, as it was stated in the introduction, a young man in the congregation was killed last year.

The Impact of the Economic Meltdown in Hispanics

The Greek philosopher Plato once said that “any city, however small, is in fact divided into two, one the city of the poor, the other of the rich. These are at war with one another.”³² This is true of Oakland, where there is a distinction between minorities living

³⁰ Daniel Fisher: "The Ten Most Dangerous U. S. Cities," *Forbes*, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/pictures/mlj45jggj/3-oakland/> (accessed October 20, 2012).

³¹ *The Oakland Tribune*, "Oakland Seeks Solutions as Homicides Rise to Highest Rate since 2006," 2012, http://www.insidebayarea.com/breaking-news/ci_22289701/oakland-seeks-solutions-homicides-rise-highest-rate-since?IADID=Search (accessed January 10, 2013).

³² Inequality.org, "Poverty," <http://inequality.org/quotes/plato/> (accessed May 3, 2010).

in downtown and the rest of the population that lives in the hills around the city. The economy has become a big issue in our country for several years now, but for Hispanics living in the bay area of Oakland and San Francisco, the issue has been even more dramatic. As new research from the University of North Carolina indicates, "Despite positive signs that our overall economy is emerging from the deepest recession since the Great Depression, the socioeconomic status of Latino families has not improved and continues to lag behind that of other Americans."³³

Unemployment

Unemployment and poverty have been a historical problem in this city. After World War 2, the minority population was concentrated primarily in West Oakland, where unemployment and poverty were at least two to three times the city average.³⁴ By 1960 the unemployment rate of 8 percent in Oakland was twice the national average, but in older industrial flatlands, the rate ran closer to 14 percent, where more than three-quarters of the city's Black and more than half of the Latino population lived. In 1964, Oakland was one of the few cities in the nation to be classified as a depressed area under the Federal Area Redevelopment Act.³⁵

More recent data indicates that once again the minority groups of Oakland have been affected by unemployment. For Latinos in California, unemployment has hit record

³³ National Council of La Raza, "The Foreclosure Generation: The Long-Term Impact of the Housing Crisis on Latino Children and Families," University of North Carolina website, 2010, http://www.ccc.unc.edu/documents/NCLR.ForeGen.Impact.Latinos_final2.2010.pdf (accessed October 5, 2011).

³⁴ Rhomberg, *No There There*, 3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 137.

numbers. According to the U. S. Department of Labor, as of March 2012 the unemployment rate of the nation was 8.2 percent, but in California the unemployment rate stood at 11.0 percent.³⁶ This is the third worst in the nation after Nevada and Rhode Island, which stand at 12.0 percent and 11.1 percent respectively.³⁷ For the Latin population the employment situation has been even more alarming. Since the beginning of the economic downturn of the last five years, the Latin community in America has experience a bad trend. By the end of the third quarter of 2009, Hispanics had already surpassed Blacks in unemployment for the first time (15.7 percent) in California.³⁸ By November of 2010, the Hispanic unemployment rate was at 13.2 percent in the nation³⁹ and 14.7 percent in California.⁴⁰ As of February 2012, the jobless rate in the Latino population of California stood at 13.8 percent.⁴¹ According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of March 2012 the unemployment rate among Hispanics in the nation stood at nearly 12 percent.⁴² Some analysts sustain that Hispanics are the most affected group

³⁶ Bureau of the Labor Statistics, "Economic News Release," <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/laus.nr0.htm> (accessed April 15, 2012).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *LA Times, LA NOW*, "Hispanic Unemployment Rate in California Exceeds that of Blacks," <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/lanow/2009/07/state-hispanic-unemployment-passes-black-rate-.html> (accessed April 17, 2012).

³⁹ Hispanics Business.com, "Hispanics Unemployment Rate Drops to 10.3%," http://www.hispanicbusiness.com/2012/4/6/hispanic_unemployment_rate_drops_to_103.htm (accessed April 17, 2012).

⁴⁰ *LA Times*, "Latinos Hit Hard by Job Losses," <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/feb/05/business/la-fi-latino-jobs-20120205> (accessed November 8, 2011).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Bureau of the Labor Statistics, "Economic News Release, Employment Status of the Hispanic or Latino population by sex and age," <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empst.t03.htm> (accessed April 8, 2012).

in this recession, since they depend on jobs related directly with the housing and the construction markets. As the Center for American Progress point out, "The recession has hit the construction and manufacturing sectors particularly hard, and many Latinos, including recent immigrants, have historically found work and gained access to wealth building and the middle class in these sectors."⁴³

Members of the Oakland Spanish SDA Church have not been able to escape the unemployment storm. Just as in the community, many church members depend on construction-related jobs, which is a sector that has been hit hard in the economic downturn. The economic crisis has had serious repercussions to the ministry of the congregation since the decrease in tithes and offerings has significantly affected the budget of the church.

The Subprime Mortgage and Foreclosure

The housing crisis of the 2008 was a major contributor to the collapse of the U. S. economy, but many experts consider California to have been the epicenter of that crisis. According to research conducted by RAND California, it is estimated that between 2007 and the first half of 2010, there were 42,327 foreclosures in Oakland and the surrounding areas.⁴⁴ For the Latino community of Oakland, the housing crisis proved to be a devastating factor for the economy of the families, not only because many of them lost their houses to foreclosures, but also because a significant percentage of the Latino

⁴³ Jorge Madrid, "California's Proposition 23 Is Bad News for Latino Families," September 2, 2010, <http://www.americanprogressaction.org/issues/2010/09/latinos-prop23.html> (accessed January 15, 2012).

⁴⁴ RAND California, "Housing Foreclosure Statistics," <http://0-ca.rand.org.catalog.oaklandlibrary.org/cgi-bin/monthly.cgi> (accessed May 20, 2010).

population of Oakland depends upon construction-related jobs. In a June 2010 report done by the Center for Responsible Lending, it is estimated that during the first three years of the foreclosure crisis, from 2007 through 2009, 2.5 million foreclosures were completed in the U. S.⁴⁵ The report also estimated that by the end of 2009, nearly 8 percent of African Americans and Latinos have lost their homes to foreclosures, compared to 4.5 percent of Caucasians. These numbers are significantly important when taking into consideration that African Americans and Latinos are a significant percentage of the city of Oakland. That same report also estimates that “African-American and Latino borrowers are 76% and 71% more likely, respectively, to have lost their homes to foreclosure than non-Hispanic White borrowers.”⁴⁶ The report continues,

When the number of homes that are in imminent danger of foreclosure is combined with homes already lost, it is clear that the foreclosure crisis is affecting a large number of families. Expressed as a share of the population of homeowners as of 2006, we estimate that 17% of Latino homeowners, 11% of African-American homeowners, and 7% of non-Hispanic White homeowners already have lost or are at imminent risk of losing their homes.⁴⁷

The impact of the housing crisis in the Latin community goes beyond economics. Recent studies have found that families that face or are facing foreclosure experienced high rates of depression, increased anxiety, and tension. As a result of foreclosure,

⁴⁵ Center for Responsible Lending, "Foreclosure by Race and Ethnicity: The Demographics of a Crisis," <http://www.responsiblelending.org/mortgage-lending/research-analysis/foreclosures-by-race-and-ethnicity.pdf>, 2010 (accessed May 1, 2011).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

spousal relationships suffer, and the academic performance and behavior of children at school were impacted greatly.⁴⁸

Considering the fact that by all estimates California has been at the epicenter of the foreclosure earthquake that has shaken the nation in the last few years, it is natural to understand that the Latino community of Oakland has been impacted by all these tremors. For members of the Oakland Spanish SDA Church, even more dramatic is the fact that faith and prayers have not spared the believers from seeing their homes being lost and succumbing to foreclosure. Many church members, who previously felt fortunate enough to be living the American dream, have lived in a nightmare during the last few years as they have had to give up their homes to financial institutions. This has had dramatic consequences, not just for the families affected, but also for the ministry of the congregation, as many leaders of the church were forced to relocate to faraway areas, or even to different cities or a different state.

Issues of Illegal Documentation

The number one issue for Latinos in the U. S. is the issue of immigration, and it is also one of the major issues in American politics and society. The undocumented people in the U. S. are publically known as "illegal immigrants," but officially the U. S. government uses the term "unauthorized residents" to refer to illegals. The U. S.

⁴⁸ National Council of La Raza, "The Foreclosure Generation."

Department of Homeland Security defines an unauthorized resident as follows: "all foreign-born non-citizens who are not legal residents."⁴⁹

It is estimated that 22 million immigrants came to the U. S. between 1965 and 2000, and an additional 7 to 10 million came as undocumented residents in the same period. The largest group was from Spanish-speaking countries, especially Mexico.⁵⁰ Official data indicates that "the number of unauthorized immigrants living in the United States in January 2010 was 10.8 million—the same as in January 2009—but down from 11.8 million in January 2007. Between 2000 and 2010, the unauthorized population grew by 27 percent. Of all unauthorized immigrants living in the United States in 2010, 39 percent entered in 2000 or later, and 62 percent were from Mexico."⁵¹ California is the state with the highest number of undocumented residents. It is estimated that by 2010 there were 2,570,000 undocumented residents living in California, and it is estimated also that about 124,000 of those reside in Alameda County,⁵² of which Oakland is part.

The issue of legal documentation is at the center of the struggle of many Latinos in California. Being undocumented represents challenges on different fronts for Latinos. One of the biggest struggles for undocumented residents is the fear of deportation. This fear is not due to paranoia or an imaginary sense of persecution. In fact official data

⁴⁹ U. S. Department of Homeland Security, "Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the U. S.," http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/ois_ill_pe_2010.pdf (accessed November 5, 2011).

⁵⁰ Robert Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007), 183.

⁵¹ U. S. Department of Homeland Security, "Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the U. S."

⁵² Public Police Institute of California, "Unauthorized Immigrants in California, Estimates for Counties," July 2011, http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/report/R_711LHR.pdf (accessed November 22, 2012).

confirm that "new regulation enforcements have led to dramatic increases in deportations and that a record 393,000 illegal immigrants were deported in 2009 compared to less than 200,000 annually in the early 2000s and less than 100,000 annually before 1997."⁵³

Deportation would mean separation from family and economic stress for that household, among other things. In fact, for many undocumented residents, it is so vital to remain in the U. S. that they prefer not to visit their countries of origin for fear of not being able to return to the U. S. Many people in the Oakland Spanish SDA Church, for instance, have not been able to visit their dying relatives or attend the burial of their parents back in their countries, for fear of not been able to reenter the U. S.

Another significant challenge for undocumented residents is the ability to compete in the employment market. Because of federal regulations, it has become increasingly difficult for undocumented residents to find jobs. California is among the "states that have adopted requirements that state contractors or state employers use federal electronic verification system known as E-Verify to determine the legal status of an applicant."⁵⁴ This has made it more difficult for undocumented residents to have stable and reliable jobs. The recession has also made it more difficult for undocumented residents to find jobs. In fact, according to the Public Policy Institute of California, "Pre-recession unemployment rates were lower among illegal immigrants than other workers, but are now higher."⁵⁵ This, of course, adds a significant amount of stress to the families.

⁵³ Public Policy Institute of California, "At Issue: Illegal Immigration," http://www.ppic.org/content/pubs/atissue/AI_711HJAI.pdf, 2011 (accessed August 1, 2012).

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Education is another challenge for undocumented residents. Many undocumented residents, especially young people, struggle to acquire an opportunity for higher education after they graduate from high school, due to the fact that many colleges and universities close their doors to undocumented residents. In addition, undocumented residents do not have access to grants and the financial aid available for legal residents.

A fourth significant challenge for undocumented residents is health care. Because the lack of health insurance, many undocumented residents struggle to find timely treatment for their illnesses. Housing is another challenge for this community. Many landlords refuse to rent to people who do not provide proper documentation like a social security card, so many undocumented residents end up in private rental homes with a less-than-ideal quality of life.

The struggles of the undocumented residents in the Oakland Spanish SDA Church are not different from those of the community. Church members constantly struggle to find jobs, medical care, decent housing, and in the case of many young people, opportunities of achieving a higher education.

Issues of Family Relations and Spirituality in Latinos

Family interaction and family values is at the core of the Latino community. Traditionally, the Hispanic culture has been very family oriented, but the idea of family in the Latino community goes beyond parents living with their children in a household. In their book, *Avance*, two Adventist scholars, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson and Edwin Hernandez, explain, “The idea of the typical family as a nuclear structure that includes two parents and their children, living within one residence does not reflect the reality of

many Hispanics. The Hispanic family extends to aunts, uncles, and grandparents who reside in close proximity."⁵⁶ Any family interaction among Hispanics, therefore, is not limited to the immediate family but includes the extended family as well. There is a sense of unity and responsibility for the well being of the other members of the family, as Ramirez and Hernandez note again: "The Hispanic culture values a deep sense of familialism (feelings of obligation, solidarity, and reciprocity within the family) and family member interdependence, which are reflected in the extended family structure."⁵⁷

Traditional family values have also played a significant role in the development and education of a child in a Latino family. That being said, these values have been challenged in recent years, as new generations assimilate new values through a process that some scholars call acculturation. Ramirez-Johnson and Hernandez defines acculturation as follows: "When two cultures meet, change is inevitable. This dynamic process of confrontation and change is called acculturation."⁵⁸ These two scholars elaborate and explain the impact of acculturation in the Hispanic culture with the following statement: "Acculturation involves the adoption by one ethnic group of another's cultural characteristics, including worldview, language, values, practices, religion, and diet. . . . While Hispanic culture has made an impact on American culture,

⁵⁶ Johnny Ramirez-Johnson and Edwin Hernandez, *Avance: A Vision for a New Mañana* (Loma Linda, CA: Loma Linda University Press, 2003), 37.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 23.

more often than not the Hispanic community has been modified to a greater extent by the larger American culture."⁵⁹

Robert Wuthnow, a prolific scholar who has studied the conflict between new and older generations in the context of religion, seems to echo Hernandez when he observes, "There is also a growing Hispanic middle class for whom religion continues to be important, but who embrace a more personalized style of faith that seems compatible with assimilation into middle class occupations and more diverse neighborhoods."⁶⁰ New generation of Hispanics, Wuthnow observes, do not adhere to the idea of following church teachings, but in a way live a more personalized way of spirituality where they focus more on inner spiritual connections than outward religiosity and practice.⁶¹ For instance, observes Wuthnow, younger generations see no problem in marrying outside their faith,⁶² and engaging in sex outside of marriage even when they believe it is wrong.⁶³ This new worldview has brought about tension in Latino communities and particularly in Adventist congregations that have historically been identified as being more conservative and traditional. Standards and practices are being challenged by a new generation of young Hispanic Adventists who have adopted a more open way of expressing religion and spirituality.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 24-25.

⁶⁰ Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 186.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 153.

⁶³ Ibid., 187.

Acculturation is easily identified in the Latino community of Oakland, and it is easily identified in the Oakland Spanish SDA Church, particularly in younger people born in the U. S. This can be seen by the fact that many young people have departed from the worldview of their parents. Even fundamental Adventist beliefs and practices like Sabbath observance and marriage, for instance, have become divisive issues between children and their parents in the Oakland Spanish SDA congregation. Younger generations practice a less restrictive form of Sabbath observance than that which is exercised by their parents. As a consequence, relationships have become more fragmented in many families in the congregation. Many young people prefer to congregate in English-speaking churches with a more progressive or liberal attitude where they share a common worldview on issues of spirituality. Many parents and grandparents perceive that as a rejection of the Hispanic culture, their values, and even church principles. At Oakland Spanish SDA Church, many parents and grandparents feel desperate and have no idea of how to cope with the reality of the new generation; they feel unable to control the situation, and they believe that their children are being lost. On the other hand, many young people feel desperate to find acceptance and understanding from their parents and older relatives.

CHAPTER 2

A DESCRIPTION OF THE NATURE AND MINISTRY OF THE OAKLAND SPANISH SDA CHURCH

This chapter provides a brief description about the character, personality, and ministry of the Oakland Spanish SDA Church. It begins with a description of general characteristics of the church and then moves to a brief description about how this congregation carries on its ministry in the community of Oakland. It also includes a brief description of different internal and external challenges this church faces that, in many cases, hinder spiritual growth.

The Makeup of the Congregation

The Oakland Spanish SDA Church is a vibrant, inner-city congregation of about four hundred members. The makeup of the church is a mixture of first-, second-, and even third-generation Hispanic immigrants who have come mostly from Mexico and Central America. In regard to age, the median of this congregation is thirty-six years of age, and only 10 percent of the congregants are fifty-five or older. In this congregation, women represent about 55 percent of the total while men represent 45 percent. Only about 35 percent of the members, mainly the young people, speak English fluently. About another 20 percent, mainly the older people, came to this country as adults and do not

speak English at all. The remaining 45 percent do not speak English fluently, but they speak well enough to carry on their daily business. The vast majority of the members do not hold an educational degree. Only about 5 percent of members hold a four-year college degree, and the majority of those are degrees that they acquired in their own countries. These foreign degrees generally do not help them find employment in the U. S. due to issues of degree incompatibility. There are nurses in the congregation, for instance, who were employed in hospitals in their home countries, but who are not eligible to be employed here.

Things are starting to change, though, since several young people who grew up in the church are attending prestigious colleges like UC Berkeley and UC San Francisco. Even though this is good news for the families of these young people, it is bittersweet for the church, since too many young people do not remain in the congregation while they are in college or after they graduate. The reason why they do not remain in the congregation is very simple: it is due to incompatibility. The new generation of college graduates has been acculturated to the new environment. Among the things they have assimilated to is language. Since younger people at the church prefer English over Spanish, they opt to be part of English-speaking churches where they feel they have more in common. English-speaking congregations also provide a perspective on faith and religion that identifies more with the way these young Hispanics see things.

More educated Hispanics, then, have in many ways abandoned the congregation where they grew up. Consequently, when educated Hispanics leave the congregation, the potential ministry involvement and the financial support that they could have provided to the congregation goes with them. The local church remains as a congregation of low-

income people who struggle to survive, relying on the construction, service, and agriculture jobs that the city can provide.

Another important aspect in understanding the makeup of this congregation is the impact of immigration. Members who have come to the church by transfer constitute a good part of the composition of this congregation. About 55 percent of the people in the church were already Adventists in their country of origin before they came to California. The other 45 percent includes children who have grown up in this country as well as new converts from Oakland.

This reality sometimes creates tension between those who want to preserve “the old-time religion” and those who want to conform to the “new ways” of the culture. Younger people perceive religion, church life, and Christianity in a whole different way than their parents and grandparents do. Issues of music, style of worship, language, and standards and practices of the church are a constant debate. New generations of Adventists who have either been born or raised in the U. S. do not adhere to traditional standards of dress, adornment, and entertainment, for instance. Even fundamental issues like the proper way of keeping the Sabbath create tension between generations. To the detriment of many conservative members, a good number of young people and even some adults resist adherence to a more traditional and rigid form of Sabbath keeping. While the new generation of Hispanics in the church describe themselves as open-minded, tolerant, progressive, and more in tune with the American culture, the older generation describes young people as worldly, liberal, and unconsecrated.

The Church as a Vital Element for the Social Well-being of the Congregation and the Latino Community

For the majority of the people in the congregation, the church is central to their lives. Many of them define their lives in terms of the church. Generally, they are very supportive of the different ministries, activities, and programs carried on by the church. Family retreats, camping activities, and spiritual programs bring joy to the congregation. The church, in many respects, brings a significant amount of fulfillment to people of the congregation.

For Hispanics living in Oakland, the church represents an avenue for social interactions with other Hispanics in the community. For many people who would otherwise be lonely, the church represents a great opportunity for finding companionship, friendship, and lasting relationships. Latinos who leave family behind in their countries of origin find in the church a sense of belonging as well as others who share similar experiences. There is often a sense of strength that comes from gathering with others who have had common experiences.

As discussed in Chapter 1, life sometimes becomes difficult for this community, and the church provides a spiritual refuge from everyday struggles and tribulations. One group of people for whom this congregation has proven to be valuable is new immigrants. For many immigrants coming from Latin America, the church represents a primary source of support in their process of adaptation to the new environment. When new immigrants arrive, specially undocumented residents who have no friends or relatives in the U. S., they rely on members of the congregation to help them through the process of adaptation. This support sometimes comes in the form of information. Some of

the vital information passed on to new immigrants includes where to shop, where to find jobs, and where to find affordable housing.

The Oakland Spanish SDA Church as a Spiritual Center: Internal and External Ministries

The Oakland Spanish SDA Church is an active, conservative Adventist congregation that adheres to the traditional values and norms of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and a church that takes seriously the duty of proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. When it comes to ministries, this is a very committed church. Active ministry is one of the characteristics by which this congregation is known. More than 60 percent of this congregation is involved in some type of internal or external ministry and about 20 percent is involved in active leadership. This congregation has a good and balanced program that focuses in a variety of internal ministries on the one hand, and various outreach programs and activities on the other hand. This section will present a brief description of how this congregation carries out those important internal and external ministries.

The ministries of this congregation are organized through different ministry departments, which is the structure of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination as well. The church, through different types of boards and committees, elect the heads of each of those departments. These heads are selected based on gifts and skills and in their expressed interest in working in a particular ministry. A support team is also selected in each ministry department to assist the leader in carrying out a successful ministry.

The Sabbath School Department

There are a number of ministry departments that shape the identity of this congregation. One of the indispensable ministries in this congregation is the Sabbath School Department. The purpose of this ministry department is to teach, nurture, and encourage spiritual growth in every member of the church. This ministry is carried out mainly on Saturday mornings in the church facilities. The main focus is spiritual growth and the main tool used is quarterly lessons designed according to the different age groups. There are lessons for children, youth, and adults. The topics of these lessons range from Bible doctrine to family, worship, health, and even on how to take care of the environment. Besides the Sabbath School superintendent, which is the leader of the department, central to the Sabbath School are the different teachers and facilitators who lead the different classes on Sabbath morning including the children's, youth, and adult classes.

Personal Ministry Department

Another critical ministry in this congregation is represented by the Personal Ministry Department. This department focuses on evangelism and church growth. This congregation has baptized an average of twenty-five converts each year, and this ministry is in many ways instrumental in that accomplishment. The main objectives of this ministry are to train, organize, and mobilize members of the congregation for active evangelism in the community. This department also provides the resources needed for training and the materials needed for outreach. Part of the training this ministry provides is in the area of visitation, discipleship, and Bible studies, and some of the annual

outreach activities this ministry organizes include evangelistic series meetings, community-oriented felt-need seminars, and distribution of evangelistic material in the neighborhoods of Oakland.

The Youth Ministry Department

The youth ministry department is comprised of a number of youth and children's organizations that work in close association with the youth department of the Northern California Conference of the SDA. This is the local regional conference with which the Oakland Spanish SDA Church is associated, as part of the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In this congregation, there are three active youth ministry organizations, which are the Pathfinders Club, the Adventurer's Club, and the Youth Society.

The Pathfinder's Club is a club described by many as a scouting type of club. The description of this ministry is described in the Adventist church manual as follows: "The Pathfinder's Club provides a church centered outlet for the spirit of adventure and exploration found in junior youth. This includes carefully tailored activities in outdoor living, nature exploration, crafts, hobbies or vocations beyond the possibilities in an average junior youth."¹ The Pathfinder's Club is designed for children between the ages of ten and fourteen. Some of the annual activities include camp-outs and retreats, visits to nursing homes and hospitals to do volunteer work, giving food to the homeless, giving hot breakfasts to the day laborers in different parts of the city, and participating in community activities like the "Cinco de Mayo" parade.

¹ General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, *Seventh Day Adventist Church Manual, 18th Edition* (Hagerstown, NJ: Review and Herald, 2010), 104.

This congregation also operates a very active Adventurer's Club. This club is designed for children between the ages of six and nine. Although this club has some similarities with the Pathfinder Club, it operates differently. First of all, due to the age of the children, this club requires parent participation and involvement. Second, the Adventurer's Club has different objectives from the Pathfinders. The church manual explains the purpose of this organization by indicating that the Adventurer's Club "is designed to stimulate the children's curiosity and includes age specific activities that involve both parent and child in recreational activities, simple crafts, appreciation of God's creation, and other activities that are of interest to that age."²

Some of the activities of this club include visiting zoos, parks, and museums. It also includes the annual Christmas visit to nursing homes where the children have the opportunity to sing Christmas carols to the elderly and share Christmas gifts and cards that the children themselves have made. In this club children learn about the Bible, nature, their community, the environment, and even how to take care of their bodies.

The youth of the Oakland Spanish SDA Church is very active, and the Youth Society is an important group for the young people of this congregation. The main goal of the Youth Society is to involve all youth in activities that will bond them closer together and train them for Christian service. The objectives of this ministry include the spiritual, mental, and physical development of each individual. The society meeting is a place to receive inspiration, fellowship, and strength; it is the center of happy activity and Christian fellowship for the young people of this church. The Youth Society meets on

² Ibid., 104-05.

Sabbath afternoon, and that meeting is one of the most important appointments of the week for many youth.

The young people of this congregation support the witnessing and outreach programs of the local church; therefore the programs and activities of this department consist of a number of internal and external activities carried on through the year. Some of the internal activities of this department are spiritual in nature and include a week of prayer, evangelistic meetings, vigils, campouts, retreats, Bible trivia competitions, talent shows, and concerts. In addition, the youth of this church also project efforts to the community. Annual activities carried out in the community include youth rallies, which are realized in public places of the city, visiting hospitals to minister the sick, visiting the prisons to minister the incarcerated, and different types of community activities like the “Say No to Drugs” march carried out on the streets of Oakland. The Youth Society also focuses on social and physical activities, and they plan social and sports events in different places in the community. Soccer matches and other types of sport competitions are frequently organized by the youth.

The Family Ministry Department

The objective of family ministries in this church is to strengthen marriages and families of the congregation. This ministry focuses on premarital guidance for couples, marriage strengthening programs, and the education of parents. This department also gives attention to the special needs of single parents and stepfamilies.³ Annual programs and activities of this department include family retreats, marriage retreats, and parenting

³ Ibid., 90.

classes. The majority of those programs are open to the community; in that way this organization becomes an outreach ministry as well.

Children's Ministry Department

The Oakland Spanish SDA Church runs a very strong children ministry program. This department focuses on developing the faith of children of the church from birth through age fourteen. It works very closely with the Pathfinder's and Adventurer's clubs, but because for the most part this ministry is carried out on Sabbath morning in the form of children division classes, it works in harmony with the Sabbath School Department as well.

The objective of this ministry is to develop the devotional lives of the children and to create a bond between them and the church. Through diverse methods used by teachers, children of the congregation learn Bible stories and how to study their Bibles. Children are also taught to memorize Bible verses and Christian songs, and they also learn to participate in the programs of the church by singing special songs, doing plays, and participating in a variety of activities. Church members find in this ministry a partner in the spiritual development of their children.

Women's Ministry Department

Women of this congregation are passionate about helping other women of the church and of the community as well. *The Adventist Church Manual* defines the objectives of this department as follows:

The objectives of this department are to foster spiritual growth; affirm that women are of immeasurable worth by virtue of their creation and redemption, equip them for service, and offer women's perspectives on church issues; ministry to the

broad spectrum of women's needs, with regard for multicultural and multiethnic perspectives; build good will among women to encourage mutual support and creative exchange of ideas; mentor and encourage women and create paths for their involvement in the church.⁴

Among the activities and programs that this department fosters in the church are women's retreats, cooking schools, stress and health seminars, women's health, and a variety of seminars related to issues women face. The women's ministry of this church also organizes social activities like baby showers, camp-outs, walks, and breakfasts, among others. These activities facilitate interaction among women and help draw women of the congregation closer to each other.

Community Services Department

The Community Services Department is one of the most important ministries in this congregation, since its efforts focus on reaching the community through different programs and activities. Because it focuses on the needs of people in the community, this organization gathers and prepares clothing, food, and other supplies for those in need. One of the activities this ministry enjoys is providing hot breakfasts for day laborers. Every weekend a group of members of the church spend the early hours of the morning going to different places where day laborers are found, and providing them with hot breakfast.

Another important program in this church is the food bank, which assists many people with limited resources in the community. This food bank operates in conjunction with city organizations and local business that provide food at a low cost. The church invests about 5 percent of the annual budget to operate this food bank.

⁴ Ibid., 100.

Other activities of this department include first aid classes, safety and emergency seminars, and community fairs. The community fairs are organized with the assistance of city and governmental agencies. These fairs take place on a particular street in Oakland where the community is invited to walk through different booths and expositions focusing on such topics as domestic violence, housing, and social programs, to mention a few.

Health Ministry Department

The Seventh-day Adventist Church puts a great deal of emphasis on healthy living. Adventists believe that human beings are called to glorify God with their bodies. This congregation has an active health ministry department that focuses on health of body, mind, and spirit. As such, the annual health ministry program of the church includes a number of activities such as health fairs and health seminars, which include topics like diabetes, hypertension, stress, women's health, depression, and a healthy diet. In addition, this department also organizes a number of health assessment clinic programs throughout the year.

For this activity, health professionals are invited to come and educate the people of the community on issues related to their health and to the prevention of disease. During those clinics, people of the community come to have their vital signs, blood sugar level, and blood pressure checked for free. This ministry has proven to be one of the most appreciated programs the church offers.

The Many Stressors in the Oakland Spanish SDA Church and Their Impact on Spirituality

As a Latino church, the struggles of this congregation are not separate from the struggles of the rest of the Latino community of the city. Although the Oakland Spanish SDA Church faces many external challenges, certain factors are particularly relevant to the well being of the members. These issues are also at the forefront of spiritual challenges the members are facing. This section provides a brief description of those challenges.

The Economy

As stated in Chapter 1, the economy has become the number one issue for all Americans, but for Hispanics living in Oakland the economic situation has proven to be particularly detrimental. The congregation of the Oakland Spanish SDA Church has felt this deeply. Even before the economic crisis, a large number of church members were living below the poverty line, but the economic crisis triggered by the housing crisis and unemployment has made the situation even more desperate for the church's families.

Many people of working age in the congregation are either unemployed or underemployed. Most of the underemployed work on a part-time basis in factories, cleaning services, construction, and farm-related jobs. But even among those fortunate enough to have steadier jobs, a good percentage of them earn no more than the minimum wage of eight dollars an hour.

Many of the men of the congregation seek work as day laborers on a daily basis. It is not uncommon to see members of the church in the early hours of the morning, standing near home improvement stores like The Home Depot or Lowe's, with the hope

of being hired for the day. Unfortunately, this is not an ideal system of finding a job. Many day laborers within the congregation testify that sometimes a whole week can pass before somebody hires them. This is due to the fact that the number of day laborers seeking work exceeds the demand. At the same time, there are fewer people hiring day laborers because home improvement and remodeling jobs have decreased since the economic and housing crisis began.

Foreclosure has also impacted people of the congregation greatly, to the point that even the ministry of the church has been affected. This foreclosure situation has forced many people to relocate to different cities, states, or even to go back to their countries of origin. Consequently, these people leave family, friends, and even the church behind, and the ministry, leadership, and financial support they provided for the congregation goes with them, leaving ministry and leadership voids in the congregation.

Health Issues

Health issues have been a constant struggle for a number of people in the church. The lack of access to health care and health care education and information has resulted in poor health for a significant number of members. By not having access to medical care that is provided by insurance, they rely on social programs like the walk-in clinics administrated by the government or health programs provided by La RAZA, an organization devoted to helping the Hispanic community in North America. These social programs, though somewhat helpful, do not adequately provide assistance to Hispanics facing health challenges. Consequently, many Hispanics have no choice but to suffer

through untreated medical conditions or to end up in the hospital for emergency interventions.

One of the medical conditions that go untreated in many Hispanics is diabetes. Research indicates that “among the Latino population in the U. S. the prevalence of diabetes is estimated to be three to five times greater than that of the general population.”⁵ The prevalence of diabetes at the Oakland Spanish SDA Church follows this trend as well. With diabetes, researchers say, come a number of complications associated with the condition, which include “heart disease, stroke, hypertension, retinopathy, kidney disease, neuropathies, amputations, and dental disease.”⁶ Sadly, many people in the Latino community and in this congregation as well have no choice but to suffer these complications.

High blood pressure is also a problem for many members of the Oakland Spanish SDA Church. In many cases, this situation among members is related to genetics, stress, and anxiety. But it is also due to a lack of information and education on how to deal with such conditions as hypertension.

Cancer is another big issue for this congregation, and it is the disease that has brought a significant amount of grief to this church. Many people of the congregation are currently suffering with different types of cancer, and sadly, this disease has already taken the lives of five members of the church in a period of about five years. For a small congregation like this one, where many members are tied by family, friendship, and Christian kinship, that number is devastating.

⁵ Stanhope Marcia and Jeanette Lancaster, *Public Health Nursing: Population-Centered Health Care in the Community*, 7th ed. (St Louis, MO: Mosby Elsevier, 2008), 758.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 647.

Crime

To live in Oakland, one must accept the reality of living in one of the most dangerous cities in the U. S., as well as the tragic consequences. As discussed in Chapter 1, Oakland is one of the top five most dangerous cities in the U. S. Crime in Oakland is part of everyday life, and sadly, members of the congregation have not been able to escape that reality.

Many people in the congregation have been touch by crime, and some of them have been touched very deeply. One man of the congregation was assaulted three blocks from his house in downtown Oakland. After the gang beat him, they took his money and left him unconscious in the street with multiple broken bones, including his jaw. The man was taken to the hospital and was submitted to multiple reconstruction operations in his body and face. The trauma of that experience has caused him to suffer for many years, and some of his physical scars can still been seen.

Other members of the congregation have been victims of rape, assault, robbery, and vandalism. But the most dramatic case of violence that this church has suffered in recent years was the case of a young man in his early twenties who was fatally wounded on the streets in Oakland. An inconsolable mother and relatives, along with the church family, have mourned the loss of that young life. Crime causes people of this congregation to be anxious, fearful, and insecure, sometimes wondering when something will happen to one of them. In the meantime they keep praying for security and protection in this extremely dangerous city.

Immigration Issues

The issue of immigration has been part of the political conversation of the U. S. for many years, but for Hispanics the issue of immigration goes beyond politics. For Hispanics, immigration is an issue of survival. There are an estimated eleven million undocumented residents in the U. S. About half a million of them live in the Bay Area, and about 250 of them are members of the Oakland Spanish SDA Church.

For undocumented residents of the congregation, the issues surrounding immigration and documentation have become one of the biggest tests of their faith. Documentation is related to jobs, health care, housing, education, and even the ability to visit relatives left behind in their countries of origin. One of the main issues related to being undocumented is that of securing a driver's license. Many members of the congregation tell stories of travelling to faraway states like Washington in order to acquire a driver's license and be able to drive for work. They also tell stories of acquiring phony documents like social security numbers and IDs in order to be able to find or keep their jobs.

As difficult as the situation is for undocumented residents in this country, their struggles began back in their countries of origin. Many undocumented residents at the church tell about the financial expenses they incurred in order to come to the U. S. For many, this investment is very significant. Some members of the congregation sold their houses or even borrowed significant amounts of money from friends or relatives in order to pay the expenses to cross the border. For many, those expenses include paying a "coyote" to help them cross the border. Some members of the congregation testify that in some cases, after they have paid all that is due to various individuals helping with the

process, they have spent more than ten thousand dollars in order to bring just one relative to the U. S.

But financial expenditure is just part of all of the investment the undocumented residents have incurred to come here. They have left home and family behind, and they all come for one reason: financial security. For one, they want to help those relatives left behind to live better lives. Those who come to the U. S. provide financial support to those left back home, and at the same time they put a great deal of effort towards saving money in order to bring their family members to the U. S. and to be reunited here.

Many in the congregation tell about the many difficulties they have incurred as they were trying to cross the border. Many of them crossed rivers, and walked for miles through the cold nights or the unforgiving heat of the Arizona desert; many experienced hunger, thirst, and fear as they ventured to a new life. Many of the stories reveal miserable and dangerous experiences. After they arrived, many wonder if all the investment was worthwhile. Many of them say yes, but a good number of unsatisfied people with no jobs, no money, no shelter, and no family believe that the investment has not paid off, and some decide to return back home empty-handed.

Yet a great number of undocumented residents in the congregation have decided to keep the course and remain here, with the hope that someday they will also share and live the elusive American dream. And even as new talks and hopes surface about a possible immigration resolution, many are anxious about if this will ever happen, and if it does happen, what form this immigration reform take and what it will mean for them and their families.

Factors that Hinder Spiritual Growth

In spite of the positive outlook of this congregation that was described earlier in this chapter, there is a sense that underneath all the energy and involvement in the church, there are still many people lacking a genuine relationship with God. It is one thing to have a good relationship with the church, but it is another thing to have an intimate and growing relationship with God. Unfortunately, many at the Oakland Spanish SDA Church do not have both.

Although occupied in church work, sadly, many members do not demonstrate the character of Jesus. There are a number of issues that have led to this conclusion, including marital and relational problems, issues with drug and alcohol abuse, and school-related problems among the children of the church. To these can be added frequent issues of domestic violence, cheating, and worldly behavior or conduct that in many ways affects the testimony of the church in the community. All this reveals the fact that although the church may be central for many people, Christ may not be. In fact, it is possible that for many members, involvement in church activity has become either a substitute for real spirituality or an escape from the personal challenges and struggles they face. In essence, commitment to the church has become an obstacle for real commitment to Christ.

There are other realities that challenge the Christian spirituality of this congregation as well. External elements like those discussed above hinder spirituality in this church. For a good number of people of the congregation, survival takes priority over spirituality, and many find themselves more preoccupied with issues related to work and family than with their need for spiritual growth.

Another factor that hinders spiritual growth for many people of the church is social temptation. People in Oakland have easy access to drugs, alcohol, prostitution, and all kind of other temptations and attractions that are opposed to the teachings of Adventist Christianity. Sadly, too many people in the congregation are continually struggling with some of these temptations.

On a more intimate level, one important factor that hinders spirituality is lack of personal devotion. Some people may have the desire to grow spiritually, but they lack the right strategy that will lead them onto that path. Sadly, many people in the congregation do not have a consistent program of prayer or Bible study. As a consequence, many people in the church lack the necessary strength to face the struggles and temptations this world brings. Understanding this background, the challenge is to capitalize on the energy and enthusiasm characterized by the church, thus bringing people to a genuine relationship with Christ through a program of spiritual transformation.

As discussed above, this congregation has been experiencing a variety of adverse circumstances that have been testing the faith of the people in the church. The challenge is to help these people see their struggles in a new light and to realize that adversity can be an opportunity to achieve spiritual maturity. It is also hoped that a real connection with God can prepare them better to face life with all the struggles it brings.

Dealing with Suffering through Spiritual Disciplines

There is a connection between one's spirituality and the way a person lives his or her life. Having genuine Christian spirituality has to do with the way people live their lives and with the way they handle every situation that comes to them. It has to do with

the way people relate to God and to others in good or bad situations. This doctoral project seeks to lead members of Oakland Spanish SDA Church, who are deeply affected by trials and adversity, to the understanding that a meaningful relationship with Christ can better prepare them to face the world.

The strategy to put this congregation in the path of transformation and faith is by practicing spiritual disciplines in the context of a supportive community. Spiritual disciplines do not take away the struggles of life, but they do provide a mechanism by which the afflicted can achieve intimacy with God and in that way strengthen their faith in times of adversity.

There is a variety of spiritual disciplines available to assist believers in their path of spiritual growth and transformation, but the practice of *Lectio Divina* and Bible study will be promoted within this project. These two disciplines will serve as a cornerstone on which struggling Christians in Oakland can build a solid spiritual life and intimacy with God and in that way develop the faith that will sustain them and prepare them to face anything life brings. Kay Arthur, in her book, *How to Study Your Bible*, recognizes the importance of having a right relationship with God to handle any circumstance of life when she writes, “When you know what God says, what He means, and how to put His truths into practice, you will be equipped for every circumstance of life. To be equipped for every good work of life—totally prepared to handle every situation in a way that honors God—is not only possible, it is God’s will.”⁷

⁷ Kay Arthur, *How to Study Your Bible: The Rewards of the Inductive Method* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1994), 13.

The ancient practice of *Lectio Divina* and the valuable spiritual practice of Bible study are explained in more detail in Chapter 6. For now it is sufficient to point out that these two practices have proven to be a formidable tool in achieving a right relationship with God and increasing faith. The hope is that the practice of these two disciplines brings a more meaningful life and spiritual strength to this suffering community.

It is also important to note that these two disciplines will be practiced in community rather than individually. The mutual support of other Christians is vital when dealing with the struggles life brings, as Bonhoeffer states, “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”⁸ Chapter 6 will provide a more elaborate exposition about the role of community in dealing with adversities. What is important at this point is to emphasize the need to create this type of supportive community in the congregation, where people find intimacy with God and at the same time find an environment for mutual devotion, prayer, and encouragement that will help them deal with their struggles and tribulations.

⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1954), 19.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF RELEVANT SOURCES

This section provides a brief review of relevant sources that have served to guide and instruct the development of this project. These sources by no means represent the only material consulted for this effort, but they are good representatives of valuable literature available in the marketplace on the different subjects that sustain this project. This review includes an identification of the thesis matter, the valuable contribution to this project as it relates to the subjects of community and spiritual disciplines, and a brief identification of perceived weak points each of these sources contain.

***Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Life Together by Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a spiritual guide of how life in community is to be lived and practiced. The book represents the expanded definition of what it means to “love God and love your neighbor.” *Life Together* outlines the privileges and benefits of a life in community, but it also outlines the responsibilities as well. The thesis of the book is that community is a divine rather than a human enterprise, and comes to the Christian as a gift from God. Christian community gives expression to

genuine love, since it is in community that the Christian practice love of God and neighbor.

The book begins by establishing the indispensable value of Christian fellowship and community. Community is a blessing and a gift of God. It is only by his grace that humanity can enjoy the fellowship of other Christians who are united by the same love and passion for God.¹ This gift should not be taken for granted, but needs to be valued and appreciated as “the roses and lilies of the Christian life.”²

In *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer establishes the foundational aspect of the incarnation of Christ in Christian community. Through his incarnation, Jesus became one with humanity, a brother. Through the incarnation, Christians became “the body of Christ,”³ who share this wonderful fellowship with Jesus. This Christian fellowship, explains Bonhoeffer, “is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”⁴ It is in Christian fellowship and communion that the believer grows in the likeness of Christ and in holiness. Bonhoeffer states, “Christian community is like Christian’s sanctification.”⁵

For Bonhoeffer, Christian community is rooted in principles shared in common with other Christians. Fellow believers share the same faith, the same presence of Christ, his word, his uncompromising truth, his grace, and his acts of mercy on behalf of

¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 18.

² *Ibid.*, 21.

³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

humanity. Those are fundamental elements that characterize the uniqueness of the Christian community.⁶

Beginning in Chapter 2, *Life Together* establishes what can be defined as Bonhoeffer spirituality. It begins by affirming the family as the primary and fundamental Christian community, where morning and evening devotions should be practiced. For Bonhoeffer, every aspect of family life, including worship, prayer, mealtimes, and even work, represents components that should give expression to the adoration of and communion with God. Every aspect of family life belongs to God, affirms Bonhoeffer.⁷ For Bonhoeffer, any communal devotion begins with prayer, especially praying the Psalms since “the psalter is the great school of prayer,” and from the psalms the Christian learns what prayer means, what to pray for, and to pray in fellowship.⁸

In Chapter 3, Bonhoeffer moves from corporate to individual devotions. Here he describes the value of the individual spiritual disciplines of solitude, meditation, prayer, and intercession. He begins by describing solitude as silence and stillness. He writes, “The mark of solitude is silence.”⁹ This silence is “simple stillness under the word of God and waiting for blessings.”¹⁰ Then Bonhoeffer defines the purpose of meditation. He

⁶ Ibid., 25.

⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁸ Ibid., 47-49.

⁹ Ibid., 78.

¹⁰ Ibid., 79.

emphatically declares that the only purpose of personal meditation is devotion to the Scripture, private prayer, and intercession.¹¹

In regards to the practice of personal prayer, Bonhoeffer sustains that personal prayer is related to the Word of God. He writes, “Scripture meditation leads to prayer.”¹² Consequently, in accordance with Scripture teaching on prayer, the Christian ought to pray for the clarification of the day, preservation from sin, growth in sanctification, and faithfulness and strength in his or her work.¹³ In regards to the practice of intercession, Bonhoeffer defines intercession as “to bring our brother into the presence of God,”¹⁴ and this represents a daily duty of Christians towards their brothers or sisters.¹⁵

In Chapter 4, Bonhoeffer moves to the practical aspect of Christian brotherhood, or, put in different words, the responsibilities of how the Christian is to relate with other Christians. This relationship is marked by the practical expression of right behavior and attitudes toward others. This points to the responsibilities of Christian brotherhood, which Bonhoeffer calls ministries. These ministries include: holding one’s tongue, meekness, listening, helpfulness, bearing, proclaiming, and authority. How these ministries are administered is what determines a right relationship with others.

In *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer defines the relationship among Christians as one that should be characterized by respect and acceptance. In this place, empathy for others is

¹¹ Ibid., 81.

¹² Ibid., 84.

¹³ Ibid., 85.

¹⁴ Ibid., 86.

¹⁵ Ibid., 87.

manifested and people are welcomed with strength and weakness. In this place, there is a display of understanding, love, and compassion, which are marks of true Christian community.

Bonhoeffer ends his book with a powerful argument about the value of confession in the fellowship of believers. He establishes confession as “the breakthrough of Christian community.”¹⁶ Confession, he argues, is the mark that defines genuine Christian community, since it is in confession that sinners come to terms with their sin. The reality of sin is the distinct equalizer that brings people together into genuine fellowship. In the search for grace and forgiveness, the sinner finds redemption in the act of confession with fellow believers. In community, says Bonhoeffer, sinners confess their sins “and in this very act find fellowship for the first time.”¹⁷

Bonhoeffer concludes his wonderful work by pointing to the ultimate goal of Christian fellowship. The ultimate goal of Christian community, Bonhoeffer explains, is to reach “life together” into eternity and enjoy the ultimate fellowship together with the Lord Jesus Christ. He asserts, “Here the community has reached its goal.”¹⁸

This book does not represent a manual on small group ministry, but the foundational value of this book on the concept of community has been very well established. This book is as devotional as it is authoritative. Its contribution for this doctoral project, which is framed in the context of Christian community, has been indispensable.

¹⁶ Ibid., 112.

¹⁷ Ibid., 113.

¹⁸ Ibid., 122.

Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach
by Gareth Weldon Icenogle

Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry by Gareth Icenogle is an exhaustive exposition on the theology of small groups. This title is comprehensive and insightful on the subject of small group ministry. The book offers not just information and insights but important practical applications that lead to the transformational experiences of small group communities.

From the start, Icenogle makes clear that although this work deals with small groups, in this book “God is the subject, not small groups.”¹⁹ Small groups, Icenogle explains, are only the vehicle by which God carry out his will.²⁰ The book is structured around the life of Jesus himself. Icenogle discusses concepts from the time before Jesus’ birth, during his lifetime, and after his death, and from these time periods he draws principles that apply to small groups today. The thesis of the book is very clear and is defined by Icenogle himself as follows: “The small group is a generic form of human community that is transcultural, transgenerational, and even transcendent. The call to human gathering in groups is a God-created (ontological) and God-directed (teleological) ministry, birthed out of the very nature and purpose of God’s being.”²¹

The concept of Christian community runs throughout the entire book and serves as the framework of all the aspects pertaining to small group ministry.²² For Icenogle,

¹⁹ Gareth W Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 13.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 69.

“the small group is the base community,”²³ and the Bible is the foundation by which all the elements of the small group ministry are derived. Such elements as the definition, the rationale, the form, the content, the purpose, and the structure of a small group find their principles in the Bible, according to Icenogle.

In Part One of the book, Icenogle discusses the rationale for small groups from the Old Testament. Small groups are covenant communities that are gathered by God to experience face-to-face encounters with other believers. Icenogle maintains that “small groups are about face-to-face relationships.”²⁴ From the New Testament, Icenogle draws foundational principles for a successful small group ministry from the experiences of Jesus and his disciples, including aspects pertaining to fellowship, relationships, calling, mission, spiritual growth, training, group dynamics, and leadership.

One of the key concepts in this book is the emphasis on the spiritual formational aspect of small group communities. Icenogle clearly affirms that “groups must consciously strive to practice group disciplines as family disciplines.”²⁵ He identifies face-to-face conversation, Bible study, and prayer as the three main disciplines of small group ministry.²⁶ A key feature of this book is the use of narratives. By using narratives and life experiences, Icenogle enhances understanding and makes his book practical and easy for people to learn and practice.

²³ Ibid., 23.

²⁴ Ibid., 21.

²⁵ Ibid., 137.

²⁶ Ibid., 111.

This book is less dedicated to the specifics of the practical application of how to carry out this ministry than other books on small groups. For that, other sources have been used to complement this work. Icenogle's book, however, provides an in-depth analysis and understanding of the subject of small group ministry. As such, it represents a valuable contribution in the development of this doctoral project, which focuses in the practices of spiritual disciplines in the context of small group communities.

***Using the Bible in Groups* by Roberta Hestenes**

Using the Bible in Groups by Roberta Hestenes is a complete and comprehensive manual on the subject of Bible study group ministry. The scope of this book goes beyond mere information to provide the reader with a well-designed and well-crafted method on how to develop such a ministry. The thesis of the book is simple: *Using the Bible in Groups* enables transformation to take place, and the result of this transformation benefits the individual, the local church, and society.²⁷

In the first section of the book, Hestenes lays down the basis of small group ministry as an expression of the community of God. From the start, she defines communities as “God’s design” and as “the calling of Jesus.” She sustains that Jesus Christ has called the church to be a fellowship of love and that this is a believer’s “distinctive heritage and calling.”²⁸

After laying the biblical foundation of a Christian community, Hestenes explains why a local church needs a Bible study group ministry and the benefits such a ministry

²⁷ Roberta Hestenes, *Using the Bible in Groups* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 10.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

brings to the church. Some of these benefits are fellowship, spiritual maturity, and completeness. In addition, in a committed community, Hestenes explains that “humans find their meanings and purpose for life within the context of both divine and human fellowship.”²⁹

Of particular importance is the fact that Hestenes fully explores all the elements that one must consider when launching a Bible study group ministry. By paying attention to these details, she answers the what, when, why, who, and how of a small group ministry. She explains how to deal with important factors for a successful small group such as time, focus of the group, type of group, what to avoid, what to do, when to do it, how to do it, and why. Hestenes also considers membership and leadership roles and how to carry out those roles in a way that is going to consolidate the group. Central to this book is the Bible. Hestenes argues in favor of using the Bible over any other source or material since she affirms that “the one source which has shaped the life of the church more than any other through its long history has been the Bible.”³⁰

Attending to every detail again, Hestenes discusses how to choose a Bible study among the particular topics and themes of the Bible, and how to choose a particular method of Bible study. She also presents tools to consider in the process of launching Bible study groups. At the same time she articulates the differences between various types of Bible studies, and prescribes her own set of recommendations along the way.

²⁹ Ibid., 10-11.

³⁰ Ibid., 14.

The last section of the book contains a series of well crafted Bible study lessons. These lessons serve as examples, but they can also be used by a Bible study group. This element serves as an indispensable aid for the beginner.

Hestenes's emphasis on the practical aspects of Bible study groups results in the fact that she does not provide an in-depth analysis of small groups themselves; here she tends to be brief and to the point. But in regards to the practical aspects of how to start and sustain a group Bible study ministry, there is not one single element that has been overlooked by Hestenes. Her attention to detail is outstanding and exhaustive. This book represents an indispensable tool for the practical application of this project that focuses on the transforming ministry of Bible study groups.

***Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines
by the Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists***

This book is a publication of the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It represents a thorough, biblically based, Christ-centered exposition of what Adventists believe.³¹ The general argument of the book is that the Bible is the source of all doctrine, and when properly understood it accomplishes the following: it defines the character of God; it serves as a guide for Christians who live in a society where absolutes are denied; and it inspires the Christian to serve others and to be prepared for the second coming of Jesus.³²

³¹ Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventist, *Seventh-day Adventist Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Boise: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2005), viii.

³² Ibid.

There are two primary purposes of the book: first, to lead Adventist believers into a deeper relationship with Christ through the study of the Bible, and second, to assist those who are interested in knowing why Adventists believe what they believe.³³ Though the book is an exposition of Adventist doctrine, the authors clarify that this work should not “be viewed as an unchangeable creed,”³⁴ since they sustain the Seventh-day Adventist Church has only one creed, which is “the Bible and the Bible alone”³⁵ This book provides a detailed exposition of every biblical doctrine as understood by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The authors state that “these beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture.”³⁶

The book presents a set of six doctrines: the doctrine of God, the doctrine of man, the doctrine of salvation, the doctrine of the Church, the doctrine of the Christian life, and the doctrine of the last things. Each doctrine is divided into a set of beliefs comprising a total of twenty-eight fundamental beliefs. Under “The Doctrine of the Church,” for instance, there are seven declarations of beliefs: the church, the remnant and its mission, unity in the body of Christ, baptism, the Lord’s Supper, spiritual gifts and ministries, and the gift of prophecy. Each of those subjects is followed by a summary statement, which appears at the beginning of each chapter of the book. These statements of belief are fully developed in the book with a comprehensive biblical exposition for each declaration. According to the authors, these doctrines cover the entire history of humankind and their

³³ Ibid., ix.

³⁴ Ibid., v.

³⁵ Ibid., viii.

³⁶ Ibid., v.

relationship with God from the beginning to the end of history, as described in both the Old and the New Testaments.

For many readers it will be of particular interest to observe some key doctrines that serve to form the theological identity of Adventism, but those doctrines may differ from a number of other Protestant denominations. Among these can be found the Adventist belief concerning the law of God,³⁷ the Sabbath,³⁸ the concept of “The Great Controversy” between good and evil,³⁹ and the concept of “Christ’s Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary.”⁴⁰ This last one is a concept unique to Adventist biblical interpretation.

Relevant to this project are the particular subjects of the Church, unity in the body of Christ, the remnant and its mission, and the Law of God. The Adventist interpretation of these concepts serves to guide this project so that it is consistent with Adventist thought and tradition. The doctrinal expositions contained in this book are structured as a simple and easy-to-follow outline organized in a form of a Bible studies. Each argument is presented from a biblical standpoint and with simple theological insights.

This book does not represent any significant contribution to specific aspects of spiritual disciplines and practices. But it does provide significant explanations of the concepts of justification, sanctification, holiness, mission, and the concept of the body of Christ as it relates to Adventist theology and doctrine, which is crucial for this project.

³⁷ Ibid., 263.

³⁸ Ibid., 281.

³⁹ Ibid., 113.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 347.

That understanding allows for this work to be in tune and faithful with Adventist tradition.

***Contemplative Bible Reading: Experiencing God through Scripture* by Richard Peace**

Contemplative Bible Reading by Richard Peace is a book about *Lectio Divina*, an ancient practice of praying with the Scriptures. The alternative term used by Peace in his book is contemplative Bible reading, the title of the book. Peace describes *Lectio Divina* as “a way to approach Scripture not just to learn about God but to engage in conversation with him.”⁴¹ The book is also about Bible study, and it combines these two disciplines of *Lectio Divina* and Bible study as complementary practices to achieve intimacy with God.

This book is introduced as a “guide” to assist in learning the spiritual discipline of contemplative Bible reading and Bible study and to practice them in a way that is going to bring about transformation.⁴² This guide includes methods to do *Lectio Divina* in the context of a small group or as individuals.⁴³ The general argument of the book is structured around the benefit of two concepts: analytical and contemplative reading of the Bible. Therefore, Peace explains, “in this book each passage is looked at twice. In the first section the passage invites one to “serious Bible study,”⁴⁴ and in the second section the passage invites one to reflect by means of a *Lectio Divina* exercise.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Richard Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading: Experiencing God through Scripture* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), 7.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 18.

It seems clear that in preparing this book, Peace has the novice in mind. The book therefore is characterized by its simplicity. “This guide,” writes Peace, “is written in ordinary language so that anyone can participate.”⁴⁶ Yet the book does not sacrifice substance for simplicity, since the content goes beyond the practice of *Lectio Divina* itself to invite serious analysis of the Bible through well thought out Bible studies. Peace explains that this study attempts “to give you a balanced experience of the Bible that takes seriously the need to analyze and the need to listen, the need to understand and the need to pray.”⁴⁷

Important elements of small groups such as leadership and the responsibilities of the participants are taken into account. For participants, Peace introduces the concept of a small group covenant in order to clarify the expectations of the group, and then he outlines essential elements that serve as a good starting point for the group.⁴⁸ In regards to leadership, Peace dedicates a whole section to guide the leader of the group to lead the small group effectively, taking into account basic principles and strategies that will assist the leader in conducting a successful group session.

The lessons contained in this book follow a simple but engaging format that start by making people feel comfortable, then moving them to participate in a conversational and reflective Bible study that leads to spiritual application and transformation. Peace describes the process of *Lectio Divina* in four steps: prepare to listen to God’s Word,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 9-10.

listen to the Word of God, ask “How is my life touched by this Word?” and pray. In group *Lectio Divina*, Peace explains, this prayer is for one another.

The simplicity and the user-friendly format of this book are positive characteristics of this work. Its strength could represent its weakness, though, since more demanding readers may expect a more comprehensive analysis of *Lectio Divina*. But for this project that targets a novice community, the format and content of the book are ideal and valuable.

Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today
by Diogenes Allen

Spiritual Theology by Diogenes Allen is a scholarly exposition on the concept mentioned in its title: spirituality theology. In this remarkable book, Allen makes the case that principles of spiritual disciplines and practices developed from theologians, thinkers, philosophers, and intellectuals from the past can be of tremendous benefit to those searching for a meaningful way to grow in their relationship with God today. Allen contends that contemporary Christianity has departed from the rich heritage of early Christian spiritual theologians like St. Anthony and the desert fathers, Augustine, Basil the Great, Bonaventure, Cassian, Evagrius, Francis of Assisi, Gregory of Nyssa, George Herbert, Julian of Norwich, Maximus the Confessor, Teresa of Avila, and Simone Weil. He regrets that the Church has dismissed them as mere devotional resources, and that consequently, modern Christianity has lost the rich benefits that these practices have to offer.

Allen’s plea for the Church is: “We must cease to regard spiritual classics and the heart-stirring words of early theologians as merely ‘devotional’ and not to be confused

with theology or with critical thinking.”⁴⁹ He argues that old spiritual practices can lead the believer in a path to a “face-to-face” encounter with God that in turn leads to transformation. These disciplines were not meant as a prescription for spiritual formation, but as tools that can be applied according to each experience and context.

Allen states that his book was written in part to answer the question, “What is there for us to do after conversion?”⁵⁰ In answering the question, he assumes that justification by faith has taken place at the moment of conversion, but his discussion focuses on the aspect of sanctification, which he defines as “the process by which we actually begin to become holy, free of the effects of evil and full of charity or divine love.”⁵¹ In that way, Allen focuses on the sanctified life after conversion. “Justification, states Allen, “is the beginning of sanctification.”⁵²

For Allen, the work of sanctification requires the submission of tendencies of the mind, body, and heart. Once again, Allen turns to ancient teachings of the fourth century to explain how the believer can submit to those tendencies today. He particularly examines the teachings of fourth-century desert fathers and specifically Evagrius, and his eight deadly thoughts. By examining this teaching, Allen identifies ways these insights can help today. These ancient teachings reveal that spiritual disciplines play an important

⁴⁹ Diogenes Allen, *Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1997), 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵² *Ibid.*

role in developing a sanctified life that honors God. Allen sustains that spiritual disciplines provide a mean by which holiness can be achieved.⁵³

Allen does not write about ancient disciplines from the standpoint of a theorizing theologian or a spiritual historian. He writes, rather, from the perspective of someone who has found a remedy for his own spiritual shortcomings by practicing these ancient disciplines himself. Allen gives testimony, for instance, regarding how the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina* guided him to experience the transformation he needed to submit his own tendencies of anger, and how that practice led him to experience peace and joy in his life.⁵⁴ In that way the validity of these ancient practices have been established in his own life.

The in-depth content of this book and the use of technical terms that require some attention could represent a hindrance for those who prefer a more simplistic approach in understanding spirituality. This book, however, serves to encourage the application of ancient spiritual disciplines in a contemporary context. For this doctoral project, which seeks to help people experience God's transformation by way of practicing *Lectio Divina*, this book represents significant spiritual and intellectual support.

⁵³ Ibid., 152.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 86-89.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

This chapter is a brief overview of key Adventist doctrines as it relates to the project at hand, which aims to lead a struggling congregation in Oakland to a deeper relationship with God through the practice of spiritual disciplines in the context of community. It is fitting therefore to overview key concepts in Adventist theology that relate directly to this project. Therefore a brief analysis of the concepts of community, holiness, and mission in the Adventist Church will be sufficient to understand how this project is consistent with the faith and tradition of Adventists.

The Body of Christ as the Community of Believers

Christian community is at the core of the relationship between God and humanity. It is something so wonderful that Bonhoeffer describes it as “the ‘roses and lilies’ of the Christian life,”¹ which could only come to humans as a gift from God.² Through the ages God has defined his interaction with humanity in terms of community relationships. From the creation of Adam and Eve and the relationship with that first couple, to the calling of

¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 20.

² *Ibid.*, 19.

Israel as his people, to the calling of the twelve apostles by Jesus, to the establishment of his church, God has defined his relationship with humankind always in terms of community. As Russell Burrill, an Adventist writer, in his book, *The Life and Mission of the Local Church*, puts it “The essence of God is community. At God’s very heart is the whole idea of community.”³ This is echoed by Icenogle when he states that community “is the common life between God and humanity.”⁴

In the New Testament the community of believers is described as “the body of Christ.” That has been a fundamental concept in the rise and development of the Christian Church. This element is introduced more specifically in the writings of the Apostle Paul in metaphoric language as follows: “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Romans 12:5).

This concept is foundational in Adventism, which defines the Church in terms of “the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior”⁵ and “a community of faith of which Christ himself is the head.”⁶ Although the Apostle Paul uses metaphoric language to describe the Church as a body, particularly in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12, this concept of the Church as the body of Christ should not be viewed only in terms of an illustration, but as a spiritual reality as well.

³ Russell Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1998), 101.

⁴ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 11.

⁵ Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 163.

⁶ Ibid.

Paul uses what some scholars describe as the “in Christ motif” to refer to the spiritual connection between Christ and the believer. Prominent Adventist scholar Jack Sequeira, for instance, explains in his book, *Beyond Belief*, that the “in Christ” motif is based on the biblical teaching of solidarity and “the central theme of Paul’s theology regarding the gospel.”⁷ This concept, though, is “largely foreign to the western mind,”⁸ Sequeira argues, and “difficult for the western mind to grasp and accept because it is much more accustomed to thinking in individualistic terms.”⁹

Sequeira asserts that humankind is spiritually connected with Christ through his incarnation, which miraculously united Jesus Christ with corporate humanity. Sequeira writes, “By God’s miraculous act, initiated and carried out by Him alone, He united in one person—Jesus Christ—our corporate humanity that needed redeeming with His own perfect divine nature. At this incarnation, Christ assumed the corporate life of the entire human race in its fallen condition. . . . The entire human race is corporately one ‘in Him.’”¹⁰ This view seems to echo the understanding of Bonhoeffer on the subject. When it comes to defining the body of Christ in terms of the incarnation and the connection between Christ and the believer, Bonhoeffer declares, “When God’s son took on flesh, he truly and bodily took on, out of pure grace, our being, our nature, ourselves . . . where he

⁷ Jack Sequeira, *Beyond Belief: The Promise, the Power, and the Reality of the Everlasting Gospel* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1993), 37.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

is, there we are too, in the incarnation, on the cross, and in his resurrection. We belong to him because we are in him. That is why the scriptures call us the Body of Christ.”¹¹

Seventh-day Adventists adhere to that concept. In *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, the denomination’s view on the church-body relationship is as follows:

The cross reconciles all believers “to God in one body” (Eph. 2:16). Through the Holy Spirit they are “baptized into one body” (1 Cor. 12:13)—the church. As a body, the church is nothing less than Christ’s body (Eph. 1:23). It is the organism through which He imparts His fullness. Believers are the members of His body (Eph. 5:30). Consequently, He gives spiritual life through His power and grace to every true believer. Christ is “the head of the body” (Col. 1:18), the “head of the church” (Eph. 5:23).¹²

The purpose of God for humanity is community and fellowship, but this ideal is confronted with the reality of sin. God’s intention is unity, but the intention of sin is individualism, separation, and isolation, or as Burrill simply states, “The essence of sin is the attempt to live apart from community in isolation from others.”¹³ In the real world this is translated in broken communities where distrust, competence, egotism, and the destruction of one another are prevalent. In view of that reality, the Church, and more particularly in this case, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the subject of this project, is confronted with the tremendous responsibility of restoring communities to the original plan of God. Russell Burrill pleads for the Adventist Church to put words into action and lead the way in restoring broken communities: “Adventists often proclaim that God is seeking to restore humanity to the image of God. If so, then at the heart of Adventism must be the desire to restore broken communities into communities that reflect the divine

¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 24.

¹² Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 167.

¹³ Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 101.

image. Therefore, the Adventist church must be at the forefront of any movement that seeks to restore broken communities to the image of God.”¹⁴

This plea is fitting as long as it is always be kept in mind that Christian community is not a human but a divine enterprise, and that all efforts for community should focus on God as the initiator and sustainer rather than human efforts and methodology. Bonhoeffer provides a sense of direction in this effort when he writes, “Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ which we may participate. The more clearly we learn to recognize that the ground and strength and promise of all our fellowship is in Jesus Christ alone, the more serenely shall we think of our fellowship and pray and hope for it.”¹⁵

The Body of Christ as an Agent of Transformation

The Church as the body of Christ plays an important role in the spiritual life of the believer. The New Testament registers the dynamic that exists between baptisms of new converts and their subsequent affiliation to the body of Christ. In Acts 2, for instance, the writer gives testimony that in the early day of the Church, those being baptized were “added to their number” (Acts 2: 41, 47). Likewise, the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians states that “in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12: 13). In the New Testament, then, to be baptized is to be baptized into the Church as part of the community of the believer.

¹⁴ Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, 101.

¹⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 30.

Adventists affirm the New Testament interpretation in the relationship of the Church and the convert. In *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, the authors state, “Through baptism the Lord adds the new disciples to the body of believers—His body, the church (Acts 2:41, 47; 1 Cor. 12:13). Then they are members of God’s family. One cannot be baptized without joining the church family.”¹⁶ With the understanding that converts are called into the Church, it is only logical to conclude that it is in the body of Christ where the process of sanctification takes place after conversion. John Stott analyzes this dynamic in his book, *Christian Mission into the Modern World*:

From the Day of Pentecost on, when God’s people became the Spirit-filled body of Christ, the apostles expected converts to join it. Peter’s summons to the people that very day was not only to repent and believe—as if their conversion could remain an individualistic transaction—but also to be baptized and thus to ‘save themselves’ from that ‘crooked generation’ and be ‘added’ to the new community of the Spirit (Acts 2.40-47).¹⁷

Adventists have always adhered to the belief that as the body of Christ, the Church is the agent of God not only for justification, but also for transformation. In affirming that position, Adventist writer Richard Rice makes this declaration: “The church is the sphere of salvation. God is active in the church to accomplish reconciliation, and he adds to the church those who are being saved.”¹⁸ Likewise, Adventist scholar C. Raymond Holms makes an emphatic statement about the role of the Church as an agent of redemption when he writes, “The church is not a discussion club for the exchange of

¹⁶ Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 218.

¹⁷ John R. W Stott, *Christian Mission in the Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1975), 120.

¹⁸ Richard Rice, *Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1997), 208.

views, nor a debating society. It is an agent of redemption.”¹⁹ Thus it is evident that the church plays an essential role in God’s work of sanctification.

Christ instituted his church as an agent of salvation and transformation in the world. The church becomes the place where the believer, as part of the body of Christ, grows in communion with other believers. That mutual growing relationship is described in *Seventh-day Adventist Believe* as follows: “We are no longer isolated individuals; we have become members of Christ’s church. As living stones we make up God’s temple (1 Peter 2:2-5). We maintain a special relationship to Christ, the head of the church, from whom we receive our daily graces for growth and development in love.”²⁰

Holiness and the People of God: A Brief Overview from the Bible and Christian Traditions

The previous section serves well as a set-up for discussing more specifically the issue of holiness as it relates to salvation and to Christian living. From its inception, the Adventist Church has put a great deal of emphasis on the concepts of holiness and sanctification. This emphasis has created some sort of a divide between the Adventist Church and some in the evangelical community. These evangelicals, who emphasize justification and grace, question the adherence of Adventism to the principles of *sola fide* (“faith alone”) and *sola gratia* (“grace alone”) of the Reformation, and they have traditionally viewed Adventists as a group that believes and preaches righteousness by works.

¹⁹ C. Raymond Holmes, “What Is the Gospel?” *Journal of the Adventist Society*, Vol. 3 (1992): 145.

²⁰ Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 220.

Donald Grey Bernhouse, editor of *Eternity* magazine during the 1950s and one of the most prominent representatives of the conservative wing of Protestantism, was one of the evangelicals who questioned the Adventist stance on righteousness by faith.²¹

Bernhouse's questions led Adventists to vigorously attempt to clarify their stance on righteousness by faith throughout the years. George Knight's book, *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, was one of several books written in order "to help bring peace between Adventism and conservative Protestantism."²²

Adventists have historically insisted on the fact that the Church has always been and will remain faithful to the principles of the Reformation, and that salvation is only by faith and not by works. The Adventist official statement of beliefs states that salvation "comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace."²³ But Adventists have also insisted that grace does not eliminate obedience and sanctification, and that in fact God's call to his Church is a call to holiness.

As understood by Adventists, the subject of holiness runs throughout the Scriptures. God call for his people is: "You shall be holy; for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44), an admonition that is repeated in the New Testament by the Apostle Peter: "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, 'Be holy. For I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15, 16). These passages clearly indicate that being a child of God comes with certain requirements and expectations. Holiness is something to be practiced in all aspects of human activity.

²¹ George Knight, ed., *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, Annotated ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003), xiii.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 133.

In analyzing the passage of Leviticus 11: 44-45, Adventist theologian Hans Larondelle, in his book, *Christ Our Salvation*, summarizes the practical meaning of holiness in this way: “‘*Be holy, because I am holy*’ (Leviticus 11:44,45; emphasis supplied), is God’s appeal not only to cultic purity, but also to moral integrity and physical wholeness in his own people.”²⁴ In the same manner, the Old Testament also expressed the purpose of God for Israel as the chosen people of God, as indicated in the words spoken to Moses: “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words you shalt speak unto the children of Israel” (Exodus: 19:6). This purpose of a holy nation is once again ratified in the New Testament in the context of the new Israel, the Christian Church. The Apostle Peter wrote, “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises to him who hath called you out of darkness into marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). This passage is a good indication of the expectation of God for his children in terms of holiness. The purposes of God for his children have always included holy living. Allen concurs: “God seeks to give us: holiness, love, peace, joy, discernment, and full union with God.”²⁵

In Adventism, as in other faith traditions, *holiness* is defined in terms of *sanctification*, a word that cannot be considered separately from its twin word, according to John Calvin: *justification*. *Justification* is one of the most important terms used in the New Testament, particularly in the writings of the Apostle Paul. The Greek word for justification is *dikiaosune*, a word that theologian Donald G. Bloesch defines as “a biblical

²⁴ Hans Larondelle, *Christ Our Salvation: What God Does for Us and in Us* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1998), 68.

²⁵ Allen, *Spiritual Theology*, 81.

term that is primarily forensic: it means to be declared or pronounced just in the context of a law court.”²⁶ This justification comes to humankind freely as a gift from God, and it is obtained by faith in Jesus and what he did on the cross as a sacrificial atonement for the sinner (Romans 3:24; 5:1; Ephesians 2:8, 9).

This understanding paved the way to the Protestant Reformation of the Middle Ages. Martin Luther, a central figure during the Reformation, found spiritual freedom in biblical expressions like “the just shall live by faith” (Romans 1:17). Luther developed the understanding that the sacraments and good works did not acquire merits for the sinner in order to obtain salvation. In addition, the Protestant Reformation developed principles like *sola fide* (by faith alone), *sola gratia* (by grace alone) and *sola scriptura* (the Bible alone as the rule of truth and faith), and sustained that those principles guide the Church and the believer in the quest for salvation.

Although accepted in Protestant denominations, the practical application of those principles as they relate to human responsibility is where the controversy begins. In other words, the role of good works in the plan of salvation needs to be clarified, as does the relationship of justification with sanctification. These issues define the major debate within the Protestant community.

On the one hand, some Christians have stretched the emphasis of sanctification to the point that as a result, they are practicing a religion focused on good works that in many cases leads to a form of legalism. On the other hand, there are those who, while

²⁶ Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology, Volume 1: God Authority and Salvation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 151.

emphasizing grace apart from works, live in a way in which there is no demonstration whatsoever of a new life in Christ. Some call this extreme “cheap grace.”

Donald Bloesh, in his book, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, identifies the error made by many Protestant churches that have rejected the value of good works. He explains that they have misunderstood the relationship between justification and sanctification:

In the reaction against Roman Catholic synergism the churches of the Reformation often fell into the heresy of cheap grace whereby salvation became a passport to heaven that was assured to one simply through baptism or a public affirmation of faith by birth in the covenant community. The inseparable relationship of grace and a life of costly discipleship were broken by an overemphasis on the all-sufficiency of the grace God revealed in Christ. There was widespread acceptance of the idea of instant salvation, that salvation is realized . . . in baptism or the act of faith. Salvation came to be equated exclusively with forensic justification, and there was a failure to recognize that justification itself is not fulfilled except in and through sanctification, which is a lifelong process.²⁷

To this day, that tension between justification and sanctification still prevails in the Christian community. Allen and Bloesh both testify to that fact. Allen observes, “Many Christians are uneasy with the idea that we are to make an effort to overcome our inadequacies because it sounds like ‘works righteousness,’ as if our salvation depended on something we do rather than wholly on God’s grace.”²⁸ Bloesh similarly points out, “The fact that the free gift of salvation demands not simply an outward intellectual assent or a voluntary submission to the Gospel but total commitment and lifelong discipleship under the cross was lost sight of in the mainstream of Protestantism”²⁹

²⁷ Bloesh, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 207.

²⁸ Allen, *Spiritual Theology*, 9.

²⁹ Bloesh, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, 207.

Some theologians and scholars in the Protestant community try to close the divide in this understanding. Allen, for instance, quotes John Calvin as an example of how justification and sanctification should be seen when he states, “As the great Protestant reformer John Calvin put it, ‘justification and sanctification are twins.’”³⁰ These twins came from the same womb and have identical characteristics. The relationship of justification and sanctification is in the fact that they are both gifts from God.³¹ Allen proceeds to explain the relationship between justification and sanctification by writing, “They are both the works of Christ, but each is a distinct work. Justification is our forgiveness or pardon by God apart from the law because of Christ’s death on the cross; sanctification is the process by which we actually begin to become holy, free of the effects of evil and full of charity or divine love. Justification is the *beginning* of sanctification.”³²

Justification, then, is not opposed to sanctification. As Calvin asserts, they are twins, and as Bonhoeffer states, both are gifts from God, but with different functions. All this is echoed by the official position of Adventism in the relationship of faith and works. For Adventists there is an inseparable relationship between faith and works, between justification and obedience, and that stance is anchored in the interpretation of both Old and New Testament passages.

For example, the Adventist Church addresses the apparent contradiction between the Apostle Paul and James in regards to the issue of faith and works in *Seventh-day*

³⁰ Allen, *Spiritual Theology*, 9.

³¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 30.

³² Allen, *Spiritual Theology*, 9.

Adventist Believe. Both Paul and James discuss the experience of Abraham and how God justified him (Romans 4:1-4; James 2: 14-24). The Adventists explain that Paul, on the one hand, warns about the danger of “wrongly believing that their standing before God depends on their good or bad deeds,”³³ but that James, on the other hand, points out the danger of believing that “one can be justified by faith without manifesting corresponding works.”³⁴ *Seventh-day Adventist Believe* summarizes the harmony between these two apostles as follows: “Paul and James agreed on justification by faith. While Paul addressed the fallacy of obtaining justification through works, James dealt with the equally dangerous concept of claiming justification without corresponding works. Neither works nor a dead faith leads to justification. It can be realized only by genuine faith that works by love (Gal 5:6) and purifies the soul.”³⁵ Bonhoeffer describes beautiful the practical relationship between faith and works when he writes, “Spiritual love creates the fruits that grow healthily in accord with God’s good will in the rain and storm and sunshine of God’s outdoors.”³⁶

The divide between some evangelicals and Adventism in matters of salvation and grace is the same divide that has always existed between different faith traditions in regards to the interpretation of the roles that justification and sanctification take in the plan of salvation. In other words, some interpretations of the relationship between faith and works are not exclusive to Adventism, but they are also present in the theology of a

³³ Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 136.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 137.

³⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 37.

good number of different conservative Christian scholars and groups. Adventists insist that a closer look at these concepts can reveal that the disagreement ends when it begins; it is a matter of emphasis.

Holiness and the Law of God in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Adventists have long held the position that sanctification is a fruit of salvation. The concept of holiness, however, is a very important one in Adventism, as Adventists believe that obedience to the law of God and the demonstration of a sanctified life is a mark that will identify the true believer at the end of time. As it has already pointed out, in Adventism, holiness is defined in terms of sanctification. Hans Larondelle, who was a prominent scholar and an emeritus professor of theology at Andrews University, the most prominent Adventist university in the U. S., explains the relationship between sanctification and holiness as follows: “Sanctification denotes primarily *consecration to the holy God in order to serve His holy purpose. . . . The Old Testament uses the verb ‘to sanctify’ (Hebrew *qadash*) primarily for a God-ordered ceremony of setting apart for, or consecrating, to God’s service”³⁷*

In the same line of thought, Adventist scholar Richard Rice, in his book, *Reign of God*, a work dedicated to the explanation of Adventist theology, adds this to the definition of sanctification: “The English word ‘sanctification’ comes from the Latin word *sanctus*, meaning ‘holy.’ The basic idea of the holy is that of something separated, or radically different from ordinary.”³⁸ He adds, “When the New Testament describes

³⁷ Larondelle, *Christ Our Salvation*, 66.

³⁸ Rice, *Reign of God*, 276.

church members as holy, or as saints, it refers to their unique relation to God. . . . This is why the New Testament insists on personal purity and godly living among the followers of Christ.”³⁹

Another important element to point out in regards to godly living is the fact that in Adventism, holiness includes the keeping of the law of God, that is, the Ten Commandments, as they are written in Exodus 20. But Adventists sustain that this sanctification is not a result of human efforts or human works, but the result of the work of the Holy Spirit creating in believers new hearts and new minds and giving them power to live lives that glorify God. *Seventh-day Adventist Believe* states, “Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God’s law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life.”⁴⁰

Spirituality and Mission in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Mission is an important concept in Adventism. In fact, mission is tied to the very existence of the Adventist Church. Adventist historian George Knight asserts, “Mission is what the Seventh-day Adventist Church is all about. Mission is the only reason for the denomination’s existence.”⁴¹ In Adventism, mission is linked to spirituality, and the mission of the Church is understood in eschatological terms. Adventists have historically identified themselves as the end-time remnant church of Revelation 14. George Knight, a very well respected Adventist historian and professor emeritus of church history at

³⁹ Richard Rice, *Reign of God Second Edition: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1997), 276.

⁴⁰ Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 133.

⁴¹ George Knight, *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom: Adventist Mission Confronts the Challenges of Institutionalism and Secularization* (Boise: Pacific Press, 1995), 7.

Andrews University, writes the following in his book, *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism*: “Founders of Adventism found the significance of their movement in the prophetic package of Revelation 14. . . . They saw themselves as a called-out people with a special end-time message to present to all the world. It was that prophetic understanding that empowered Seventh-day Adventism and made it a dynamic force.”⁴²

In the same line of thought, the official statement of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* under the title, “The Remnant and Its Mission,” defines the mission of the Adventist Church in relation to the Ten Commandments in this way: “In the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His Second Advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14.”⁴³ In line with this, Adventists believe that their calling and mission in the world includes living and practicing a holy life that gives honor and glory to God. To quote *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* again, the authors write, “We are called to be a godly people who think, feel, and act in harmony with the principles of heaven.”⁴⁴

In Adventism, then, mission and spirituality are two sides of the same coin. In Adventism, proclamation and holiness go hand in hand. Failure to do one thing is to fail in both. Adventist scholar and professor, Mario Veloso, in an article titled, “Salvation and

⁴² George Knight, *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism* (Hagerstown, NJ: Review and Herald, 2008), 47-48.

⁴³ Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 181.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

the Adventist Faith and Mission,” writes about the relationship between the keeping of the law and the mission of the Adventist Church: “When we fulfill our mission, we have to go far beyond our own feelings; we have to include also the teachings of the gospel. . . . We are called and empowered by the gospel to keep the commandments of God and to keep the faith of Jesus. The everlasting Gospel never separates faith from commandments or teachings, doctrines, and beliefs. We have to keep them all. Our mission includes all of them.”⁴⁵

A Need for Spiritual Reorientation

There is a big difference between saying and doing. In general terms, there is a great divide in Adventism between theology and practice, between words and deeds, and between doctrine and application. In spite of the great emphasis that Adventists put on issues of transformation, holiness, and spirituality, as discussed above, in practice many Adventists are no different from anyone else. In many cases, Adventists have departed from their traditional roots and, as a result, the Church is losing its identity as an apocalyptic movement that has been called to proclaim repentance in preparation for the second coming of Jesus. Consequently, as Knight observes, the Adventist Church is declining in membership.⁴⁶ Part of the problem, explains Knight, is that “Adventism has to a large extent lost the apocalyptic foundation of its message.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Mario Veloso, “Salvation and the Adventist Faith and Mission,” *Journal of the Adventist Society*, Vol. 3 (1992): 13.

⁴⁶ Knight, *The Apocalyptic Vision*, 15.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

The problem of the Adventist Church losing the apocalyptic foundation goes beyond a simple change of methodology or new forms of expressions, since as it has already been pointed out, the apocalyptic mission of the Church is tied to its spirituality. The solution, Knight suggests, is “a transforming heart relationship and not merely correct doctrines and good lifestyle practices.”⁴⁸ In other words, change has to come from the heart; change cannot come from an empty proclamation of doctrine without the transforming power of Jesus in the heart.

For many Adventists, the change needed by the Church is defined in terms of a spiritual reform. The deterioration in the practice of traditional Adventist spirituality has been the focus of attention of many outspoken members of the denomination, including the new president of the Church, Ted Wilson. Since his inauguration in June of 2010, Wilson has been calling for a spiritual reform in the denomination and a return to the roots of Adventism.⁴⁹ In his inaugural sermon, titled, “Go Forward,” Wilson called Adventists to a “spiritual revival and reformation” in their lives and in the Church in order to carry on the task of proclaiming the end-time message entrusted to the Church.⁵⁰

The transformation needed by the Church, though, is not to be realized through artificial programs that will give the appearance without the essence of change. Transformation is to be consistent with doctrine and mission, but any genuine change has to come from the heart of the individual believer first, before it gets to a particular church

⁴⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁴⁹ Ted Wilson, “Go Forward,” a sermon given at the Adventist General Conference in Atlanta, Georgia, July 3, 2010, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/33861749/Ted-N-C-Wilson-Sermon-Go-Forward> (accessed March 10, 2013).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

or denomination. After all, God is in the business of transforming individuals, not institutions. The Church needs individuals who seek God earnestly through prayer and devotions, people who genuinely pray for the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in their hearts. As E. M. Bounds, in his book, *Power through Prayer*, writes, “What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more and novel methods, but men whom the Holy Spirit can use—men of prayer, men mighty of prayer. The Holy Spirit does not flow through methods, but through men. He does not come on machinery, but on men. He does not anoint plans, but men—men of prayer.”⁵¹

Spiritual transformation and reorientation is indeed needed in Adventism, but the intention of this doctoral project is not to fix the problems of a denomination, but rather to focus on the Oakland Spanish SDA Church. It is hoped that this project will help that struggling and suffering congregation to find a path towards the spiritual transformation it needs. In the end, humans will respond before God as individuals, not as a group or as a corporate institution. A practical spirituality, then, is indispensable for spiritual reorientation. The objective of this project is to help the church in Oakland realize that spiritual reorientation and new commitment to God can be achieved through the practice of meaningful Bible-based spiritual practices, which is the subject of the next section.

Bible-based Spiritual Disciplines Foundational for Transformation

Spiritual disciplines are a necessity for obtaining a more intimate and meaningful relationship with God. It is through disciplines that the believer achieves intimacy with God, which in turn strengthens his or her faith. Both the Old and the New Testaments

⁵¹ E. M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 10.

address the need for prayer; fasting; meditation; and reading, studying, and memorizing the Scriptures, among other disciplines. In the Old Testament, for instance, the book of Psalms is full of references to worship, prayer, and meditation, among other disciplines. Even Jesus, the incarnated Son of God, relied on spiritual disciplines for the strengthening of his faith. The Gospels register the different spiritual practices that strengthened the faith of Jesus while he walked on this earth. Part of the spiritual routine of Jesus consisted on prayer, retreat, fasting, and reading and memorizing the Scriptures. That routine prepared him to face his rejection, his passion, and ultimately his death on the cross.

If the concern for any Adventist is spiritual transformation in preparation for the soon return of Jesus, then he or she should urgently take the reading and studying of the Bible more seriously than ever. In addition, the individual should regard the Bible not only as a source of knowledge, but as an agent of transformation. Many Adventists are very good at using the Bible as a reference book to argue and to prove doctrine, but they fail to see the Bible as the necessary transforming Word of God available for humanity. The value of the Bible as an agent of transformation is the theme of Hestenes's book, *Using the Bible in Groups*. In it Hestenes sustains that using the Bible, especially in the context of a small group, can enable transformation and renewal, and "this can result in benefits for individuals, for the church and for society."⁵²

It has indeed been by the power of the Word of God that the world has seen powerful societies like the Roman empire and powerful organized religions like the Church of the Middle Ages be put upside down. That is why the Apostle Paul writes,

⁵² Hestenes, *Using the Bible in Groups*, 10.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God” (Romans 1:16). It is the word of God, the compass that guides the Christian to walk in paths that bring honor to God. As Arthur explains, “The Bible was written so that anyone who wants to know who God is and how they are to live in a way that pleases Him can read and find out.”⁵³

Wherever there is a concern for spiritual reform and transformation, whether for an individual, a local church, or in an entire denomination, it has to begin with the Bible. The reason is simple: the Bible more than any other thing in this world has the power to bring about change and transformation for the Church. As Hestenes again points out, “The one resource which has shaped the life of the church more than any other throughout its long history has been the Bible.”⁵⁴

Therefore, if the Oakland Spanish SDA Church is to be brought closer to God, it is going to be through the Word of God. In that context this project is framed around two Bible-based spiritual disciplines that have proven to increase transformation and intimacy with God to those who seriously and consciously practice them. These disciplines are Bible study groups and *Lectio Divina*. How these two disciplines are going to be developed and incorporated into the life of those members is explained in Chapter 6, but for now is sufficient to say that these practices have demonstrated to be of enormous value in achieving intimacy with God and could impact this congregation in a significant way.

⁵³ Arthur, *How to Study Your Bible*.

⁵⁴ Hestenes, *Using the Bible in Groups*, 14.

CHAPTER 5

SUFFERING THAT LEADS TO HOLINESS

Suffering is a reality no human can escape, but suffering can also be a catalyst for a more meaningful experience with God. This chapter provides an analysis of two great men of the Bible, the Psalmist Asaph and the Apostle Paul, who serve as examples of how the believer can deal with suffering and obtain a more intimate walk with God, even in the midst of adversity. This chapter also underlines the fundamental necessity of practicing spirituality in a context of community in order to achieve transformation and peace.

Suffering and the Child of God

There is no more compelling argument against Christianity and the concept of a loving God than the issue of human suffering. For the most part, Christians and non-Christians alike recognize that there is a kind of suffering that can be understood and even justified, which is the suffering that comes as the consequence of one's own doing. In their book, *Holy Eros*, James and Evelyn Whitehead observe, "Human suffering often springs from our own clinging and anxiety. Violence toward others and abuse of

ourselves account for much of the world's distress.”¹ There is no doubt that Christians need to oppose drastically and emphatically this unnecessary suffering that is manifested either personally or collectively in the world. But how to respond to unjustifiable, unexplainable suffering is the real dilemma.

It is a pressing challenge for Christians to know how to respond to the horror of the Holocaust and September 11th, to the families of innocent children who died in Newtown, Connecticut on December 17, 2012, and to the daily struggles of those who suffer from cancer, AIDS, anxiety, fear, depression, and loneliness. Timothy Keller, in his book, *The Reason for God*, focuses on answering the arguments that skeptics have against God. Keller states the challenge as follows:

For many people it is not the exclusivity of Christianity that poses the biggest problem, it is the presence of evil and suffering in the world. Some find unjust suffering to be a philosophical problem, calling into question the very existence of God. For others it is an intensely personal issue. They don't care about the abstract question of whether God exists or not—they refuse to trust or believe in any God who allows history and life to proceed as it has.²

But to question a loving God has not been only the work of the skeptic. Sadly, it has also been the concern of many professing Christians. For many unsatisfied people, suffering becomes an issue of fairness and justice. Even some believers who apply the biblical concept of retribution ask, “If God is just, why do the just suffer and the unrighteous prosper?” Many Christians with Abraham wonder, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” (Genesis 18:25).

¹ James and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Holy Eros: Recovering the Passion of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 109.

² Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008), 22.

Things at times appear awry for the righteous. It often seems that the law of retribution does not necessarily apply on this earth, at least from human observation. To this concern Dorothee Soelle, in her book, *Suffering*, adds even more questions that in her view “can neither be answered nor dismissed.”³ Soelle asks, “Why must we suffer? Can pain possibly have any meaning?”⁴

In that search for answers, unbelievers generally dismiss the concept of a loving God on the spot, arguing that suffering and a loving God are contradictory and cannot coexist. Believers, on the other hand, take different approaches. Some are not able to reconcile faith and suffering, and they resolve to take the path of the friends of Job and blame the afflicted. Unfortunately, many Christians who are unable to reconcile faith and suffering still ask the question that the disciples asked, “Who sinned, this man or his parents?” (John 9:2). By so doing, they attribute suffering to either personal sin or to a lack of faith on the part of the believer or the believer’s family.

Other believers testify that there is another approach to understanding suffering other than intellectual understanding: it is the approach of faith. In the Bible, Job, the Apostle Paul, and the psalmist Asaph subscribe to this response of faith when it comes to suffering. While recognizing the challenge that suffering constitutes for the believer, this doctoral project does not represent an attempt to provide a theological or biblical explanation for why suffering takes place. Plenty has already been written to help people understand suffering, but the fact that people, including some believers, still ask why a loving God would allow the innocent to suffer, that in itself reveals that no

³ Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 1.

⁴ Ibid.

answer derived from the Bible or from any theological or ethical argument has been sufficient to eliminate that concern. This project, then, consistent with the biblical approach to suffering, focuses more on how the believer is to deal with adversities in a context of genuine faith, rather than trying to understand or rationalize this mystery.

Samuel Terrien, in his book, *The Elusive Presence*, correctly observes that the literature of the Bible as a whole presupposes a transcendent faith.⁵ In that same line of thought, John Ortberg, in his book, *Faith and Doubt*, points out, “Suffering both raises unanswerable questions and tells us that our only hope must be a hope beyond ourselves”⁶ This project, therefore, is more about the role faith plays when there is no answer, rather than an exposition of why the innocent suffer.

It is a fact that suffering is part of being human. All humans suffer, including the believer, the just, and the righteous. The Bible clearly attests to that truth and testifies that even great people of faith were not exempt from suffering, but that in the end they were victorious over it. Their victory came not because they were relieved from their struggles necessarily, but because they learned to trust a loving God even in the midst of dire affliction.

This chapter takes a closer look at two great men of the Bible, the psalmist Asaph and the Apostle Paul. These men serve as models for how the Christian can obtain victory over the doubt and despair that come from the struggles of life. It also focuses on the connection between adversity and the spiritual growth of the Christian in the context of the community of faith. The narrative of Asaph in Psalm 73 guides the believer towards a

⁵ Samuel Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Toward a New Biblical Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000), xviii.

⁶ John Ortberg, *Faith and Doubt* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 10.

proper approach to doubt when facing struggles, while the narrative of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4 guides the Christian in the right spiritual approach to adversity.

Asaph: The Suffering of the Righteousness and the Prosperity of the Wicked in Psalm 73

Psalm 73 is the opening psalm of book III (Psalms 73-89). This psalm is considered by many to be one of the great psalms of the Bible, and one commentator calls it “the greatest of the wisdom psalms.”⁷ The author of this psalm is Asaph, an official in the temple. In 1 Chronicles 16:4-5, Asaph is named chief among the Levites, appointed “as minister before the ark of the Lord, to invoke, to thank, and praise the Lord, the God of Israel” (1 Chronicles 16: 4, RSV). This passage tells the account of King David and the Israelites during the celebration following the bringing of the ark of God back to the city of David after defeating the Philistines (1 Chronicles 15:29). In this passage, Asaph is mentioned as a chief among the singers and as the one in charge of the ceremony (1 Chronicles 16: 5, 37). Asaph is a choirmaster, a minister of worship in the house of the Lord. In addition, Asaph is presented in 2 Chronicles as a seer or a prophet of God (2 Chronicles 29:30). He holds a very important position as a minister in Israel, yet he faces pain.

Theme of the Psalm

This psalm is about one and many things. This psalm is what Psalms commentator Frank E. Gabaalien calls “a moving autobiographical reflection on the suffering of the

⁷ Marvin Tate, *World Biblical Commentary, Volume 20: Psalms 51-100* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 231.

righteous and the prosperity of the wicked.”⁸ It is the account of a man who battles with doubt, even though he serves as an official officer in the temple. It is also about a man who struggles to understand good and evil in this world and give the appropriate response to it. It is a prayer arising from pain.

This psalm also deals with the place of God in human affairs, as J. Clinton McCann, Jr., affirms; this psalm is not just an important text in the psalter, but in the entire Old Testament.⁹ McCann suggests that this psalm is particularly important because it addresses the fundamental question about “the ‘place’ and ‘kind’ of God’s presence in this world.”¹⁰ In a similar line of thought, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, in his book, *Faith on Trial*, writes, “This psalm is a classic statement of this particular problem—God’s ways with respect to man, and especially God’s ways with respect to His own people.”¹¹

This psalm then goes directly to the heart of the matter concerning the issues of fairness and retribution as they relate to the justice of God. In that way this psalm deals with theodicy, which as McCann explains is “the justice of God.” More specifically, “where is God’s justice in a world where the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper.”¹² This psalm goes beyond the understanding of the place and act of God in human suffering; at the center it deals with faith. It deals with the question of whether the

⁸ Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed., *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 5* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 475.

⁹ J. Clinton McCann, Jr., *Great Psalms of the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 92.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial: Studies in Psalm 73* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publishing, 1965), 15.

¹² McCann, Jr., *Great Psalms of the Bible*, 92.

believer can survive doubt when personally confronted with adversity. As A. A. Anderson puts it, this psalm “deals not only with theodicy as such, but also with the very survival of faith.”¹³ This psalm then is the testimony of one who has triumphed with faith and survived the very darkness of doubts.¹⁴ That is why, as McCann observes, “Psalm 73 does not end with the crisis of faith,”¹⁵ but with the triumph of faith over doubt. Lloyd-Jones describes this ending as “a triumphant note,”¹⁶ which echoes the faith of the first verse in the psalm: “Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart” (Psalm 73:1).

The Struggle of Faith

Asaph has a difficult time understanding why there is so much injustice in this world where a righteous God is supposed to exercise his dominion. He wonders if God is either absent or indifferent to what is happening around him. His first impression is that God is responsible for either allowing injustices to take place or for not doing anything about it. From his observation, he realizes that the law of retribution is not necessarily a reliable principle for life, since the wicked prosper and the just suffer. His reaction is derived from his own experience, a man who serves the Lord with clean heart, who has purified his life in service to God (v. 13), but finds himself suddenly experiencing a set of circumstances that have caused him to wonder about the value of his commitment. The

¹³ A. A. Anderson, *The New Century Bible Commentary, Psalms (73-150)* (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans Publ. Co, 1983), 529.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ McCann, Jr., *Great Psalms of the Bible*, 93.

¹⁶ Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial*, 13.

passage does not reveal the specific circumstances that led the psalmist to this predicament, as Lloyd-Jones notes, but “whatever it was, it was very grievous and hurtful; he was being tried and tried very sorely.”¹⁷ Asaph is being tried to the point that he almost lost his faith (v. 2), and he was indeed walking on slippery ground (v. 2).

The psalmist is not troubled only by reason of his struggles, but by the overwhelming reality of what he perceives as a great injustice: the wicked prosper and the just suffer. In verses three through twelve, he describes the prosperity of the wicked in spite of their arrogant attitude and their complete disregard for God. They do not suffer or experience hunger, they oppress the weak, and they know how to get their evil ways with no consequence (v.10). God should punish them, but instead of being punished, these evil ones prosper.

Asaph observes that the life of the wicked is such that they live healthy and happy lives to their last breath (v. 4). They experience in their lives the signs of blessings that the righteous should enjoy. As Donald Williams observes in his book, *Mastering the Old Testament*, “The wicked are criminals who violate God’s law. Nevertheless, they experience prosperity, meaning ‘well-being,’ which includes ‘health’ or ‘wholeness.’”¹⁸ In contrast he, as a representative of the righteous, is “stricken and rebuked every morning” (v. 14). Lloyd-Jones describes beautifully the spiritual pain this man of God was enduring in trying to make sense of his situation:

Here he was living a godly life; he was cleansing his heart, he tells us, and washing his hands in innocence. In other words he was practicing the godly life. He was avoiding sin; he was meditating upon the things of God; he was spending

¹⁷ Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial*, 14.

¹⁸ Donald Williams, *Mastering the Old Testament: Psalms 73-150* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1982), 21.

his time in prayer to God; he was in the habit of examining his life, and whenever he found sin he confessed it to God with sorrow, and he sought forgiveness and renewal. The man was devoting himself to a life which would be well-pleasing in God's sight. He kept clear of the world and its pulling effects; he separated himself from evil ways, and gave himself up to the living of his godly life. Yet, although he was doing all this, he was having a great deal of trouble . . . he was being tried, and tried very sorely. In fact, everything seemed to be going wrong and nothing seemed to be going right.¹⁹

These observations lead the psalmist to express his disappointment, and to feel that his faith is futile and that his investment is not paying off. In his view, he has a bad bargain. He comes to the point of envying the life of the wicked as if it was a better system of happiness (v. 3).

In verses thirteen through sixteen, this man of God narrates his struggles in trying to make sense of all this, but he explains that his efforts up to this point have been in vain. To make sense of it all has been an overwhelming task that led him to spiritual exhaustion (v. 16). He struggled to find a reason to keep his faith alive, but everything had proven to be a vain and overwhelming task, as Williams explains, "He cannot understand ('know') this, that is, [he cannot] achieve reconciliation between theory and practice, by his own effort. It is too 'painful,' or troubling."²⁰ Put simply, the psalmist is spiritually burned out.

The Turning Point of Faith

Verse seventeen, as many scholars suggest, is the turning point for the psalmist and the solution as well. Until now his efforts in reconciling justice and evil not yielded any satisfactory result. He comes to understand that to reconcile these is humanly

¹⁹ Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial*, 14.

²⁰ Williams, *Mastering the Old Testament: Psalms 73-150*, 25.

impossible, but when all of his efforts fail, the psalmist opts for an alternative to his doubts. This alternative is to seek beyond the affairs of this earth and to try to find understanding in the presence of God. It is in the presence of God that Asaph acquired a change of perspective, after which he testified: “Until I went into the sanctuary; then I understood” (Psalm 73: 17). Commenting on this, Anderson makes this beautiful observation: “What had been impossible to achieve by reasoning is now attained by faith or trust in God.”²¹ That trust is an act of surrender, or as Ortberg puts it, “Here’s where trusting comes in. Letting go is always an act of trust.”²²

In verses 17-20, the psalmist explains what he now understands. He understands the end of the wicked. The final retribution is set for the end of all things, where the wicked will finally get what they deserve. He understands that the law of retribution is a law that will not necessarily be applied while the wicked or the righteous walk on the face of this earth. But in essence, what Asaph understands is that in the end, in spite of everything, in spite of any questions and doubt, God continues to be just.

The questions of why the innocent suffer and why God allows it are certainly very difficult questions to answer, even more so when humans wrongly assume, as did Asaph, that the answer to those questions has to be contained in the perimeters of this life. Asaph discovers that God, rather than being the one responsible for the injustice of this world, is actually the one with the answer. He poses an eternal plan that in the end will be executed to perfection to the satisfaction of all creation.

²¹ Anderson, *The New Century Bible Commentary, Psalms (73-150)*, 533.

²² Lloyd-Jones, *Faith on Trial*, 37.

The experience of Asaph reveals that doubt is not always a bad thing, if it is appropriately directed. Asaph contemplates God and his infinite and eternal purposes; he seeks an eternal perspective of the sovereign plan of God for humanity. It is in the presence of God that Asaph moves from the present to the future, from the temporal to the eternal, from this earth to the everlasting kingdom, from the status quo of human affairs to the final judgment of God, in which he will give the final reward reserved for humankind.

Instead of slipping away and going astray, as Psalms commentator Derek Kidner observes, Asaph “decided to turn to God Himself, and to Him as an object not of speculation but of worship,”²³ and for doing that God rewards him. In the sanctuary he understands (v. 17) that no one will be exempt from the judgment hour, and that justice will come in God’s time and place. Asaph understands that the acts of God on this earth are not directed by a human sense of justice, but by his eternal wisdom. God knows the right time and place for everything.

A New Relationship: From Darkness to Light (verses 21-26)

In this section, Asaph gives a clear description of the state he was in during his spiritual crisis. During this time he was in a state of depression. His attitude, as he recognizes it later, was unjustified and irrational. He was “like a brute beast before God” (v. 22), but in this later section of the psalm he is enjoying the beginning of a new relationship with him (v. 23). By being in the presence of God, Asaph has turned his pain into joy. Before he was bitter, but now he is glad; before he was angry, but now he has

²³ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 261.

found peace. In his new experience, he is rejoicing in the presence of his Lord. His state of confusion has been replaced by a state of clarity; his darkness has turned into light and his doubts into faith. Now he enjoys his new relationship with God, as described in verses 23-26, a relationship marked by joy and fulfillment in the continuing presence of God.

There are some important realities to consider in this psalm. One is the fact that at no place in the psalm does Asaph praise God for deliverance from pain. The circumstances of Asaph, at least from the account of this psalm, never changed. God did not change, and the circumstances of the wicked did not change. At the beginning and at the end of the psalm, the righteous still suffer and the wicked still prosper. The only thing that changed was Asaph's new perspective of God and his new relationship with him.

In times of struggle and doubt, there are always two alternatives: to slip away and die spiritually or to get even closer to God and find meaning for life. Some struggling people make the choice to run away from God, but Asaph decided to get even closer to him. The psalmist acknowledges that God is sovereign in the universe, and he has learned to see his goodness and to trust him.

The psalmist understands that God will reward those who are faithful by giving them peace on this earth and a glorious future at the end of time. The psalmist is rejoicing so much in his new relationship with God that he wants to proclaim his goodness. He trusts God and for that he is rewarded with peace of heart. Such a peace is also available to all those who, like Asaph, throw themselves in the arms of God when facing difficulties in life.

Paul: Joy in the Midst of Suffering in Philippians 4:4-13

This section provides a brief analysis of the concept of joy in the book of Philippians, which many scholars describe as the central theme of the book. Since Philippians 4: 4-13 contains the theme of the whole book, for all intents and purposes this section will focus on these nine verses. From them, one can draw valuable lessons that will guide the Oakland Spanish SDA Church as members deal with the adversities and struggles that life brings.

Background of Philippians

There is consensus in the theological community that the author of this letter is the Apostle Paul.²⁴ Many scholars also accept the idea that Paul wrote this letter about A. D. 61 while he was unjustly incarcerated and facing the possibility of death in a jail in Rome (Acts 28:16, 30; Philippians 1:7, 13-14, 16, 17).²⁵ For that reason, the letter to the Philippians is known as one of the prison letters.²⁶

In Philippians, as in other books in the New Testament, it is clear that Paul is a veteran of suffering and his writing demonstrates that it is possible to find joy even while experiencing difficult times in life. At the prison in Rome, Paul is facing an uncertain future. At that time he was on trial for his life (1:19-24; 1:30; 2:17). He hopes to be released from prison, but he is also prepared to face death by execution if that is his

²⁴ Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 11* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 96.

²⁵ D. A. Carson, *Basic for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 1996), 15.

²⁶ Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 20.

inevitable destiny. If death is imminent, he is ready to face it with hope and honor, and die like a martyr for the cause of Christ (3:11).

Not only did Paul write this letter in the context of his own trials and tribulations, but he is also writing in the midst of the persecution and trials of the Church. The early Church is, as Carson describes, “not more than ten years old and [has] a variety of pressures that could damage this fledgling Christian community.”²⁷ Carson adds that this letter is written in the context of an evil Roman Empire that had begun to decay but refuses to accept other ways of salvation and demands loyalty to the Emperor.²⁸

Purpose of Philippians

Philippians is a letter of thanks (4:10, 11). It is also a letter of encouragement. It is an invitation to experience joy. The purpose of Philippians can be summarized by the words of Ralph P. Martin in his commentary on Philippians: “This letter is a document of exhortation in which the apostle, himself facing the severe trial of impending martyrdom, rallies his beloved Philippians to share steadfastly with him the fellowship of Christ’s suffering (3:10, 11), and to remain true and loyal in the face of their adversaries.”²⁹

At the time of Paul’s letter, the church at Philippi was going through some difficult times, experiencing doubt and fear (1:28)³⁰ in a hostile world (2:15). In that context Paul invites the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord (2:18; 4:4). If someone was qualified for a call to rejoice in the middle of all, it was the Apostle Paul. The Philippians

²⁷ Carson, *Basic for Believers*, 15.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Martin, *Philippians*, 44.

³⁰ Ibid., 169.

knew about how Paul dealt with the difficult challenges he confronted during his first visit to Philippi, and how Paul was able to, by faith, turn despair into joy (Acts 16: 19-25).

Joy in the Midst of Adversity

In Philippians 4:4-7, Paul outlines the main intention of this letter: to exhort the Christians to keep a positive attitude in life in all situations. To accomplish this, he sets indispensable qualities necessary at all times for Christians. The first of those qualities is to rejoice “always.” The words, “I will say it again,” in verse four indicate that Paul means what he says: they ought to rejoice in the Lord no matter the circumstances. John MacArthur, in his commentary on Philippians, notes the importance of this passage: “This verse expresses the theme of the book of Philippians, that the believers are to rejoice in the Lord always.”³¹

Paul was able to rejoice even in the midst of the most difficult circumstances: imprisonment, trials, and the crude reality that he could be facing execution. Now Paul invites the Philippians to do the same, since they are going through what he himself has gone through (1:28-30). As Martin points out, it is like as if Paul is saying, “I rejoice, now you rejoice.”³²

The Meaning of “Rejoice” (4: 4)

This passage has proven to be a difficult one to understand, let alone apply, for many Christians. Many question the validity of a call to rejoice in the midst of suffering.

³¹ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Philippians* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2001), 273.

³² Martin, *Philippians*, 45.

They question how is it that a Christian in a poor village of Africa is supposed to rejoice with an empty stomach, or a young mother dying of cancer, or perhaps a mother who has lost her young son after being killed on one of the streets of Oakland. Many people wonder about how joy can be a reality or even a possibility in the midst of such testing. Some also wonder if Christians are called to a masochistic, fatalistic, stoic, or even a denial type of approach to life when facing suffering. But fatalism, masochism, stoicism, and denial are not what Paul has in mind in Philippians 4. Part of the difficulty in understanding and applying this passage is confusion regarding the meaning of the word “rejoice.” Perhaps part of the answer to this, then, is a proper understanding of what Paul means with this exhortation to rejoice.

In this exhortation, it is very important to notice that Paul does not simply command people to rejoice, but to “rejoice in the Lord” (verse 4); in that way, to “rejoice” has God as the foundation of joy. Carson sheds light on this subject when he explains that Paul focuses not on the style of rejoicing, but the reasons for rejoicing. Carson explains, “Our delight must be in the Lord himself. That is what enables us to live with joy above our circumstances. As Nehemiah puts it, ‘The joy of the Lord is your strength’ (Nehemiah 8:10).”³³ To this explanation, MacArthur adds, “The phrase ‘in the Lord’ introduces an important principle: spiritual stability is directly related to how a person thinks about God. . . . Knowledge of God is the key to rejoicing.”³⁴

The Apostle clearly does not have in mind the exuberance or emotional expression that people have come to identify as joy. As MacArthur again correctly points

³³ Carson, *Basic for Believers*, 105.

³⁴ MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Philippians*, 273.

out, “Some, wrongly identifying joy as purely human emotion, find Paul’s twice-repeated command to rejoice puzzling. How, they ask, can people be commanded to produce an emotion? But joy is not a feeling.”³⁵

The call to rejoice by Paul, then, is not a call to elation or to an emotional expression, but to a spiritual manifestation in the life of the believer. Martin puts it simply: “The Pauline appeals to joy are never simply encouragements; they throw back the distressed churches on their Lord; they are, above all, appeals to faith.”³⁶ To this, Gordon Fee, in his book, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, adds, “Joy, unmitigated, untrammelled joy, is—or at least should be—the distinctive mark of the believer in Christ Jesus. . . . Christian joy is not the temporal kind, which comes and goes with one’s circumstances; rather, it is predicated altogether on one’s relationship with the Lord, and is thus an abiding, deeply spiritual quality of life.”³⁷ Herbert E Douglas, in his book, *Rediscovering Joy*, summarizes this section beautifully when he states, “In verse 4-7 we are listening to a veteran of many conflicts tell us the secret that undergirds his perseverance and optimism—how anxiety is turned to peace, no matter what.”³⁸

Gentleness in Adversity

In Philippians 4:4, Paul affirms that the first quality that should characterize the suffering Christian is joy, the second quality is gentleness. Paul invites the Philippians to

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Martin, *Philippians*, 70.

³⁷ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 404.

³⁸ Herbert E. Douglas, *Rediscovering Joy* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994), 79.

manifest *epiekes*, which is translated as “gentleness” in the New International Version, but can also be translated as being “charitable,” “gentle,” “forbearing,” “yielding,” “ready to forgive.”³⁹ In relation to other people, Christians should have such a spirit that, even when surrounded with trials and difficulties, they will show kindness and gentleness toward others. Christians have the solemn duty of not allowing the adversities of life to cause them to become bitter and angry towards others; on the contrary they are to show mercy, kindness, and a forgiving spirit toward others at all times.

To be able to behave like this in a hostile world, Paul reminds the Philippians that they have a great incentive: “The Lord is near” (4: 5). In the book of James, trials are also connected with the coming of the Lord (James 5:8). The coming of the Lord is the blessed hope of all ages. He is coming with a reward. His coming represents the end of injustice, pain, suffering, and death. The Lord is coming to settle everything. Injustice and trials will not be forever; as William Barclay writes, “If we remember the coming triumph of Christ, we can never lose our hope and our joy.”⁴⁰

Prayer as the Alternative for Anxiety

The invitation of Paul in verse six is to not be anxious but prayerful. Adversity in this evil world is inevitable, even for the believer. But the Christian has a tremendous resource of power to deal with adversity, which is prayer. In his commentary on

³⁹ Martin, *Philippians*, 170.

⁴⁰ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 76.

Philippians, Warren Wiersbe writes, “The first step in right praying is adoration.”⁴¹ In this passage, Paul uses three different words to describe how to pray “rightly.” The first is *proseuchē*, or “supplication,” which denotes an attitude of worship on the part of the believer. The second is *deēsei*, or “petition,” which denotes prayers as expressions of need. The third is *eucharistias*, or “thanksgiving,” which denotes an attitude of appreciation, giving thanks to God for all he has done and will do for his children.

The reward of a praying life is to obtain the peace of God that transcends all understanding. What the phrase, “passeth all understanding,” of verse seven means for Paul is beautifully explained by William Barclay like this: “That does not mean that the peace of God is such a mystery that man’s mind cannot understand it, although that also is true. It means that the peace of God is so precious that man’s mind, with all its skill and all its knowledge, can never produce it.”⁴² That peace guards the hearts and minds of the Christian from all anxieties. The Christian should rest assured that God will take care of him or her even in the midst of testing sorrow and tribulations.

The Secret of True Contentment (Philippians 4: 10-13)

In this section starting with verse ten, Paul expresses his gratitude to the Philippians for their generosity and for their care for him. The Philippians tried many times to assist Paul with his needs, but for circumstances beyond their control they had been unsuccessful. In verse 11, Paul makes clear that the reason for his joy is not that his

⁴¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, Volume 2 (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 2000), 94.

⁴² Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 78.

physical needs are at last going to be met, but that finally the Philippians have the chance of helping Paul and in that way participate in his ministry.

Paul states clearly that he was not dissatisfied with his current state since he had “learned to be content what ever the circumstances” (v. 11). Those circumstances included good and bad times: times of “need” and times of “plenty,” times when he has been “well fed” and when he has been “hungry.” This passage clearly demonstrates that Christians are not exempt from difficulties and adversities because even he, the great Apostle Paul, experienced many adverse situations. He was a master of suffering, but whether the circumstances smiled at him or turned the other way, he learned to be content no matter what.

To achieve such a level of contentment in life is beyond human capacity since contentment is not something that comes naturally for people. But Paul reveals the reason why he has achieved such a level of contentment: he has “learned the secret of being content in any and every situation” (v. 12). Paul is not talking here about a masochistic type of suffering, as if suffering is something to enjoy, neither is he referring to a stoic attitude where a person passively accepts whatever comes. His secret has nothing to do with a system of self-discipline that will empower him to achieve such peace. His strength did not come from within but from without. His secret is Christ. It is Christ who empowered him to do all things. Christ was the source of strength for Paul (v. 13). Everything Paul needed to keep going, even in the most difficult situations, was found in Christ. It was the relationship he had with his Savior that prepared him to face the world and whatever was thrown at him.

The life of Paul testifies to the fact that adversity can lead to holiness. Adversity can lead to a closer relationship with Christ, and in that way one can be empowered to face this evil world. In the words of Barclay, “Paul could face anything, because in every situation he had Christ; the man who walks with Christ can cope with anything.”⁴³

Means for Achieving Transformation and Peace

Transformation and peace have never come instinctively. They always follow a conscious and active decision on the part of the Christian to become more intimate with God. This section deals with Bible-based spiritual formation and Christian community as foundational factors in order for members of the Oakland Spanish SDA Church to achieve renewal of life.

A Supportive Community Essential for Spiritual Growth

Spiritual formation is a work of community. There is great value to people of like faith being together to keep each other strong. The Bible states the importance of Christian fellowship to keeping the faith in various passages. The following are several examples: “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24, 25); “Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thessalonians 5:11); “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42); “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst” (Matthew 18:20); “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we

⁴³ Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*, 85.

have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7); and “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). These passages are good representatives of the emphasis of the word of God on community. In community, transformation and renewal become a reality for the Christian. The words of Bonhoeffer are appropriate to underline this point: “Christian community is like the Christian’s sanctification.”⁴⁴

The previous examples of Asaph and Paul serve to illustrate the importance of community in spiritual formation. In Psalm 73, Asaph describes his struggle with doubt as well as his victory over it. From the beginning in verse 1, he celebrates victory over doubt, praising God for his goodness. But the goodness of God, he points out, has been manifested not just to him but also to Israel. In verse 15, he is conscious of how his doubts, as well as the potential of falling into temptation, would affect the community of believers. Donald Williams, in *Mastering the Old Testament*, explains it like this: “If the psalmist followed the empirical evidence of the wicked, he would have been ‘untrue’ to (or ‘betrayed’) God’s people, the ‘generation of your children.’ Since to reject God’s people is to reject God, he would have broken from the family of faith, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”⁴⁵ Sin and doubt can affect the Christian community, but in turn the community of faith plays an important role in helping other Christians to obtain the victory.

In the case of Asaph, community was a vital element for obtaining victory over doubt. McCann suggests that the phrase “sanctuary” in verse 17 is plural in the Hebrew,

⁴⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 30.

⁴⁵ Williams, *Mastering the Old Testament: Psalms 73-150*, 25.

and that it alludes to the various courts or locations within the temple. McCann suggests that the sanctuary in this case was the place where the people of God gathered to worship, and that it was in this context of communal worship that the psalmist receives some sort of revelation. He also contends that it is within this context of community that this holy man comes to the new knowledge that led him to the transformation he describes in verses eighteen through twenty-eight.⁴⁶

This view is consistent with that of Psalms commentator Marvin E. Tate. Tate notices that the expression “washed my hands in innocence” of verse thirteen “alludes to rituals in which the washing of hands declared one’s innocence and indicated that the person was clean (or “pure”) for worship.”⁴⁷ That is communal worship. Based on that analysis, McCann suggests that the psalmist would have never made it alone with his doubts. He relied upon the help of the community of believers to help him find a way through. In describing the importance of community, especially when the believer faces struggles and doubt, Ortberg writes, “Disciples are not people who never doubt. They doubt and worship. They doubt and serve. They doubt and help each other with their doubt.”⁴⁸

In the case of the Apostle Paul, the whole book of Philippians is written in the context of community. In Philippians 2:1, he writes about the fellowship of the Spirit, in 2:4 he writes about caring for others, in 3:10 he writes about the fellowship of his suffering, and in chapter 4 each one of his exhortations is framed in a context of

⁴⁶ McCann, Jr., *Great Psalms of the Bible*, 97.

⁴⁷ Marvin Tate, *World Biblical Commentary, Volume 20, Psalms 51-100* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 235.

⁴⁸ Ortberg, *Faith and Doubt*, 176.

community. In Philippians, Paul makes clear that it is in fellowship that the believer has the opportunity to live a practicing love for others, to care for others and to become passionate about God. Carson considers the implication of Christian fellowship as seen in Philippians and summarizes as follows: “What most tie us together as Christians is this passion for the gospel, this fellowship in the gospel . . . the good news that in Jesus, God himself has reconciled us to himself. This brings about a precious God-centeredness that we share with other believers.”⁴⁹

The implication of this God-centeredness that Christians share, Carson explains, is that they ought to be sharing with one another what they have learned from the Word of God, joining in prayer and “encouraging one another in obedience and maturing discipleship.”⁵⁰ In other words, this fellowship in the gospel through the study of the Word of God, through prayer, and through the caring for each other is conducive to an experience of sanctification.

Communion always provides the climate for spiritual maturity because in fellowship, Christians become aware of their fellow Christian brothers and sisters. It is in communion that Christians become aware of the trials, tribulations, needs, and even temptations that fellow Christians face. And it is in communion that the admonition of Paul to “bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2) takes meaning. It is in communion that prayers and the study of the Word of God become mighty instruments in the spiritual lives of Christians. Bonhoeffer makes the connection between community and spiritual maturity with this simple but profound sentence:

⁴⁹ Carson, *Basic for Believers*, 19.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

“Christian community is like the Christian’s sanctification.”⁵¹ Carson again echoes that when he correctly affirms: “Christians cannot say, ‘I will improve my prayer life but not my morality,’ ‘I will increase in my knowledge of God, but not in my obedience,’ or ‘I will grow in love for others but not in purity or in my knowledge of God.’”⁵²

Sanctification then is tied to the ministry of Christian community. There is no question that a supportive community founded in the Word of God and prayer is essential for dealing with issues that challenge the faith of the believer. In community the believer can find strength and achieve spiritual maturity.

The Bible as the Source of Faith and Spiritual Formation

There is a fundamental difference between the Bible and any ordinary book: the Bible changes lives, and the Bible has the power to transform the individual. That power is derived from the fact that the Bible is not of human but divine creation. Robin Maas, in his book, *Church Bible Study Handbook*, defines the Scriptures as “a compendium of supernatural or divine truth.”⁵³ Jim Wilhoit and Leland Ryken, in their book, *Effective Bible Teaching*, expand on that definition by asserting, “Reading the Bible is not like reading other books. . . . The Bible itself constantly claims to be God’s word to us. Its writers claim to be inspired by God”⁵⁴ Hans-Reudi Weber, in his book, *The Bible Comes Alive*, suggests that part of the reason the Bible has such a power of transformation is the

⁵¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 30.

⁵² Carson, *Basic for Believers*, 21.

⁵³ Robin Maas, *Church Bible Study Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 19.

⁵⁴ Jim Wilhoit and Leland Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 187-88.

fact that any other book can be read by people, but the Bible is the only book that reads humans.⁵⁵ Adventists agree with that point of view. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* affirms the fact that “the Bible reveals God and exposes humanity. It exposes our predicament and reveals His solution.”⁵⁶ Wilhoit and Ryken elaborate on that concept:

The Bible is a subversive book—a book that undermines and calls into question conventional attitudes and values. It challenges the way in which the human race has tended to order its affairs. In the face of perennial human belief that people are basically good enough, the Bible hammers home the point that something is terribly wrong at the heart of human nature. Against the popular view that people should not be held responsible for their wrong actions, the Bible asserts that they are responsible.⁵⁷

Put simply, the Bible demands and expects right living from humans, but it also provides in its revelation the strength needed to fulfill its expectations. To acquire the strength available in the Bible, it is imperative that humans approach the Word of God with the right attitude, since change cannot take place in a hesitant heart. Hestenes in affirms that idea with these words: “Understanding and responding, in faith, to the word of God is the foundation of all Christian life and action.”⁵⁸

This doctoral project focuses on reading and studying the Bible in small group communities. Hestenes, who is a specialist in the area of small groups, describes the tremendous benefit of approaching the Bible in the context small group communities. She writes, “Small groups which use the Bible as part of their life together can enable this transformation and renewal to take place. This can result in benefits for individuals, for

⁵⁵ Hans-Ruedi Weber, *The Bible Comes Alive: New Approaches for Bible Study Groups* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1996), xiv.

⁵⁶ Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 13.

⁵⁷ Wilhoit and Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching*, 189.

⁵⁸ Hestenes, *Using the Bible in Groups*, 10.

the church and for society.’⁵⁹ As mentioned above, one of the distinctive elements that characterized the Bible is its claim of divine authority, as Wilhoit and Ryken testify: “Through history the Bible has been accorded the status of an authoritative sacred book, and it is in this spirit that we approach it as readers and teachers”⁶⁰ That is indeed the spirit in which this project approaches this holy book. By establishing the Bible-based spiritual disciplines of *Lectio Divina* and Bible study groups at Oakland Spanish SDA Church, this project has laid the foundation by which transformation and renewal will take place in the lives of those who will open their hearts to the Word of God.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Wilhoit and Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching*, 188.

CHAPTER 6

GOALS AND PLANS

This doctoral project is an effort to lead members of a congregation in Oakland, California to the understanding that a meaningful relationship with Christ can better prepare them to face the trials and adversity of life. This chapter introduces and defines the strategic elements that will be put in place to achieve these goals. The chapter contains three basic parts. It begins by identifying key concepts that serve to inform the rationale and context for this project. Then it defines the goals of this project in the perceived context. And lastly, it defines the specific parts and components that ground this project. The final part of the chapter will describe the process for selecting and training leaders who will carry out the implementation of this vision.

The Path from Suffering to Holiness

The objective of this doctoral project is to lead a congregation from suffering to holiness. This section identifies key concepts such as suffering in a perceived absence of God, the value of a supportive community, the important role of spiritual disciplines in achieving intimacy with God, and the purpose of God for his suffering children. The understanding of these concepts serves to validate the proposed strategy for this project.

The Apparent Absence of God

This project starts by recognizing a legitimate problem. Christians believe in an eternal and almighty God, but at times it seems like this God is either non-existent or indifferent to human affairs. Terrien describes the situation with these words: “The reality of the presence of God stands at the center of biblical faith. This presence, however, is always elusive.”¹ This is indeed a reality for many people at Oakland Spanish SDA Church, who struggle to understand why God allows their struggles and adversities.

As noted in the introduction of the previous chapter, there is no more compelling argument against Christianity than the seeming absence or, for that matter, the seemingly indifference of God in a world where suffering and injustice are manifested. But as observed in the life of Asaph in Psalm 73, the fact that people do not understand justice and the purpose of suffering it is not an indication of the absence of God in human affairs. Keller deals with arguments against the concept of an absent God, and makes the case that “horrendous, inexplicable suffering, though it cannot disprove God, is nonetheless a problem for the believer in the Bible. However, it is perhaps an even greater problem for nonbelievers.”² The reason why suffering in the world is a bigger problem for the nonbeliever is as Keller explains:

The evolutionary mechanism of natural selection *depends* on death, destruction and violence of the strong against the weak—these things are all perfectly natural. On what basis, then, does the atheist judge the natural world to be horribly wrong, unfair, and unjust? The nonbeliever in God doesn’t have a good basis for being outraged at injustice, which . . . was the reason for objecting to God in the first place. If you *are* sure that this natural world is unjust and filled with evil, you are

¹ Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, xxvii.

² Keller, *The Reason for God*, 25.

assuming the reality of some extra-natural (or supernatural) standard by which to make your judgment.³

The Bible is full of examples where God seemed to be absent but in the end he was an always-present God, surprising people by revealing his salvific purposes, often times unexpectedly. Esther, Joseph, and Asaph are just three examples.

In the case of Asaph, when he was in the middle of his doubts, thinking he had been left alone in his struggles and pain, he discovered that the presence of God was ever constant with him (Psalm 73:21-24). Terrien describes beautifully the realization of Asaph: “At the very core of his *Anfechtung*, the thinker found out that his cosmic solitude was an illusion. He was not alone. All along, though without knowing it, he had been in the immediate company of Yahweh.”⁴ Asaph also discovered that God has a plan beyond the perimeters of this life and of this world. He understood an external perspective of the acts of God that moves beyond this present age. He understood eternity.

The purpose of this doctoral project is to strengthen the faith of the members of Oakland Spanish SDA Church. Although God seems absent at times, he is always present and ready to assist those who earnestly seek him. The goal of this project is to create an environment where God can be sought and found by people of the congregation.

A Supportive Community When Dealing with Suffering

In this congregation, the path from suffering to transformation begins with a supportive community. The Bible commands believers to “bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). The law of Christ is to demonstrate love

³ Ibid., 26.

⁴ Terrien, *The Elusive Presence*, 317.

and compassion one to another. Helping others in their struggles is a Christian duty and a sign of real Christian fellowship, as Allen writes, “Our primary relationship to other people is one of service and concern for their welfare.”⁵

Bonhoeffer sees fellowship as an extension of the presence of God that alleviates the suffering Christian. He writes, “The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian in exile sees in the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God.”⁶ The dynamic of how mutual restoration takes place in group communities is described by Icenogle as follows: “As group members are allowed space for consideration and healing of their own inner pain and hurt, they become more open and aware of the inner hurt of others and the hurt between group members.”⁷ At the Oakland Spanish SDA Church, the primary objective is to create a supportive community through small group ministry where people find brotherly support in the context of small group communities of faith.

A Supportive Community When Seeking Spiritual Growth

Spiritual maturity and transformation at the Oakland Spanish SDA Church is the ultimate goal of this doctoral project. To achieve that, the creation of small group communities where spiritual disciplines can be practiced is essential. In no other context is community more important than in the spiritual realm. Western societies define religion and spirituality in individualistic terms, as a result there is a spiritual decline manifested in these societies. Icenogle describes the problem of individualistic religion in

⁵ Allen, *Spiritual Theology*, 24.

⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 20.

⁷ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 301.

the American society in this way: “For many American Christians prayer is considered a private discipline: ‘my relationship with God is no one else’s business.’ This attitude may be connected to a fear of intimacy, during a time when rugged individualism continues to be a pervasive American Value.”⁸

Western societies, including the United States, are perceived more and more as secular societies. Secularism has a strong connection with individualism and individualistic religious expressions. For Carson, this privatized religion is what defines and characterizes secularism. He explains, “Secularization refers to the process that squeezes religion to the periphery of life. The result is not that we abandon religion or banish the gospel; rather, religion is marginalized and privatized, and the gospel is rendered unimportant.”⁹ Christians have the solemn duty of opposing the individualistic way of spirituality and moving forward with an integrational approach to Christian community because, as Peace rightly declares, “The Christian way was never meant to be a solitary way. It has always been a matter of community.”¹⁰

Christian community creates the context where spiritual maturity and intimacy with God take place. MacArthur describes the important role of community in achieving that spiritual strength and maturity: “The fellowship and support of the body of Christ is an important factor in developing and maintaining spiritual stability. The general strength of the fellowship becomes the strength of each individual. The more isolated a believer is

⁸ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 299.

⁹ Carson, *Basics for Believers*, 13.

¹⁰ Richard Peace, *Learning to Love God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress Publishing Group, 1994), 9.

from other Christians, the more spiritually unstable he or she is likely to be.”¹¹ Columba Stewart, in her book, *Prayer and Community*, also emphasizes the important role that community plays in spirituality. In analyzing the life and experiences of Saint Benedict, for instance, he observes that for Benedict, community was essential for spiritual development. He writes, “Benedict had learned that left to ourselves we can too easily develop a false confidence about our progress in the spiritual life. Other people remind us by their examples, good and bad, and by our interactions with them, fortunate and unfortunate, of how far we have yet to go.”¹²

The important role of community in spiritual growth can also be observed in the fact that community creates the environment where mutual spiritual growth is achieved more easily. Norvene Vest, in her book, *Bible Reading for Spiritual Growth*, notices, “As we come together in love and truth within the body of Christ that we are, our spiritual growth unfolds naturally, as individuals and as community.”¹³ In the congregation of the Oakland Spanish SDA Church, the goal is to create a context where Christian community and fellowship take place in a way that encourages spiritual growth among members.

The Role of Spiritual Disciplines for Achieving Intimacy with God

Spiritual disciplines are foundational for spiritual growth. The understanding of what constitutes a spiritual discipline is important when embarking on a specific spiritual practice. Peace explains that a spiritual discipline is not a sign of piety but a sign of

¹¹ MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Philippians*, 269-70.

¹² Columba Stewart, *Prayer and Community: The Benedictine Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 119.

¹³ Norvene Vest, *Bible Reading for Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 40.

need.¹⁴ He writes, “A spiritual discipline is an activity that we practice so that it will become habitual for us and a normal part of who we are.”¹⁵

The key word in Peace’s definition is “practice.” There is a great deal of interest in the present society about self-development. Society puts a lot of emphasis on the importance of a discipline regime to exercise one’s mind and body in order to keep them fit. The relevant word here is “discipline,” since without it neither the greatest athlete nor the greatest thinker can achieve excellence. The same applies for spiritual formation. Spiritual strength cannot be achieved without discipline. Robin Maas and Gabriel O’Donnell, in their book, *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*, make that observation when they analyze the comparison that the Apostle Paul makes between the Christian life and an athlete in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. They write,

This investment of interest and energy in the discipline of an exercise and health care regimen is a useful entrée into the business of spiritual disciplines. St Paul likens the Christian life to an athletic contest—to running a race—and speaks of the effort and concentration that it requires. This is true today as it was in the time of Paul. The life of prayer entails a relationship between God and the individual believer, and as with any authentic relationship, it requires time, attention, and discipline if it is to grow, stabilize, and mature.¹⁶

Maas and O’Donnell conclude that it is only through a relationship with God and its attendant disciplines that spiritual wholeness and maturity is possible.¹⁷

¹⁴ Peace, *Spiritual Autobiography*, 89.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Robin Maas and Gabriel O’Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 133-34.

¹⁷ Ibid., 134.

Joy: The Purpose of God for His Suffering Children

There is no doubt that God intends for his children to be happy and fulfilled in life, but that objective at times is trampled by adverse circumstances that take away the joy and happiness of life. Nevertheless, the Bible continues to encourage joy. Joy should characterize the life of the Christian. The previous chapter analyzed the exhortation of the Apostle Paul in the book of Philippians to experience joy even in the midst of tribulation. This joy is characterized in the believer by a life of sanctification, prayer, and thanksgiving. The purpose of this project is to lead members of Oakland Spanish SDA Church to experience the peace and joy that can only be obtained with an intimate and meaningful relationship with God, despite their adverse circumstances. To achieve that, a plan of practicing spiritual disciplines in the context of community will be developed in this chapter.

Strategy Goals

The overall objective of this project is to bring a local congregation that is facing multiple adversities to an experience of transformation and renewal. In order to achieve that purpose, three goals have been set to help achieve main objective. The first goal is for members to achieve a deeper relationship with Christ through the practice of spiritual disciplines. The second goal is for members to practically apply of the Word of God to achieve spiritual growth. The third and final goal is to create a supportive community where mutual encouragement takes place among people of the congregation.

A Deeper Relationship with Christ through the Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

As noted above, spiritual training and discipline is vital to achieve spiritual growth. Spiritual maturity and increased faith cannot be achieved without a conscious effort to grow in intimacy with God. As Christian Schwartz, in his book, *The 3 Colors of Your Spirituality*, writes, “If we are serious about spiritual growth, about placing God at the center of our life, about becoming more and more Christlike, about achieving ‘the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’ (Eph. 4:13), continuous training should be firmly rooted into our daily lives.”¹⁸ The strategy, then, is to create a program where spiritual disciplines will be practiced in the context of community and in that way increase the spirituality of the congregation.

Applying the Word of God for Spiritual Transformation

Another fundamental goal of this project is to bring members of the Oakland Spanish SDA Church to a closer relationship with the Bible. Understanding the impact that the Bible makes in the believer is critical in a program of spiritual development. It is the Bible that guides the individual toward the right path of living a life that pleases God, as Arthur contends, “The Bible was written so that anyone who wants to know who God is and how they are to live in a way that pleases Him can read it and find out.”¹⁹

This project focuses on Bible-based spiritual disciplines. The practice of *Lectio Divina* and Bible study are two key elements in this process of peace and transformation for the congregation. Studying the Bible in small groups will create an environment

¹⁸ Christian A. Schwarz, *The 3 Colors of Your Spirituality* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2009), 169.

¹⁹ Arthur, *How to Study Your Bible*, 9.

where people of the church discover the purpose of God for their lives and act accordingly, as Peace, in his book, *Learning to Love God*, affirms, “The aim of the entire small group experience is to understand and apply a passage from the Bible to your life.”²⁰ The hopeful outcome of members applying the Bible in their lives is a congregation that manifests the faith and character of Christ in their everyday walk. It is a congregation that has learned to find direction and strength in the Word of God and that consequently lives an experience that brings glory and honor to God.

Mutual Encouragement through Supportive Community

As described in Chapter 5 of this project, a supportive community is essential for Christian growth and well-being. Christians need other Christians, or, as Bonhoeffer simply puts it, “Christians need others.”²¹ Bonhoeffer also asserts, “The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer.”²² This leads to the third and final goal of this project, which is to create a supportive community for members of the Oakland Spanish SDA Church. This project will seek to create an environment where mutual encouragement takes place, an environment where people can find kindness, love, acceptance, and mutual understanding. This supportive community will also be characterized by prayer, sympathy, and compassion for those who struggle with any difficult life situations.

This supportive community will take place in a form of small groups. Small groups represents the best vehicle where encouragement and care for others takes place,

²⁰ Peace, *Learning to Love God*, 9.

²¹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21.

²² *Ibid.*, 19.

as Icenogle point out, “The group becomes the place where persons with weakness are loved, supported and granted dignity for their value as God’s created and redeemed creatures. . . . God’s shalom practiced in a family group brings healing health and longevity.”²³ The hope is that the mutual encouragement provided in these small groups will lead this congregation to an experience of support that solidifies faith in God and service for the church.

Content of the Strategy

This section provides an understanding of the different components that integrate this project. It begins with a brief explanation in regards to the concept of small groups and its essentiality in practicing spiritual disciplines, then it moves to defining and explaining the concepts of *Lectio Divina* and Bible study groups, and it ends with a brief description of the supportive material to be used in the application of the disciplines as well as in the training of the leaders of the small groups.

Small Group Formation

The implementation of a small group ministry is vital for a project dealing with spiritual formation in the context of community. Carl F. George, a strong proponent of small groups, in his book, *Prepare Your Church for the Future*, establishes the value of small groups for spiritual growth by stating that the creation of small groups is “the most strategically significant foundation for spiritual formation and assimilation.”²⁴ In the same line of thought, Thomas S. Rainer, in his book, *The Book of Church Growth*, agrees

²³ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 54.

²⁴ Carl. F George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1992), 41.

with George when he contends, “I know of no better shepherding model in the world than that of small groups.”²⁵

Hestenes and Icenogle also articulate the reasons why small groups are so essential as a spiritual community. Icenogle lays down the fundamental aspect of small groups by pointing out the fact that “the human community exists foundationally as *small group*,”²⁶ and he expands on that concept with this paragraph: “Humanity as the imaged beings of God were created in community and are called to live and mature in community. The natural and simple demonstration of God’s communal image for humanity is the gathering of a small group.”²⁷ Hestenes defines the necessity of small groups in terms of what a small group accomplishes. She affirms that “we need Christian small groups because they help us become what we are meant to be—those set free by the love of Christ, who seek to share his love with us.”²⁸ The creation of small group communities will be a good complement to the ministries already taking place in the congregation. The hope is that these small groups will serve as a catalyst for a new spiritual experience among members.

Size of the Small Groups

An important factor to consider when designing small groups is the question of how big a small group should be. Experts are in disagreement about how many

²⁵ Thomas S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology and Principles* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993), 189.

²⁶ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 23.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁸ Hestenes, *Using the Bible in Groups*, 10.

participants constitute the appropriate number for a small group. Several authors suggest that a study group could be between seven and eighteen people. Hestenes suggests three to twelve people,²⁹ while Rainer, on the other hand, reports that “most studies indicate that ten is a maximum size when everyone can have the opportunity to interact with the rest of the group.”³⁰ Hans-Ruedi Weber suggests seven to fifteen people, plus the facilitator, as the ideal size of a study group,³¹ while Peace indicates that a group of up to twelve people is ideal.³² This project envisions small groups composed of a minimum of five to a maximum of twelve people for each group in order to facilitate relationship and interaction in the small groups.

The Concept of Covenant

Several authors who focus on small groups explain that one of the essential parts in the life of a small group is the adoption of a covenant. This is an important concept that will be introduced in the course of this project to the participants of the program. More details in regards to when in the process this concept will be introduced is found in the next chapter, but for now it is important to define this concept.

A small group covenant is defined by Peace as follows, “A small group covenant is simply a list of ground-rules by which a particular group decides to operate.”³³ Arnold

²⁹ Hestenes, *Using the Bible in Groups*, 14.

³⁰ Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 283.

³¹ Weber, *The Bible Comes Alive*, xviii.

³² Peace, *Learning to Love God*, 12.

³³ Richard Peace, Course notebook for “CF705, Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World” (Pasadena: Fuller Theological Seminary, June 16-27, 2008), 27.

adds, “Covenants stipulate the mutual expectations and responsibilities involved when we participate in a transaction or relationship between at least two parties.”³⁴ Peace explains why a covenant is so important for the life of the small group: “When everyone is clear about what is expected then the group runs more smoothly. . . . But when a group has no agreed upon covenant, all sorts of misunderstandings are possible. . . . A covenant is all about clarity of expectations.”³⁵ Experts on small groups agree that a covenant should never be imposed upon a group, and Arnold points out that doing a covenant by consensus is important for the effectiveness of the group.³⁶

Peace explains that a covenant has two parts: “The first part deals with the *structure* of the group and the second part focuses on the *commitments* of the group.”³⁷ The structure part deals with issues like time, place, goals, membership, food, childcare, and leadership. On the commitment side, the covenant focuses on attendance, confidentiality, participation, respect, honesty, advice, care for one another, and prior preparation, among others.³⁸ Figure 1 displays a sample of a small group covenant.

³⁴ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 67.

³⁵ Peace, Course notebook for “CF705, Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World,” 27.

³⁶ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 67.

³⁷ Peace, Course notebook for “CF705, Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World,” 27.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 28-32.

Group Covenant

Look over the following guidelines for our group. Are there any items that you feel need to be dropped? Changed? Added? Can you wholeheartedly agree to this covenant as the ground-rules for our group?

- *Attendance:* To give a high priority to the meetings
- *Confidentiality:* Not to share what is said with those not part of the group
- *Participation:* To be actively involved in each session
- *Advice:* Not to try to solve the problems of others
- *Respect:* To treat others as responsible, thoughtful adults
- *Openness:* To be honest in ways that are appropriate
- *Prayer:* To pray for each member of the group.

Figure 1. An Example of a Small Group Covenant

Source: Peace, Course notebook for “CF705, Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World,” 27.

Lectio Divina

This section provides a brief exposition of the history, meaning, and practice of *Lectio Divina* as a spiritual discipline. *Lectio Divina* is an ancient spiritual discipline. Having been used for over fifteen hundred years, *Lectio Divina* was the means by which monks approached the Bible. Many scholars like Columba Stewart, a Benedictine monk, associate the practice of *Lectio Divina* with Saint Benedict, an Italian monk who lived in the fifth and sixth centuries.³⁹ But although there is no question that the practice of *Lectio Divina* is central to Benedictine and monastic spirituality of the fifth century, some

³⁹ Stewart, *Prayer and Community*, 36.

scholars, like Norvene Vest and M. Basil Pennington, associate the practice of *Lectio Divina* even further back to Jewish tradition, and these authors make the case that *Lectio Divina* shapes the spirituality and mission of Jesus himself. Vest writes, “It is likely Jesus himself practiced something like lectio in his earthly life.”⁴⁰ Pennington also describes Jesus’ association with *Lectio Divina*: “The accounts of Jesus’ life give clear evidence that our Jewish rabbi was a man formed by lectio—from his first adventure as a man of twelve until he hung upon the cross. His first long encounter as Risen Lord with disciples was given over to sharing the fruit of his lectio, the lectio that had told him that he would die and rise again.”⁴¹

One important element when considering the practice of *Lectio Divina* is to identify the principles of what constitutes *Lectio Divina*, and in that way discover what has made this practice a valuable spiritual discipline through the centuries. In her book, *Bible Reading for Spiritual Growth*, Vest summarizes the fundamentals of *Lectio Divina*:

Lectio always involves a slow, meditative reading of the word, balanced with periods of silent reflection. It is both active and receptive. It is not principally oriented toward the gathering of the information, but rather toward a personal encounter with the living God that casts light on present life issues. It is a way of bringing the Scripture to heart, of making its promises one’s own in a transformed life.⁴²

Pennington echoes Vest and defines *Lectio Divina* in terms of friendship and relationship:

Lectio Divina is: letting our Divine Friend speak to us through his inspired and inspiring Word. And yes, of course, it includes our response to that word, to his communication to us through that word. Lectio is meeting with a friend, a very

⁴⁰ Vest, *Bible Reading for Spiritual Growth*, 84. Vest uses the term “lectio” as shorthand for “*Lectio Divina*.”

⁴¹ M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: The Cross Road Publishing Company, 1998), ix.

⁴² Vest, *Bible Reading for Spiritual Growth*, 90-91.

special friend who is God; listening to him, really listening; and responding, in intimate prayer and in the way we take that word with us and let it shape our lives.⁴³

When engaging in *Lectio Divina*, it is important to understand the purpose of this practice. The purpose of *Lectio Divina* is transformation, as Vest indicates: “*Lectio* is designed to facilitate an encounter with the living God, in such a way that we are gradually transformed into Christ’s own likeness. . . . It is intended to empower us to reconcile the world to God in Christ.”⁴⁴ Maas and O’Donnell also define the purpose of *Lectio Divina* in terms of transformation: “Reading in the quest for God—or reading for holiness—has traditionally been called *Lectio Divina*.”⁴⁵

The practice of *Lectio Divina* requires following a step-by-step process in order for the experience to be successful. Vest outlines the process of *Lectio Divina* as follows:

Prepare.

Take a moment to come fully into the present. Sit comfortably alert, eyes closed, and center yourself with breathing.

1. Hear the word (that is addressed to you)

First reading (twice). Listen for the word or phrase that attracts from the passage. Repeat it over to yourself softly during a one-minute silence. When the leader gives the signal, say aloud only that word or phrase (no elaboration).

2. Ask “How is my life touched?” (by this word)

Second reading. Listen to discover how your life is touched today by this passage. Consider possibilities or receive a sensory impression during the two minutes of silence. When the leader gives the signal, speak a sentence or two beginning with ‘I hear,’ ‘I see,’ ‘I sense’ (or you may pass).

⁴³ Pennington, *Lectio Divina*, xi.

⁴⁴ Vest, *Bible Reading for Spiritual Growth*, xiii.

⁴⁵ Maas and O’Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions*, 45.

3. Ask, “Is there an invitation here?” (for you)

Third reading. Listen to discover a possible invitation relevant to the next few days. Ponder it during several minutes of silence. When the leader gives the signal, speak of your sense of invitation (or you may pass).

4. Pray (for one another to be enabled to respond).

Pray, aloud or silently, for God to help the person on your right respond to the invitation received.

After this process, the group may share how it went, if desired.⁴⁶

It is important to follow this process in order to allow for the experience to accomplish the intended purpose of listening and responding to God.

In doing *Lectio Divina*, an important factor to take into account is duration. One must consider how much time the *Lectio Divina* exercises require. Most experts are in accord that a *Lectio Divina* experience should last approximately thirty minutes. Maas and O’Donnell, for instance, suggest that ideally one “does” *Lectio Divina* for thirty minutes each day, but that can be longer during a retreat.⁴⁷ Stewart agrees with the thirty minutes mark as a starting point,⁴⁸ but it points out that “many people find that their desire and need for more time devoted for *Lectio Divina* increases with age and experience.”⁴⁹ In summary, *Lectio Divina* has proven to be as adaptable as effective throughout the years. To apply it in a way that is going to remain faithful to its purpose will be a priority in this project.

⁴⁶ Vest, *Bible Reading for Spiritual Growth*, 11.

⁴⁷ Maas and O’Donnell, *Spiritual Traditions*, 49.

⁴⁸ Stewart, *Prayer and Community*, 41.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Bible Study Groups

Bible study is an important and foundational spiritual discipline, and the understanding of what constitutes a Bible study group is important in the process of this project. A Bible study group consists of a given number of people who gather together in a place to study the Word of God. As it has already been pointed out, experts do not agree on an exact number, but the consensus is that more than three and fewer than thirteen, including the facilitator, is ideal for a small group in order to facilitate interaction.

The aim of this project is to create groups with no fewer than five and no more than twelve people. This will create the environment where study of the Word of God and interaction will take place adequately. The type of Bible study suggested in this project is the conversational Bible study supported by study lessons developed with the inductive method.

Put in simple terms, the purpose of Bible study is transformation. It is hoped that believers connect with the Word of God in such a way that they are led to experience the Christian life in a new way. This new life brings honor and glory to God. Peace makes the point that “the aim of any Bible study ought to be to bring the reader into contact with Scripture in such a way that his or her life will be changed.”⁵⁰ Hestenes agrees with Peace and also points out that this life-changing experience can be obtained when Bible study takes place in small groups. She writes, “Small groups which use the Bible as part of their life together can enable this transformation and renewal to take place.”⁵¹ The purpose of

⁵⁰ Peace, *Learning to Love God*, 5.

⁵¹ Hestenes, *Using the Bible in Groups*, 10.

Bible study groups, then, is to experience such a relationship with the Word of God that lives are transformed as a result.

An effective study of the Word of God in groups requires a process. This process includes preparation, reading the passage, silence, analyzing the passage, and applying the passage. Also critical for an effective small group Bible study are the leader and the materials that provide support for the study. A brief overview of these key components follows below.

The first part of the process is preparation. Experts suggest that the ideal setting for this exercise is to sit in a circle, which facilitates eye contact and participation. Webber states, “For participatory group work direct eye contact is necessary, and it is ideal if the group can sit together in a circle with the animator.”⁵² During this time of preparation, materials like worksheets and study guides are distributed to facilitate discussion, and an opening prayer to officially begin the activity follows.

Reading the passage is the second step in the study. A group study cannot take place without reading the biblical passage. Peace suggests that the passage to be studied should be read aloud from someone in the group.⁵³ Weber also affirms that “no Bible study should be made without hearing the biblical passage to be examined.”⁵⁴

After reading the passage, the third step is silence. Weber indicates that two or three minutes should be allowed for silence before beginning discussion,⁵⁵ but Peace

⁵² Weber, *The Bible Comes Alive*, xix.

⁵³ Peace, *Learning to Love God*, 10.

⁵⁴ Weber, *The Bible Comes Alive*, 10.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, xviii.

suggests five minutes.⁵⁶ What is important is that these periods of silence take place before the discussion of the passage. Weber suggests that these moments of silence are essential because it gives the opportunity for both quick and slow thinkers to meditate equally on the Word of God.⁵⁷ Since this will be a new experience for this congregation, this strategy proposes that three to five minutes be dedicated to familiarizing the group with the process.

The next step in the process is analyzing the passage. This is the part of the study where the participant tries to discover the message of the passage through the process of observation (to discover what the passage says) and interpretation (to discover what the passage means). Analysis of the passage leads to the discovery and understanding of the purposes of God in the lives of the participants.

The final part of the study is when the participants, in obedience to the Word, apply the truth of this passage to their own lives. Without application, the Bible study becomes simply a source of information, but by applying that information, the Word of God can begin the work of transformation.

Having an efficient leader is essential for a good group experience. Understanding this role and applying it in the group will mark the difference between a positive and a negative experience. Weber calls the leader the “animator/enabler” and describes this individual’s function as follows: “The animator has the double task of watching that the biblical message remain in the center of attention and that all participants can join in the

⁵⁶ Peace, *Learning to Love God*, 10.

⁵⁷ Weber, *The Bible Comes Alive*, xviii.

common search. Enablers are therefore the advocates of both the Bible and the quiet and hesitant members of the group.”⁵⁸

Peace clarifies the role of the leader by pointing out the difference between a teacher and a facilitator by saying: “The goal of the leader is to facilitate conversation, not to teach or counsel.”⁵⁹ The leader, explains Peace, has to understand the difference between being a teacher and a facilitator. One of the differences, he explains, is that the facilitator is constantly deflecting questions back to the group. It is not the facilitator’s role to approve or disapprove responses. A teacher, on the other hand, explains Peace, is the focus of the conversation and decides if the answer is accurate or inaccurate.⁶⁰ When discussing the importance of participation in a Bible study, James A. Schacher, in his book, *Conversational Bible Studies*, makes this point: “Two steps are essential in a conversational Bible study: securing information and group discussion.”⁶¹ The role of the leader, then, is to guarantee that that discussion takes place in the group.

Application of the Small Group Ministry

It is critical to this project to describe the process of how this ministry will be carried out and how the interaction between Bible study and *Lectio Divina* will take place in the small group sessions. The first item of consideration is frequency of meetings. This project has as an objective to establish weekly meetings for small group activities.

⁵⁸ Weber, *The Bible Comes Alive*, xix.

⁵⁹ Peace, *Learning to Love God*, 14.

⁶⁰ Peace, Course notebook for “CF705, Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World,” 20.

⁶¹ James A. Schacher, *Conversational Bible Studies: New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 7.

Experts like Hestenes suggest that weekly meetings are advantageous for new groups to establish personal relationships.⁶²

The second item for consideration is time. Experts suggest that between an hour and a half and two hours is a good amount of time for a group activity. An hour and a half will be the time suggested for the small groups in this congregation since that time seems to accommodate their lifestyles. This leads to the next item, which is interaction of the disciplines.

One of the objectives of this project is to apply these two disciplines in such a way that people of the congregation are going to delight in the experience. Considering that this will be a new experience for this congregation, it will be appropriate to allow enough time for each of the disciplines to be practiced without time pressure or without rushing the experience. Therefore, the proposed idea is to alternate *Lectio Divina* and Bible study every week, such that one week will be devoted to Bible study and the next to *Lectio Divina*. This system will be advantageous at least in the beginning, as time is needed for people to learn and familiarize themselves with the two disciplines. As time progresses and experience grows, these two disciplines can be combined into one event.

The last subject to consider in this process is duration of the program. Experts suggest that a good duration of a small group program is about ten weeks to three months, with the option to re-contract at the end of the period. This project is proposing a program with a duration of three months, but that can go indefinitely in those groups that decide to re-contract every three months.

⁶² Hestenes, *Using the Bible in Groups*, 24.

Resources for the Application of Disciplines

Resources are always indispensable in dealing with the application of spiritual disciplines. This section provides a short list of resources that are vital for the implementation of the spiritual disciplines proposed in this project. A more elaborate list, including vital resources for implementation and training, is provided in the next section.

A number of resources provide support for the implementation of the small groups. The three primary sources that will be used by the participants, at least in the initial stage of the project, are the following: *Philippians: 8 Studies for Individuals and Groups*, by N.T. Wright; *Philippians*, by John MacArthur; and *Contemplative Bible Reading*, by Richard Peace. These three books are valuable because they contain lessons that are ready to be applied in a small group context. Peace's book additionally provides excellent guidance in the practice of *Lectio Divina*.

In the practice of Bible study in groups, the following additional resources are also very important in the development of this project: *Using the Bible in Groups*, by Roberta Hestenes; *The Bible Comes Alive*, by Hans-Ruedi Weber; *Learning to Love God and Contemplative Bible Reading*, by Richard Peace; *CF705 Syllabus: Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Post Modern World*, also by Richard Peace; *How to Study your Bible*, by Kay Arthur; *How to Study the Bible*, by Robert M. West; and *The Serendipity Bible*. Other important sources include: *Creative Bible Study*, by Lawrence O. Richards; *Church Bible Study Handbook*, by Robin Maas; *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, by Gareth Icenogle; and *Creative Bible Study*, by Lawrence O. Richards.

In the practice of *Lectio Divina*, the following additional resources are also very important in the development of this project: *Lectio Divina*, by Mario Masini; *Bible*

Reading for Spiritual Growth, by Norvene Vest; *Prayer and Community*, by Columba Stewart; *Sacred Reading*, by Michael Casey; *Lectio Divina*, by M. Basil Pennington; and *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*, by Robin Maas and Gabriel O'Donnell, with special attention given to Chapter 1: Practicum 1 of the book.

Leadership Training

Training is a fundamental element for the success of a small group ministry. Arnold indicates that training is not optional but that in fact “leadership training is imperative” in a small group ministry.⁶³ The dynamic of small group training can better be observed in the relationship of Jesus with his disciples. The training of the disciples by Jesus was paramount in the building of the Church after Jesus left the earth. Icenogle points out, “Jesus’ call to discipleship was an invitation to small group training.”⁶⁴

Leadership training will take place in this congregation in two phases. The first phase is a preliminary training, during which leaders will be taught the principles and fundamental concepts of leading small groups. The second phase will be an ongoing training program, in which leaders will receive training once a week or once every two weeks. The small group leaders will be trained in three basic elements: leading small groups, the inductive method of Bible study, and spiritual disciplines, particularly *Lectio Divina* and Bible study groups, which pertain to this project. For this task, relevant resources will be used to ground the training, as outlined below.

⁶³ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 45.

⁶⁴ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 201.

Leading Small Groups

One of the basic areas in which the group leaders will be trained is in the area of how to lead a small group ministry. The purpose is to develop them as leaders and to train them to lead small groups effectively. There are several supportive materials that provide assistance in this area. The three primary sources to be used for training leaders are the following: *Contemplative Bible Reading and Formation and Discipleship in a Post Modern World*, both by Richard Peace. The latter is the course syllabus used by Richard Peace for his class on spiritual formation at Fuller Theological Seminary. This syllabus contains a considerable amount of information regarding forming, leading, and sustaining a small group ministry. The third source is *Using the Bible in Groups*, by Roberta Hestenes, which contains important insights in the area of small group leadership.

In the area of small groups and small group leadership, the following additional resources are also very important in the development of this project: *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, by Gareth Icenogle; *The Big Book on Small Groups*, by Jeffrey Arnold; and *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of the Local Church*, by Russell Burrill. Icenogle's book represents an exhaustive exposition of the principles, foundation, rationale, and implementation of small group ministry. It also includes valuable material regarding the key role and function of small group leaders. Arnold's book is a complete training manual on small group ministry, and it includes a description of the necessary steps for a group ministry from beginning to end. Burrill is passionate about small group ministry, and his book expands on the foundation, history, and mission of the Adventist Church from the small group ministry perspective.

In the important area of forming leaders, *The Soul of Ministry*, by Ray S. Anderson, is an important resource. This book is about forming leaders in the likeness of Christ. It presents Jesus as the ultimate model for leadership, and it seeks to empower leaders for ministry. The book, *Leaders on Leadership*, by George Barna, is also an important resource on this topic because it introduces principles of leadership from the Christian perspective. *Leading the Team-Based Church*, by George Cladis, deals with the practical aspect of how pastors and members of the congregation can unite as a team to do ministry. *Learning to Love God*, by Richard Peace, is another valuable resource.

The Inductive Method of Bible Study

The small group leaders will also be trained in the area of understanding the inductive method of studying the Bible. This will provide important knowledge that can be applied in the groups as they approach the Bible. Important resources on the topic of Bible studies are *How to Study Your Bible*, by Kay Arthur, and *Methodical Bible Study*, by Robert A. Traina. The book, *Creative Bible Study*, by Lawrence O. Richards, is another good addition in the subject of Bible study. This source contains valuable insights that can be applied in groups or personal Bible studies. It also includes exercises that can be helpful in improving interaction in the groups. Another valuable resource on the topic of Bible study is *Church Bible Study Handbook*, by Robin Maas. This book represents a complete course on how to use tools and principles that lead to a unique experience when approaching the Bible.

Lectio Divina and Bible Study Groups

This project is based on the practice of spiritual disciplines in small groups; therefore to train the leaders in mastering the concepts of *Lectio Divina* and Bible study groups will be essential for the success of this ministry. Once again, important resources will be used to ground the training. In the area of *Lectio Divina*, a key resource is *Bible Teaching for Spiritual Growth: Lectio Divina*, by Norvene Vest. Vest provides a complete overview of the concept and the practice of *Lectio Divina* in groups, and she also provides practical examples of the application of this discipline and a list of what she considers good starting passages when introducing *Lectio Divina*.

Additional resources valuable for this topic are: *Sacred Reading*, by Michael Casey; *Lectio Divina*, by Mario Masini; and *Lectio Divina*, by M. Basil Pennington. These three books invite participants to bring the ancient practice of *Lectio Divina* to a new and invigorating experience for the contemporary Christian.

Contemplative Bible Reading, by Richard Peace is also an important resource on this topic. In this book, Peace concisely explains the concept of *Lectio Divina*, but concentrates more on the actual exercises of *Lectio Divina*, which is a valuable approach for the beginner. This book is also helpful in that Peace incorporates Bible study lessons and *Lectio Divina* sessions on the same passages, a dynamic that can be valuable for leaders learning to assimilate both disciplines in order to implement them in their respective groups.

Another important resource in the area of *Lectio Divina* is *Prayer and Community* by Columba Stewart. This book is dedicated to Benedictine spirituality, including *Lectio Divina*, and it provides an ample understanding of the benefit of this practice. The book

Spiritual Tradition for the Contemporary Church, by Robin Maas and Gabriel

O'Donnell, is also an important resource because it introduces the value of *Lectio Divina* in the context of other spiritual traditions and disciplines.

In the area of Bible study groups, an indispensable resource is *Using the Bible in Groups*, by Roberta Hestenes. This is a complete manual on Bible study groups. Besides making a compelling case for the value of studying the Bible in a community context, this book also provides a step-by-step method on how to carry out a successful small group ministry focused in the Bible. Hestenes includes a number of sample lessons ready to be implemented and dedicates a good portion of the book to explain key concepts such as different methods of Bible study and the different roles of leaders and participants of the group.

Another resource is the book, *Learning to Love God*, by Peace. This book provides the small group leader with a structured guide focused on how to carry out the actual small group study sessions. The book, *The Bible Comes Alive*, by Hans-Reudi Weber is also a valuable resource for Bible study groups. This book provides valuable principles for a successful Bible study group, and it also provides insights on how to carry out Bible study groups in innovative but effective ways.

The Pastor as Trainer

Experts suggest that the pastor of the congregation is responsible for providing the training for the people of the congregation. Burrill, who is one of the most outspoken proponents of church growth and small group ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, emphasizes the role of the pastor as a trainer. Based in an analysis of Ephesians

4, in his book, *Revolution in the Church*, Burrill suggests that the primary role of the pastor of the congregation is that of “a trainer of ministers,”⁶⁵ and he goes on to affirm that training is what the pastor is paid to do.⁶⁶

The pastor indeed will be the person responsible for the training of small group leaders at Oakland Spanish SDA Church. But this burden could be too heavy for one person to carry; therefore, a database of qualified people, in and out of the congregation, will be created to assist the pastor in the work of training. This database will include members of the congregation, colleagues in ministry and specialists in areas needed such as leadership, small group ministry, spiritual formation, and group Bible studies.

⁶⁵ Burrill, *Revolution in the Church*, 47.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 48.

CHAPTER 7

PROCESS AND EVALUATION

This last chapter provides a description of the specific steps that will be taken to develop this program of spiritual transformation at the Oakland Spanish SDA Church. These steps include sharing the vision, recruiting volunteers, selecting and training leaders, registering the participants, and organizing the small groups. It also clarifies the roles of those involved and presents the assessment plan.

Sharing the Vision

Vision is one of the most fundamental characteristics of a leader. The Bible says that “without vision the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). Although this passage may suggest a prophetic connotation, it also applies to leadership, as Hans Finzel, in his book, *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make*, indicates that leadership is about the future.¹ In a congregation, it is the pastor’s role as the spiritual leader to possess vision. George Barna, in his book, *Leaders on Leadership*, discusses the imperative of vision of a Christian leader:

¹ Hans Finzel, *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make* (Colorado Springs: NexGen, 2005), 185.

Let's get one thing straight from the start. If you want to be a leader, vision is not an option; it is part of the standard equipment of a real leader. By definition, a leader has vision: What else would a leader lead people toward, if not to fulfill that vision? Understand that to be a Christian leader, the vision toward which you lead people must not be a vision of your own making, but a vision God gives to you"²

In a congregation, sharing that vision is paramount for the success of any project, since involvement of the members is necessary to carry out the plan. For this project, a three-step process will be followed to share the vision of a proposed small group ministry where the spiritual disciplines of *Lectio Divina* and Bible study will be practiced. It is hoped that this ministry will increase the faith and spirituality of a congregation that is being tested with diverse circumstances. The first step in the process is sharing the vision with elders, the second is sharing the vision with the church board, and the third and last step is introducing the plan to the congregation.

Sharing the Vision with Leaders (Fall 2013)

In order to be successful, this project calls for the involvement of the leaders of the congregation. In the Oakland Spanish SDA Church, those leaders are the elders and the members of the church board. There are six elders in the congregation, and the church board is comprised of the elders as well as the leaders of the different ministry departments outlined in Chapter 2. This project begins by "selling" the vision. George Barna, in *Leaders on Leadership*, suggests that "visionary leaders are, to some extent, salesmen: their abilities to lead depends in part on their abilities to attract people who will

² George Barna, *Leaders on Leadership* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1997), 47.

invest in the ministry, and that decision hinges on people's desires to see the vision fulfilled."³

This project starts by presenting the plan to the elders of the church. At the beginning of the fall of 2013, a special meeting with elders of the congregation will be called in order to introduce the project. During this meeting, the entire concept of the project and the perceived outcome will be explained to the elders, allowing for questions, observations, and feedback. The objective is to sell the idea and have the elders onboard with the implementation of the project.

After having the elders onboard, the next step will be sharing the vision with the members of the church board. A special session of the board will be called on the first week of November 2013 to discuss the projected plan, and that will be the only point on the agenda of this special session. Again, the plan will be introduced, allowing for questions, comments, observations, and feedback regarding the plan. The hopeful outcome will be a church board ready to implement the plan, and leaders ready to be part of the effort. This will facilitate the selling of the idea to the entire congregation, which is the next step.

Sharing the Vision with the Congregation (November 2013)

After sharing the vision with the leaders of the church, the crucial next step will be to share the plan with the entire congregation. In order to do that, a special meeting will be called during the third week of November 2013 to present the project to the entire church. The project will be introduced using PowerPoint presentations, as well as written

³ Barna, *Leaders on Leadership*, 57.

outlines and booklets that will explain the details of the project to the members. By this time, the support of elders and the rest of the leaders of the congregation will be vital in assisting in the introduction of the project to the congregation. Once again, questions, feedback, observations, and suggestions will be welcomed and expected to clarify every aspect of the project. The hopeful outcome is for a whole congregation to be on board and ready to get involved with the implementation of the ministry project.

Recruiting Volunteers for Supportive Functions (December 2013)

Recruiting volunteers is the first point at which the project moves from vision to implementation. This project is based on small groups ministry, therefore volunteers are an essential element for the success of this project, since many participants will be needed. Since the pastor has a clear concept of what is required for the success of the project, once again the role of the pastor will be crucial in recruiting the people needed. Elders of the church, who have a good knowledge and understanding of the congregation and of the particulars of the project, will also play a significant role assisting the pastor in the selection of the volunteers. These volunteers include people who will function as small group leaders, supportive staff, and people that will be willing to share their homes for small group ministry. This recruitment will take place during the month of December of 2013.

Selection and Training of Small Groups Leaders (February 2014)

After completing the process of recruiting all of the volunteers willing to embark upon this project, the next step will be to select among them the potential small group leaders and sub-leaders who will be in charge of conducting the small groups. Icenogle

suggests that “every small group needs leadership.”⁴ For an effective process, the pastor, elders, and other leaders will assist in this selection.

Small group leaders to be selected have two key characteristics: first, they must be willing and able to attend the training sessions, and second, they must have demonstrated certain gifts and abilities that are critical in a small group ministry. Arnold suggests that “leadership has many personalities and gifts,”⁵ and among the skills leaders should have, Arnold suggests the following: understanding group dynamics, planning logistics, asking good questions, and sharing group care.⁶

In addition to the above characteristics, one of the crucial elements in a small group leader is a good leadership style. Hestenes presents four different styles of leadership that are common in small group ministry: the autocratic, the authoritative, the democratic, and the laissez-faire styles. She suggests beginning with the authoritative style and moving toward the democratic style:

The best leadership styles seem to be those in which prepared leaders offer suggestions and guidance most strongly in the beginning (authoritative) and move as rapidly as possible to a truly shared ownership of the group by all its members (democratic). By the end of the first agreed number of meetings, the group members should be exercising many of the functions in the group and sharing as equal partners in decision-making about plans and procedures.

It is not assumed that a leader is going to have mastered those leadership styles to perfection before the group begins, since, as Icenogle point out, “learning to exercise specific leadership gifts comes through experience, trial, error, correction and continuing

⁴ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 90.

⁵ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 45.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

practice.”⁷ Arnold echoes that by saying that leadership “does come more naturally to some people than to others, but most people develop their ability to lead with time and experience.”⁸

Once the selection of leaders is completed, the next step is to train those potential group leaders in order to prepare them for the task of leading the small groups in the most effective way. Training of leaders is not optional; Arnold contends that “leadership training is imperative.”⁹ In order to fulfill that task, important resources and literature on the different parts related to this ministry project will be used. Relevant topics to be tackled in training sessions include small group ministry, leadership, inductive and conversational Bible study, *Lectio Divina*, Bible study groups as a spiritual discipline, and how to lead a small group. For this training, the valuable sources and material listed in the previous chapter will be used. This training will take place beginning February 2014 and will go on as part of a regular training program after the small groups start.

Registration of Participants (April 2014)

The next step in the process of establishing the small group ministry is to register those who will participate as members of the small groups. This is the gathering process that Icenogle calls “the beginning of discipleship.”¹⁰ These are the people who “are called together by Jesus to watch, pray, learn, live, imitate and practice the disciplines and life

⁷ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 90.

⁸ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁰ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 127.

that Jesus lived with Abba God,” writes Icenogle.¹¹ The number of people registered will determine the number of groups to be established.

The process of registration will be very simple. An announcement will be made on the first Sabbath of March 2014 that registration will be open beginning the first week of April 2014. The registration process will be open during the month of April with small group leaders and supportive staff being in charge of the process.

Organizing the Small Groups (April-May 2014)

The process of organizing the small groups requires that all the necessary elements be in place by the time the group ministry begins. These elements include: having the potential participants registered, having the supportive staff in place, as well as having group leaders, sub-leaders, and assistants of each group on board. It also requires that the locations of the groups be determined.

The process of organizing the groups will be based upon participants’ location of residence, and groups will be placed in each of the different zones of the city of Oakland where the Latino community concentrates. In that way, the groups will be accessible to the members of the church living in a specific zone of the city. This will make it easier for those who would otherwise not participate because of transportation issues. The hope is to capitalize on the energy and enthusiasm of the congregation and organize a minimum of ten small groups with five to twelve participants in each group. The pastor, with the assistance of the group leaders, elders, and the rest of the supportive staff, will

¹¹ Ibid.

be in charge of this part of the process that will take place during the last part of the month of April and the beginning of May of 2014.

Clarifying Roles (May 2014)

Many authors who discuss small groups agree that role clarification is vital for the function and well-being of any small group organization or ministry. Clarifying roles answers the questions of who is in charge of any specific part of the project, and also creates the opportunity to specify the job descriptions of those leading the program. Role clarification in the process and implementation of this program will avoid or, at the very least, minimize conflict and will allow for a smooth operation and development of the program as everyone involved concentrates on doing their part to the best of their potential. Below are descriptions of the specific roles that each of the participants will play starting with the pastor, the supportive staff, the small group leader, and finally the small group participants. The clarification of the different roles will take place during the month of May 2014.

The Role of the Pastor

As it has already been established, the role of the pastor as the leader is to infuse the vision and keep that vision alive. The role of the pastor, then, can be summarized with two words: “vision” and “training.” The pastor of the congregation is to be the visionary, the one who sees a new path and marks a new direction for other people to follow. Neither people nor churches want to follow a leader who lacks a clear vision of where they are headed. Therefore the role of the pastor as a visionary will be crucial in this project as people of this congregation embark upon this new spiritual venture.

Training is the other crucial element that characterizes the function of the pastor. In order for this project to be successful, the pastor will assume this role with a tremendous sense of urgency and responsibility since people, especially small group leaders, will depend on his personal and supportive resources for their development. In summary, the specific role of the pastor in this process is to give direction and provide training.

The Role of the Supportive Staff

Once the role of the pastor has been established, the next step is to clarify the role of the supportive staff. At this point, it is necessary to clarify what constitutes a supportive staff member. There are two kinds of supportive staff members to be considered for this project: one internal to the congregation and one outside of the congregation.

Members of the congregation who are willing to put their time, gifts, and resources towards the small group ministry will comprise the internal supportive staff. These are the people who will function as small group sub-leaders, secretaries, and assistants of the small group ministry. Certain qualified internal supportive staff will also provide leadership and training in the development of this project. The external supportive staff will be qualified people outside of the congregation who will be willing to provide support in the area of training. This staff includes ministers and specialists who are knowledgeable in the different areas relevant to this project, such as leadership, small group ministry, spiritual formation, and Bible study, among other topics.

The Role of the Small Group Leader

The role of the small group leader is foundational for the implementation of this project. The role of the leader as a facilitator of group conversation has already been described in the previous chapter. To clarify the role and to delineate the job description of this office is one of the priorities in this process. The clarification of the role of the leader begins during the training sessions beginning in February 2014. As leaders are trained and equipped, they understand their role. But as part of the process, it is important that everyone involved in this ministry understand the specific role of each person, in order for everybody involved to be on the same page. Therefore, the role of the leader will be explained as part of the process of role clarification during the month of May 2014, before the small groups begin.

The Role of the Participants: Concept of Covenant

The previous chapter provided a description of what constitutes a group covenant. The role of the participants of the small groups can be better described in those terms, in terms of *covenant*, because it describes the expectations and responsibilities of the participants of the small group. A covenant deals with all the components that are necessary to guarantee the fidelity and the right involvement of the participants in the small group. As discussed in Chapter 6, the covenant deals with issues like time, place, goals, membership, food, childcare, leadership, attendance, confidentiality, participation, respect, honesty, advice, care for one another, and prior preparation, among others.

The role of the participants, then, is to adhere to an agreement, and by doing so, they agree to offer their best to the group. As part of the process of role clarification, this

concept of covenant will be introduced to the participants during training events, allowing for questions, clarification, and comments to guarantee that the concept has been understood. With that agreement in place, the expectations of both leaders and participants will be settled, and all will be ready for the small group ministry to begin in June 2014.

Program Initiation (June 2014)

At this point, preparations are in place: groups are organized, leaders are trained, logistic of the groups are in place, and the supporting staff and participants are ready. With that, the project of transformation will be poised to start in the Oakland Spanish SDA Church during the first week of June 2014. The beginning of the project will be preceded by sessions of prayers during the month of May 2014, and it will be inaugurated with a special session of prayer and dedication of those who will participate during the last Sabbath of May 2014 during the worship service hour.

Evaluation

Assessment and evaluation are crucial in determining the efficacy of a program. Evaluation provides the opportunity to affirm, modify, or, in the extreme case, terminate a program. Jackson W. Carroll, in *Studying Congregations*, explains the value of evaluation: “Evaluation can be a significant tool for helping to institutionalize the

programs that give expression to your congregation's vision for ministry."¹² Therefore, periodic evaluation will be an important part in the implementation of this program.

As to what type of evaluation will be more applicable in the process of this project, Carroll makes a distinction between two types: the *formative* and *summative* evaluations. He explains, "Formative evaluations are undertaken to get feedback and improve new or existing programs. Summative evaluations are done for the purpose of making basic decisions about whether an existing program should be continued or terminated."¹³ This program calls for both formative and summative evaluations. The formative evaluation will be done during the beginning stage of the program, asking members of the respective groups for feedback in regards to key aspects of the small group, such as the value, content, form, logistics, time, and benefit of the group activities. This evaluation will provide the opportunity to affirm, modify, or eliminate particular aspects of the group activity and in that way improve the experience of the small group. Summative evaluations will take place at the end of every quarter to decide whether or not the group should continue. In this evaluation, a critical issue to be considered is whether or not the spiritual objective of the group has been realized. Critical questions in regards to spiritual growth, faith increase, and supportive fellowship will be important to assess whether or not the spiritual objectives have been met in the lives of the participants. Depending upon the findings, the leaders can determine whether or not a particular small group should continue.

¹² Jackson W. Carroll, "Leadership and the Study of the Congregation," in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, ed. Nancy T. Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 192.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 190.

If the group decides to continue, it will consider the implications of the new commitment. Hestenes sheds light on what to do in this critical stage of the group: “If all or many of the group members decide to continue, decisions must be made about the promises, and commitments of the ongoing group need clarification. Sufficient discussion time should be taken to work through key issues.”¹⁴ Hestenes also suggests that this point of recommitment presents a good opportunity to invite new members to add freshness to the group.¹⁵

¹⁴ Hestenes, *Using the Bible in Groups*, 34.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The intent of this project is to lead Oakland Spanish SDA Church, a congregation that faces a number of adverse circumstances, to an experience of increasing faith and spiritual renewal through the practice of the spiritual disciplines of *Lectio Divina* and Bible study in a context of small group communities. In order to achieve that purpose, this doctoral project has described the context of the church and its community, discussed theological foundations of Adventism and key concepts for the project, and presented the strategy designed to bring about spiritual renewal. It is hoped that this strategy will influence Oakland Spanish SDA Church members, as well as other congregations in the future.

Project Summary

Part One began by describing the community context in which this church operates and all of the challenges Oakland represents for the ministry of this congregation. This section identified a number of sociopolitical, socio-economical, and personal factors that negatively affect the well-being of the Latino community and have become part of the anatomy of this congregation as well. Poverty, crime, personal illness, and struggles for economical survival are some of the unfavorable factors that characterize this church.

Part One also described the personality of the congregation and identified positive characteristics in the social and spiritual front that form part of the DNA of this church. This is a congregation that is active in several internal and external ministries that positively impact people in the congregation and in the community as well. Despite those

wonderful ministries, however, this congregation has at times replaced inward devotion with outward activity. In many ways, ministries have become obstacles for real communion with God and spiritual maturity. This context has led to the need for spiritual reorientation in this church, and this doctoral project represents an effort to lead congregation along that path.

Part Two of this project provided an overview of key theological concepts in Adventism that provide an understanding of the set of beliefs that form the DNA of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These doctrines and beliefs also guide the spiritual practice of Oakland Spanish SDA Church. Crucial to the development of this project was the identification of the relationship between spirituality and mission in the Adventist Church and the need for a spiritual reorientation in Adventism to fulfill that mission.

Part Two continued by discussing key concepts that have framed the strategy proposed herein. In recognizing the special circumstances of this Christian community in Oakland, key to this project has been the analysis of the concept of suffering as it relates to the suffering of the righteousness and the prosperity of the wicked. This project recognizes the reality of human suffering without exception and the dilemma it represents for the believer who proclaims and believes in a God of justice. But this project did not seek to approach the reality of suffering as to finding an understanding of suffering, but instead to recognize that suffering is a mystery. The approach of this work, then, has been the approach of faith. Faith is ultimately what will hold the Christian firm even in times of severe testing. The lives of Asaph and the Apostle Paul testified to that fact. The testimony of these two men revealed that an approach of faith is essential to remain faithful to a loving God and to trust him even in the midst of severe trials.

Another foundational concept in the development of this project was the concept of community. This project has been based upon the understanding that community is essential for the social and spiritual well being of humanity. Community is God's creation, and as such the purpose of God for humanity is for community, since God never intended for humanity to live a solitary journey but a life in real relationships. During the course of this project, the benefits of community have been established. In community there is Christian fellowship, and in that context fellow believers express mutual encouragement to, compassion for, and understanding of each other. Spiritual growth and sanctification is better realized in community. Community is instrumental in developing faith and in dealing with adversity.

This work has also shown that small groups are the best expression of a Christian community. It is in small groups that real fellowship and love can be demonstrated and practiced. In small groups, mutual prayers, encouragement, compassion, and understanding are experienced. Small groups create the opportunity for growth through fellowship and through the common practice of spiritual disciplines.

This project was also based on the conviction that the practice of spiritual disciplines is foundational for achieving spiritual strength, as demonstrated in the testimony of several authors who have informed this project. Just as the athlete needs to exercise and train to be prepared physically, in the same way the Christian needs to exercise spiritually to strengthen his or her faith. There cannot be strength without discipline.

This project concluded with Part Three, which provided a description of the strategy that will take place at Oakland Spanish SDA Church and a timeline of the steps

to be implemented to fulfill this vision of spiritual transformation. This strategy seeks to implement the practice of *Lectio Divina* and Bible study to increase faith and spiritual maturity at Oakland Spanish SDA Church. Through the centuries, these two Bible-based practices have been effective tools in achieving intimacy with God. The ancient practice of *Lectio Divina* was an important part of the spirituality of great people of the past, but it has also been demonstrated that it can be equally valuable and relevant today. The spiritual practice of Bible study is equally important. The Word of God can prepare believers to face any situation that life brings. The Word of God has a power that is capable of transforming individuals, societies, and institutions alike.

Ministry Implications

This project envisions a congregation that, by applying spiritual disciplines in small groups, will develop spiritual maturity. Consequently, this project envisions a more mature church, a congregation that walks with new commitments and with an earnest search for intimacy with God. This spiritual growth will be manifested in better relationships within families, among fellow Christians, and by behaviors that reveal the love of God in their lives. It is hoped that this congregation will become a place where the practices of love of God and love of neighbor become a constant reality, where the Word of God becomes the foundation of their lives in all circumstances, and where intimacy with God and with fellow Christians brings fulfillment and joy in spite of difficult circumstances. It is hoped that this congregation will face life with a new perspective, one that moves forward with faith and trust in God.

In order to achieve this, a spiritual reorientation is needed. People of the congregation must look inward and realize that programs and ministries, although good, are not enough for a legitimate experience of surrender to Christ. The Word of God has to become the foundation of this congregation, and an encounter with God has to become the foundation of their lives. This project represents the opportunity for a new beginning for a number of members of the congregation who have struggled in achieving an intimate relationship with God. This ministry initiative puts this congregation on a path towards a new relationship with God, and a new encounter with his sacred Word. This will lay the foundation for a new experience and a new orientation to life.

Implications for Adventism

Though the focus of this project is not the Adventist Church as a denomination, it can produce a valuable reflection for a denomination that identifies itself in terms of spirituality and mission. This project has examined core values of Adventism as it puts emphasis on concepts of holiness, sanctification, and salvation. The eschatological calling and mission of Adventism is tied to those concepts. But many Adventists have not been demonstrating those values in practical ways or in their daily lives. Consequently, even the highest-ranking leaders of the denomination are calling for spiritual reform in the Church.

Adventism has to realize, however, that change has to come from within, not from without. Spiritual reform should begin with the Word of God. The Bible once again has to become the only foundation of the spirituality of members of the church, rather than any manual of doctrine or textbook of theoretical concepts, as important as those are.

Adventism has to reclaim the power of the Word of God. The Word of God can transform individuals, societies, and religious organizations. Any spiritual reform in the denomination must begin with new spiritual devotion and commitment, and with a legitimate surrender to the Word of God.

Implications for the Church at Large

This project has implications for the universal body of believers as well. This work can invite serious reflection on the importance of spiritual reorientation. The Church of today faces pressure from different fronts: skepticism, individualism, indifference, and secularism. These philosophies and attitudes are not best confronted by theological arguments, but by a living demonstration of faith. Theories can be argued, but no argument can be enough against a life that has been transformed by the power of God. The Church of today needs to reclaim that power. Spiritual formation has to be at the core of any system that wants to impact this world; therefore, this project represents an invitation for the Church at large to a spiritual reorientation. In a world of theories and philosophies, the Church of today needs an encounter with God, and new experiences founded in the power of the Word of God. Spiritual practice and spiritual maturity have to be at the center of the life of any congregation that wants to impact a community.

One of the imperative priorities of the modern Church should be a rejection of the individualism of the current culture and a restoration of the sense of community that should characterize the children of God. This type of community within the Church will bring glory and honor to Jesus Christ. By his relationship with his disciples, Jesus

demonstrated that a consecrated community devoted to the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ can change the world. That is the challenge for the Christian Church today.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Diogenes. *Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today*. Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 1997.
- Ammerman, Nancy T., Jackson W. Carroll, Carl S. Dudley, and William McKinney, eds. *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Anderson, A. A. *The Book of Psalms Volume II, Psalms (73-150)*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981.
- Anderson, Ray. *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God's People*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.
- Arthur, Kay. *How to Study Your Bible*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1994.
- Augsburger, David. *Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God and Love of Neighbor*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006.
- Bailey, Ney. *Faith Is Not a Feeling: Choosing to Take God at His Word*. Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2002.
- Barber, Cyril J. *Unlocking the Scriptures: The Key to Inductive Bible Study*. Santa Ana, CA: Promise Publishing Co, 2001.
- Barclay, William. *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. Louisville: The Westminster Press, 1975.
- Barna, George. *Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom Advice and Encouragement on the Art of Leading God's People*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1997.
- Bernardine, Joseph Cardinal. *The Gift of Peace*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 1997.
- Bloesh, Donald G. *Essentials of Evangelical Theology Volume I: God Authority and Salvation*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1954.
- Bounds, E. M. *Power through Prayer*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1979.
- Boyce, James Montgomery. *Philippians: An Expository Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000.

- Burrill, Russell C. *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church*. Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1998.
- _____. *Revolution in the Church: Unleashing the Awesome Power of Lay Ministry*. Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1993.
- _____. *The Revolutionized Church of the 21st Century: The Explosive Power of a Church Built on Relationships*. Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1997.
- Casey, Michael. *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*. Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1996.
- Cladis, George. *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999.
- Douglas, Herbert E. *Rediscovering Joy*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994.
- Drury, Keith. *Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.
- Fee, Gordon D. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995
- Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- Finzel, Hans. *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make*. Colorado Springs: NexGen, 2000.
- Gaebelein, Frank E., general editor. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 5*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.
- _____. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 11*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991.
- George, Carl F. *Prepare Your Church for the Future*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1992.
- Graham, Billy. *Just as I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997.
- Hawthorn, Gerald F. and Ralph P. Martin. *Word Biblical Commentary, Philippians*. Mexico City: Thomas Nelson, 2004
- Hestenes, Roberta. *Using the Bible in Groups*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983.

- Icenogle, Gareth W. *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- Irwing, Kevin W. *Liturgy Prayer and Spirituality*. New York: Paulist Press, 1984.
- Johnson, David W. and Frank P. Johnson. *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills*. 6th ed. Old Taggan, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1997.
- Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975.
- Knight, George. *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2008.
- _____. *A Brief History of Seventh-Day Adventists*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004.
- _____. *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom: Confronting the Challenge of Change and Secularization*. Boise: Pacific Press, 1995.
- _____. *Organizing for Mission and Growth: The Development of Adventist Church Structure*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2006.
- _____. *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Beliefs*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000.
- _____. *Seventh-day Adventist Believe: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines*. Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988.
- Larondelle, Hans. *Christ Our Salvation: What God Does for Us and in Us*. Boise: Pacific Press, 1981.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. Martin. *Faith on Trial: Studies in Psalm 73*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965.
- Longman, Tremper, III. *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 987.
- Maas, Robin. *Church Bible Study Handbook*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1982.
- Maas, Robin and Gabriel O'Donnell. *Spiritual Traditions for the Contemporary Church*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.
- Martin, Linette. *Practical Praying*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

- Martin, Ralph P. *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993.
- McCann Jr., J. Clinton. *Great Psalms of the Bible*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- Mesias, Miguel A. *Perspectiva Biblica del Sufrimiento*. Barcelona: Editorial Clie, 1999.
- Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An Exposition of the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*. Boise: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2005.
- Oliver, Barry David. *SDA Organizational Structure: Past Present and Future*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1989.
- Ortberg, John. *Faith and Doubt*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.
- Peace, Richard. *Contemplative Bible Reading: Experiencing God through Scripture*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998.
- _____. *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.
- _____. *Learning to Love God*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994.
- _____. *Spiritual Autobiography: Discovering and Sharing Your Spiritual Story*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998.
- Pennington, M. Basil. *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998.
- Radcliffe, Lynn J. *Making Prayer Real*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1952.
- Rainer, Thomas S. *The Book of Church Growth: History, Theology, and Principles*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993.
- Ramirez-Johnson, Johnny and Edwin I. Hernandez. *Avance, A Vision of a New Mañana: Report of the Study of the Hispanic Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America*. Loma Linda, CA: Loma Linda University Press, 2003.
- Rhomberg, Chris. *No There There: Race, Class, and Political Community in Oakland*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Rice, Richard. *Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1997.

- Rinker, Rosalind. *Teaching Conversational Prayer: A Handbook for Groups*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1970.
- Sahlin, Monte. *Adventist Congregations Today: New Evidence for Equipping Healthy Churches*. Lincoln, NE: Center for Creative Ministry, 2003.
- Sahlin, Monte and Norma Salin. *A New Generation of Adventist Families*. Portland: Center for Creative Ministry, 1997.
- Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2003.
- Shaw, Maura. *Forty Days to Begin a Spiritual Life*. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2002.
- Schacher, James A. *Conversational Bible Studies: New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975.
- Schwarz, Christian. *The 3 Colors of Your Spirituality*. St. Charles, IL: Church Smart Resources, 2009.
- Schwarz, Richard W. and Floyd Greenleaf. *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*. Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2000.
- Sequeira, Jack. *Beyond Belief: The Promise, the Power, and the Reality of the Everlasting Gospel*. Boise: Pacific Press, 1993.
- Smith, Gordon T. *Beginning Well: Christian Conversion & Authentic Transformation*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2001.
- Smith, Reger C. *Helping Hurting Members. A Handbook for Pastors and Other Helping Professionals*. Lincoln, NE: Advent Source, 2002.
- Soelle, Dorothee. *Suffering*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.
- Stanhope, Marcia and Jeanette Lancaster. *Public Health Nursing: Population-Centered Health Care in the Community*. 7th ed. St. Louis, MO: Mosby Elsevier, 2004.
- Stott, John R.W. *Christian Mission in the Modern World: What the Church Should Be Doing Now*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975.
- Thibodeaux, Mark E. *Armchair Mystic: Easing Into Contemplative Prayer*. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2001
- Traina, Robert A. *Methodical Bible Study*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980.

- Tramble, Thomas and Wilma Tramble. *The Pullman Porters and West Oakland*. San Francisco: Arcadia Publishing, 2007.
- Vest, Norvene. *Bible Reading for Spiritual Growth*. New York: Harper San Francisco, 1993.
- Weber, Hans-Reudi. *The Bible Comes Alive: New Approaches for Bible Study Groups*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1996.
- Whitehead, James D. and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead. *Holy Eros: Recovering the Passion for God*. New York: Orbis Books, 2009.
- Wiersbe, Warren. *The Bible Exposition Commentary, Volume 2*. Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 2000.
- Wilhoit, Jim and Leland Ryken. *Effective Bible Teaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988.
- Williams, Donald. *Mastering the Old Testament, Volume 14: Psalms 73-150*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1987.
- Wright, N. T. *Philippians: 8 Studies for Individuals and Groups*. Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009.
- Wuthnow, Robert. *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion*. Princeton University Press, 2007.
- Yancey, Philip. *Where Is God When It Hurts?* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977.