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Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

GROWING DISCIPLES AT HILLS CHURCH USING SMALL GROUPS
BASED ON BIBLE READING AND PRAYER

Written by

LEX AKERS

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:


Keith Matthews


Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: September 1, 2013

GROWING DISCIPLES AT HILLS CHURCH USING SMALL GROUPS
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A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
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JUNE 2013

ABSTRACT

Growing Disciples at Hills Church Using Small Groups Based On Bible Reading and Prayer

Lex Akers

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2013

The purpose of this project is to outline the importance of the foundational principles of Bible reading and prayer to a growing, self-feeding disciple's life. The practice of these two disciplines, or "means of grace," as John Wesley called them, are essential to the life of a disciple and, as such, must be taught by the Church if it is going to move from a consumer-based model of Church to one that begins to implement the call to "go and make disciples of all nations." The focus on these two means of grace will lead disciples to an increased love for God and love for their neighbor. The thesis was tested at Hills Church by running two small groups: one on prayer and one on reading the Bible.

The research argues that teaching participants reasons why reading the Bible is of value to discipleship as well as helping them to know how to read the Bible and make personal application will lead them to a greater interest in and greater growth towards Christlikeness. It further suggests that teaching principles of prayer along with practical exercises in prayer will help a disciple develop intimacy with God and growth towards Christlikeness. To test this hypothesis, a series of teachings on "Why Read the Bible?" and on "What Is Prayer?" were developed and taught to church newcomers. To examine the effectiveness of these "means of grace," a before group and after group survey were completed and the results analyzed.

The conclusions drawn from this study are that teaching and helping disciples to understand and engage in the principles and practice of prayer and Bible reading (with application) does increase the disciple's awareness of God and enhances the growth of the disciple.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD.

Words: 288

To my wife, who, despite the odds, has learned to live with me as I make my own
faltering discipleship journey

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I would like to thank the members of Hills Church who have loved and supported me as I push them to be disciples of Jesus. Thank you for enduring my long series of messages on discipleship topics. Thank you for embracing the concepts and growing to be more like Jesus. I would like to thank those great people who assisted me in reading drafts of my work and making suggestions. Special thank you goes to Jeff Adams who gave many hours to the project in review and guidance and to Amelia Wyndham who collated the survey data. Thanks are also due the Elders and staff of the church who graciously allowed me to complete this project. And finally thank you to my wife Phyllisia and my two boys, Jaiden and Harley, who endured long absences, and missed their husband and father as I worked on this project and tried to pastor a local church. I am indebted to you all.

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INTRODUCTION

In some of his last words to his disciples, Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19).¹ This statement of commission has been the mission of the Church since it was given. In recent times, however, the Church seems to have placed more emphasis on the “go” than it has on the “make” part of this mission. Perhaps this is because of the urgency to reach the unreached. Perhaps it is because of an emphasis on the gospel as a ticket to heaven only. Perhaps it is because of a misunderstanding of the important correction people like Luther brought to the Church’s comprehension of “salvation by grace alone” that left much of the Church believing even character transformation demanded no work on the part of the believer.

While the Church on the whole seems to be strategically pushing towards the goal to take the message of Jesus to “all nations,” it does not seem to be as strategic about disciple making.² From growing up in the church, the observation was that when people became Christians, the only method of discipleship on offer was sitting in church. Apart from the occasional twelve-week discipleship course, new Christians were generally left to grow on their own.

Some may argue at this point that this is the role of the Holy Spirit, but it is difficult to avoid the words of Jesus who said his followers should go and “make” the

¹ All Scripture is from the *Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001) Olive Tree Bible Reader Edition unless otherwise noted.

² Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 104.

disciples. No matter the approach, as disciples of Jesus, the job is to deliberately make more disciples. While the Spirit of God empowers the disciple and works in the individual, followers of Jesus have the responsibility to “make” disciples.

The process of disciple making is further complicated by the corporatization of the Church. When pastors run their churches like businesses the message and process of discipleship can become confused. Success is seen as winning customers and making sure they keep returning to the local store. This approach turns church attendees into consumers who look only to getting their desires satisfied. Building a particular culture at church or having all the great elements of church will not necessarily make disciples.

In Australia, the Church seems to have stagnated if not declined. This has occurred in an environment where churches are placing considerable emphasis on building the right environment, look, and feel. Despite all the effort that is being put into church planting and making churches attractive, the National Church Life Survey reports a net increase across all Protestant denominations of just 1 percent over a recent ten-year period, irrespective of the prominence or insignificance of a church. The reality is, most of the churches reporting growth are growing because of transfers from other churches, and those who drop out of church completely offset most of the salvations that do occur. The net increase to the kingdom community measured by church attendance is statistically insignificant.³ But it is not insignificant to the kingdom. If all of the great minds and creative programs of churches across all Protestant denominations in all

³ Sam Sterland, Ruth Powell, and Keith Castle, *Inflow and Outflow Between Denominations: 1991 to 2001*, report no. NCLS Occasional Paper 8 (Sydney: Anglicare, 2006), 10.

regions of Australia cannot produce a growing Church in ten years, something must be wrong, and something must be done. Churches must rethink their strategies. The attractional model may work for those already in the church, who might transfer to the next new exciting church, but it does not work for the general community.

While the missional church has been proposing a solution for more than ten years, something does not appear right in much of the model. Simply abandoning the traditional model and substituting a more relational and demonstrative approach is not necessarily the answer. In some cases the gospel has become only a gospel of compassion but not of salvation. One missional pastor explained that he did not believe in asking people to repent and be saved anymore.⁴ But the kingdom is not better off by simply caring for people's needs. Christianity at its heart is a telling *and* doing religion.

Some parts of the missional church also seem to abandon deliberate discipleship for discussions on spirituality. Admittedly people who grew up in the traditional Church and then became disillusioned often lead these missional churches, but problems appear when that basis of teaching has gone and less emphasis is placed on upholding the values of the church and what it means to be a disciple. In 2006, Jackie Mangion spoke at a denominational youth and young adult leadership convention.⁵ She was celebrating the fact that when asked to choose what elements of spirituality her new group members wanted to practice, they chose ones usually practiced at church; reading the Word and communion were among the list. This generous idea of asking the people what they want

⁴ A missional pastor in Brisbane, interview by author, Brisbane, QLD, 2006.

⁵ Jackie Mangion, "Missional Community" (speech, National Youth and Young Adult Leadership, Mission, and Ministry Summit, Marsfield Community Church, Sydney, January 8, 2006.)

to do fails if they choose not to have things like the Word and communion as a value.

When some group members eventually decide to start their own missional outpost, the full truth of Christianity will fail to travel down the generations. The practical problem is in understanding how disciples are taught and made. This remains one of the fundamental challenges for the Church whether it has chosen to be attractional or missional. It is no good just finding something that suits the individual without holding onto the essentials of Christianity.

The purpose of this doctoral project is to attempt to address a number of problems in the Church: first, that the Western Church is quickly adopting a consumer-driven business model to keep up with these changes in society; second, that Church attendees, no matter whether they are from the missional or attractional model, have become consumers of Church; and third, that Western churches are simply not doing very well at creating or producing disciples. The thesis herein is that church multiplication, relevance and impact has more to do with creating disciples of Jesus than it has to do with running a business or simply living a missional element of the Christian message.

The goal of this doctoral project is to see the Church make disciples who know how to live and articulate the full teachings of Jesus. It is troublesome that some people settle for a “country club” type of Christianity or eventually choose to depart the Church altogether. Churches are needed that train their members to live the disciple’s life regardless of how church is presented. It is essential to see churches develop disciples whose faith and character is not dependent on the surroundings being perfect: to develop disciples that are not consumers. When churches adopt the consumer model it is too easy

to fall into the trap of trying to keep people happy rather than trying to help them develop into mature disciples of Jesus who will not be driven by likes or dislikes, but by the internal compass of the soul tempered by a deep relationship with the master disciple maker. This is the message of Jesus and this is the message of the New Testament. It is not the message of conforming the Church to individual likes but conforming one's life to his likeness. This is the timeless kingdom model of Jesus: a group of Jesus followers training another group of Jesus followers who can train another group of Jesus followers. When this falls down, is it any wonder Christians get disillusioned with Church and drift away? It is in training disciples that the Church finds its core business. It is in producing disciples that the Church can claim success.

The obvious barrier to this is consumerism, but there are other subtle enemies. One such enemy is the segregation of church and real life. This Greek construction of life has made Christianity more like belonging to a club where one pays one's dues and demands service rather than a life that one lives every day while one lives in this world. Perhaps this idea has developed because of an over-emphasis on the "sin-management" gospel⁶ where a person deals with the sin problem, gets his or her ticket to heaven and just bides his or her time until the new kingdom arrives. Another subtle enemy of the disciple-making model of church, which extends out of this separation model, is that life is too busy to really make the time to be a real disciple of Jesus. It is in fact much easier to come to a church one enjoys than to go through the process of being a disciple. It is

⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1997), 41.

this kind of thinking, both from church attendees and ministers alike, that perpetuates the problem. Jesus did not call his followers to come to church but to be his disciples. He did not call them to meet each Sunday, but to become citizens of a new kingdom where he is the King and they are his ambassadors. If the Church is to survive a change has to be made.

To reverse the trend of Christians exiting the Church and the message of the gospel failing to make its mark, pastors and churches must make it their priority to make disciples who can make other disciples. This must start with a deep and abiding relationship with God and an understanding of what he wants to do, gleaned from his Word. This is not achieved through pulpit teaching alone, but with individuals learning how to feed themselves on the Word and build their own relationship with God through prayer. These are the building blocks of the life of a disciple and will enable him or her to grow and develop as a Christian regardless of where he or she attends or who is the pastor. Churches must adapt discipleship to the Chinese proverb that says, "If you give a man a fish you feed him for a day. If you teach a man to fish you feed him for a lifetime." Teaching disciples to feed themselves and nurture their own relationship with God will restart the self-perpetuating process Jesus began so many years ago.

One problem in the church is that attendees are not often taught how to read the Bible for themselves or pray in keeping with what the Bible says. Where these principles are taught, combined with fellowship and other aspects of church, however, they help develop strong Christians who will continue to spread the message. Teaching Christians

to nurture their own relationship with God is essential to developing a healthy reproducing Church.

At Hills Church, a Wesleyan Methodist Church in the suburb of Everton Hills, the leadership have been addressing this issue for the last three years by emphasizing Bible reading and prayer, through preaching, practical help, and opportunities to try the taught principles. As a continuation of the process of church-wide discipleship the leadership will adopt a strategy to help newcomers understand these principles and how the church values them by using a small group on prayer and one on reading the Bible. The thesis of this project is twofold: first, that disciple making is the core business of the church and second, that two fundamentals for assisting that core business are reading the Bible and prayer—taught and practiced.

The first part of this paper looks at the suburbs surrounding Hills Church and offers an analysis of population demographics, trends, and lifestyle, linking these influences and the increasing number of work hours to the way church is perceived. These insights emphasize the importance of teaching disciples how to help themselves grow spiritually. Additionally, Part One will address the ministry context at Hills Church including demographics, influential historical events, congregational and denominational expectations of ministry, and the way these affect the church's need for discipleship.

Part Two will present an approach to disciple making as a church, and will survey relevant literature on subjects applicable to building a discipleship focus using Bible reading and prayer. The need for character development in discipleship as emphasized by a Wesleyan ecclesiology will be addressed, while the work of Richard Foster will keep

the focus on the disciplines and small groups as a means of spiritual growth. Finally this section will outline a biblical approach to disciple making and ecclesiology.

In Part Three, the plan is to use two small groups to enhance the existing strategy of discipleship – one on Bible reading and the other on prayer. These small groups will offer new attendees at the church a small group version of the recent preaching series on the principle and practice of Bible reading and prayer, as well as providing weekly encouragement to engage in these disciplines. Once the small groups are completed, an assessment of the effectiveness of this program will be conducted.

PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

This chapter will describe the specific demographics of Everton Hills as well as an overlay of certain elements of the Australian culture as they apply to the area. These elements, which influence Australian interest in and attendance at church, include elements of history, views of leisure, consumer culture, the current climate of economic change, and the anti-Christian secular environment. A further aim of this chapter is to describe the trend towards consumerism in church and to present an alternate view to develop disciples instead of consumers.

An Introduction to the City of Brisbane

After many centuries of Aboriginal occupation, it was Matthew Flinders, an English sailor and the originator of the name Australia,¹ who was the first European to explore the Brisbane region in 1799. It was not until 1823, however, that Brisbane became a penal settlement under the direction of the New South Wales Governor Thomas

¹ State Library New South Wales, "Mathew Flinders' Journeys," http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/discover_collections/history_nation/terra_australis/flinders.html (accessed November 3, 2012).

Brisbane, who was petitioned by the free settlers of Sydney to send their worst convicts somewhere else. The Brisbane penal settlement had a reputation for being one of the cruelest prisons in New South Wales,² but this did not define the region for very long because “increasing agitation to bring about the end of the system of convict transportation” eventually “led to a decline in prisoners coming to Moreton Bay.”³

The area surrounding the penal settlement was first opened up to free settlers in 1838 when a group of Lutheran Missionaries was granted land in an area now known as Nundah.⁴ From 1842, after the official closure of the penal settlement, Brisbane has steadily grown as a people-friendly city, gradually expanding across the southeast corner of the state of Queensland, which was granted independence from New South Wales in 1859. Today Queensland is one of the leading tourism destinations in Australia because of its tropical weather and holiday attractions. It is also an attractive destination for immigration with more than sixteen thousand people moving to Brisbane city yearly.⁵

The Suburb of Everton Hills

Hills Church is located on the edge of what is now the city of Brisbane in a northwestern residential suburb called Everton Hills. The suburb was named after

² Wikipedia, “The History of Brisbane: 1824 Colony,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Brisbane (accessed November 2, 2012).

³ Before Brisbane was officially named, the area was called Moreton Bay. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, “The Convict Records of Queensland 1825-1842,” <http://www.amw.org.au/citation/34> (accessed November 5, 2012).

⁴ Wikipedia, “The History of Brisbane: Free Settlement,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Brisbane (accessed November 2, 2012).

⁵ Queensland Government, “Friendly, Safe City,” http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/documents/about%20council/vision2026_final_friendlysafe.pdf (accessed November 5, 2012), 12.

Everton Lodge, once located on South Pine Road, which in turn was named after the suburb Everton in Liverpool, England. Originally a part of an area called Bunyaville, located in the foothills of the D'Aguilar Mountains, Everton Hills was first subdivided in 1965 and was eventually separated off from Bunyaville in 1979.⁶ Everton Hills has developed from its semi-rural farming, fruit growing and forestry beginnings⁷ into a mix of rural, semi-detached, and high-density living. In recent years a change in the zoning restrictions has seen an increase in units and townhouses, with a subsequent increase in population density in certain areas.

The Demographics of Everton Hills

In the early years the population of Everton Hills was minimal and only increased slowly as the area was settled. In the post-war years, however, the area quickly filled up along with the outward expansion of Brisbane city.⁸ From 1981 to 2006 the population stayed relatively static.⁹ In the last five years, however, Everton Hills has increased in population by fourteen percent,¹⁰ due in large part to a relaxation of the residential

⁶ University of Queensland: Centre for the Government of Queensland, "Everton Hills," <http://queenslandplaces.com.au/everton-hills> (accessed November 2, 2012).

⁷ Ferny Hills Progress Association Inc., "History of Ferny Hills and Surrounding Suburbs," http://www.fhpa.com.au/files/ferny_hills_history.pdf (accessed November 2, 2012).

⁸ Moreton Bay Regional Council, "Everton Hills Community Profile," <http://profile.id.com.au/moreton-bay/about?WebID=470> (accessed November 3, 2012).

⁹ University of Queensland: Centre for the Government of Queensland, "Everton Hills."

¹⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Everton Hills: Census Data," http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/SSC30593?opendocument&navpos=220 (accessed November 3, 2012).

development restrictions in 2006,¹¹ resulting in an 860 percent increase in semi-detached town houses¹² that were developed on some of the original acreage allotments.

A Slowly Changing Community with the Majority Being Anglo-Saxon

Everton Hills is surrounded by suburbs that are within the catchment of Hills Church, but the population of this suburb alone stands at 5,812. The total population represented by the Everton Hills postcode, which is closer to the catchment area of Hills Church, is 41,785. The majority of the population is Anglo-Saxon, the median age of the Everton Hills population is thirty-five and there is an even balance of men and women. There are 1671 family units with an average of 1.8 children per family.¹³ Of these, 13 percent were single parent families.¹⁴ Approximately 20 percent of the population is school age children with a further 7-10 percent at university age. More than half (54.5 percent) of those aged fifteen and over were married while a further 10.7 percent were living in a de facto marriage. The population over retirement is thirteen percent.¹⁵

¹¹ Moreton Bay Regional Council, "Pine Rivers Plan," <http://www.moretonbay.qld.gov.au/subsite.aspx?id=73673> (accessed November 3, 2012).

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Everton Hills: Dwellings – Dwelling Structure," http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/SSC30593?opendocument&navpos=220 (accessed November 3, 2012).

¹³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Everton Hills: Census Data."

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Everton Hills: Families – Family Composition," http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/SSC30593?opendocument&navpos=220 (accessed November 3, 2012).

¹⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Everton Hills: People – Demographics and Education," http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/SSC30593?opendocument&navpos=220 (accessed November 3, 2012).

A Family Suburb Where Excellent Schooling Is Available Locally

These demographics are consistent with the Hills area's reputation as a family suburb with age ranges right across the spectrum. Facilities and activities available in the area also reflect this including churches. While some churches in the area have an aging population, most reflect the family nature of the area in attendance and programming. This is particularly evident at Hills Church where the family is considered essential to the church's identity and the population demographic is similar to the surrounding area.

The high ratio of families with children in Everton Hills is also reflected in the number of public and private educational institutions in the area. There are ten primary and five secondary schools within ten minutes of the Hills Church. Of these, three are well-known, well-respected, and well-attended private church schools. Some families move into the estates surrounding these schools in order to take advantage of the excellent education and Christian moral character development offered at these schools.

Increased Working Commitments Leave Limited Time for Church

Almost 90 percent of the population work full or part time with professionals and white-collar workers forming almost three quarters of the workforce. The remainder is blue-collar workers made up of trades people, laborers, machine operators and drivers. The top areas of industry employment are in various areas of government (16.1 percent).¹⁶ Most local employment is in the retail and service industries however there are

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Everton Hills: People – Employment," http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/SSC30593?opendocument&navpos=220 (accessed November 3, 2012).

some small areas of light industry.¹⁷ Sixty-eight percent of employees travelled to work by car or train,¹⁸ and many work outside the local area.

The High Cost of Consumer-Focused Living Requires Two Incomes

More than half of couple families (55.6 percent) were both working¹⁹ bringing in a median income of \$2404 a week.²⁰ This income is seen to be necessary to support the high cost of living in Everton Hills and in order to maintain private schooling fees, leisure and extra-curricular activities as well as the many consumer goods that are seen to be essential to maintaining an adequate middle-class Australian lifestyle.

In a summary of his book *Consumerism*, author Justin Healy may well have been describing Everton Hills when he asserts, “Australia is a consumer-driven society, in which success and personal fulfillment are measured by the acquisition of material things. Consumerism and overconsumption has for many Australians become a way of life, in which they experience confusion between their needs and wants.”²¹ Healy goes on to state, “Australians spend about \$10.5 billion on goods they do not use: food and drink;

¹⁷ Moreton Bay Regional Council, “Community Profile: Everton Hills – Arana Hills Industry Sectors of Employment.” <http://profile.id.com.au/moreton-bay/industries?WebID=470> (accessed November 3, 2012).

¹⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Everton Hills: People – Employment.”

¹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Everton Hills: Families – Employment Status of Couple Families,” http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/SSC30593?opendocument&navpos=220 (accessed November 3, 2012).

²⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, “Everton Hills: Families – Weekly Income,” http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/SSC30593?opendocument&navpos=220 (accessed November 3, 2012).

²¹ Justin Healey, “Consumerism Write-up,” <http://spinneypress.com.au/books/consumerism/> (accessed November 5, 2012).

appliances; exercise equipment.” He also asserts that “in 2004, Australians spent about \$500m on gym memberships that were never or hardly used.”²² Despite these statistics, 62 percent of Australians still believe that they cannot afford to buy everything they really need. This rises to 71 percent in households with children,²³ and is a significant factor in what drives working hours and the busy lives led by families in the Hills area.

A further contributing factor to longer work hours and the reduction of leisure hours is linked to economic and structural changes over recent decades. Economic factors have led employers to reduce their workforce while still requiring as much output. Research by Dr. Brigid van Wanrooy suggests that the number of full-time hours worked by the average Australian has leapt over the past two decades.²⁴ Additionally the government has worked on micro and macro economic reform, which has precipitated changes in employment and business that require longer working hours. Couple this with higher unemployment, and employees tend to do what is required to stay employed.²⁵

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the cost of living in Australia has risen by almost 40 percent over a ten-year period. Some of the greatest contributors were

²² Healey, “Consumerism Write-up.”

²³ Clive Hamilton, “Overconsumption in Australia: The Rise of the middleclass battler,” http://www.tai.org.au/documents/dp_fulltext/DP49.pdf (accessed November 5, 2012), 20.

²⁴ Anneli Knight, “A Long Work Hours Culture,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 25, 2009, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/clevel/a-long-work-hours-culture-20091125-jrbw.html> (accessed November 5, 2012).

²⁵ John Quiggin, “The Intensification of Work and the Polarisation of Labor” (paper presented at Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia Workshop, Canberra, January, 1996), <http://www.uq.edu.au/economics/johnquiggin/Conference/intensification.html> (accessed November 5, 2012).

essential services and insurance costs.²⁶ As a further indicator of cost of living, almost one third of residents in Everton Hills were paying more than \$400 per week in rent,²⁷ compared with the median rental price of \$285 per week for the whole of Australia.²⁸

Housing prices have increased markedly over the last ten years pushing the ratio of household debt to household income up from 80 percent in 1998 to around 150 percent in 2008.²⁹ Research by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research shows that the need to manage debt, combined with high levels of consumerism, has also contributed to longer working hours.³⁰ This, they indicate, has an effect on fathers, who often increase their working hours to take care of their families' needs.³¹

Increased Working Hours Means Less Discretionary Time

The vast majority of Australians believe that their lives are out of balance when it comes to working hours: they would rather spend more time with family and friends, but

²⁶ Natasha Bitá, "Inflation Rate Not a Patch on Cost of Living," *The Australian*, August 2, 2012, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/economics/inflation-rate-not-a-patch-on-cost-of-living/story-e6frg926-1226440717571> (accessed November 3, 2012).

²⁷ Moreton Bay Regional Council, "Community Profile: Everton Hills – Arana Hills Housing Rental payments," <http://profile.id.com.au/moreton-bay/housing-rental?WebID=470> (accessed November 3, 2012).

²⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Everton Hills: Census Data, Dwellings – mortgage & rent," http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/SSC30593?opendocument&navpos=220 (accessed November 3, 2012).

²⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, "4102.0 Australian Social Trends – March 2009: Economic Resources – Household Debt," <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0Main+Features60March%202009> (accessed November 4, 2012), Chart at end of report.

³⁰ Robert Drago, David Black and Mark Wooden, "Melbourne Institute Working Paper Series, Working Paper No. 12/05: The Persistence of Long Work Hours," http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/downloads/working_paper_series/wp2005n12.pdf (accessed November 5, 2012), 21.

³¹ University of Melbourne, "Media Release Wednesday 24th August 2005," <http://archive.uninews.unimelb.edu.au/view-45654.html> (accessed November 5, 2012).

they still choose to work, which leads to tension over anything else that would take time away from what is deemed an important value.³² The author of a survey into consumer culture in Australia asserts that “reclaiming leisure and family time will require many households cutting back on expenditure.”³³ This situation leaves consumers with a problem: reducing expenditure may give back leisure time, but it also reduces disposable income to undertake leisure activities. Faced with this dilemma, many choose to maintain their levels of consumption, which forces them to prioritize more carefully their leisure activities. With limited time for leisure, some find it difficult to prioritize religious activities. This occurs particularly for current church attendees who it appears are following the trend in many western countries of considering attending church once or twice a month to be adequate.³⁴ The squeeze on leisure time seriously affects potential seekers and the outreach activities of the church because going to church becomes an additional demand on an already squeezed weekend.

A “Lifestyle” Priority Leaves Limited Time for Church Attendance

This tension between the cost of living on one hand and consumerism on the other, as well as the desire for leisure and providing for the children, has led to great difficulties for churches to attract residents to activities and programs that are seen to use

³² Mike Steketee, “Hearts Say Stay, But Heads Say Work,” *The Australian*, November 1, 2001 quoted in *Overconsumption in Australia: The Rise of the middleclass battler*, Clive Hamilton, http://www.tai.org.au/documents/dp_fulltext/DP49.pdf (accessed November 5, 2012), 18.

³³ University of Melbourne, “Media Release Wednesday 24th August 2005.”

³⁴ Colin Lindsay, “Statistics Canada: Canadians attend weekly religious services less than 20 years ago,” <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-630-x/2008001/article/10650-eng.pdf> (accessed November 5, 2012).

up valuable leisure time. When added to the rapid secularization of the Australian society, many make the choice to maintain family and other activities while de-prioritizing church attendance. In an article entitled *God's OK, it's Just the Religion Bit we Don't Like*, Lindy Morris states, "Although many Australians identify themselves as religious, the majority considers religion the least important aspect of their lives when compared with family, partners, work and career, leisure time and politics."³⁵ The survey, commissioned by Germany's Bertelsmann Foundation, found that "forty-four percent of Australians considered themselves religious but said religion did not play a central role in their lives."³⁶ "Australians are among the world's most godless people," claims Larry Buttrose in summarizing the findings of a book called *Losing My Religion*, by Tom Frame.³⁷

The Curse and Blessing of a Culture Where Leisure is a Priority

This prioritization of family, career, work, leisure, and politics before God is further fueled by the persistent belief that Australia is the land of leisure and that their weekend is theirs to spend on themselves. Australians resent that work intrudes on their weekends, but when that is traded off for more disposable income, Australians will make the sacrifice. When other activities including church demand too much time, Australians

³⁵ Lindy Morris, "God's OK, It's Just the Religion Bit We Don't Like," *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 11, 2008, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world-youth-day/gods-ok-its-just-the-religion-bit-we-dont-like/2008/07/10/1215658037568.html> (accessed November 1, 2012).

³⁶ Morris, "God's OK, it's Just the Religion Bit we Don't Like."

³⁷ Larry Buttrose, "Sport, Grog and Godliness," *The Australian*, September 5, 2009, <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/sport-grog-and-godliness/story-e6frg6zo-1225769660554> (accessed November 26, 2012).

are more likely to say “No” to church in favor of other activities that are seen as more highly valued. This is a trend reflected in the volunteer sector where there has been an almost 25 percent decrease in the number of hours volunteered over a ten-year period to 2006, and it makes the operation of the church increasingly more difficult.

The Land of the Long Weekend

The salience of this view about the weekend is probably due more to nostalgia than reality. There is evidence to suggest that the idea that Australia is the “Land of the Long Weekend” is a myth perpetuated by cultural idealism.³⁸ According to Richard Dennis, quoted in an article by Adele Horin of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, “Australians often believe they live in the land of the long weekend. But they work longer hours, have less annual leave and fewer public holidays than workers in most other industrialised³⁹ countries”⁴⁰ Bert Peeters quotes Candace Sutton from the *Sunday Herald* when he writes, “In the late 1970s, Australia was described as ‘the land of the long weekend.’ Today, some have dubbed it ‘that land of the lost weekend.’”⁴¹ Nevertheless this ideal still drives Australians to aim for time away to relax. Whether or not the leisure time actually exists

³⁸ Knight, “A Long Work Hours Culture.”

³⁹ Although I am Australian, I am writing this document using American spelling since it will be submitted in the US and marked there. However on many occasions I quote from Australian sources, and where they use Australian spelling, I have chosen to leave these as printed rather than inserting “Sic.” at every occurrence.

⁴⁰ Adele Horin, “Whoever Said This Was The Land of The Long Weekend?” *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 5, 2003, <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/07/04/1057179162638.html> (accessed November 26, 2012).

⁴¹ Bert Peeters, “Australian Perceptions of the Weekend: Evidence From Collocations and Elsewhere,” in *Phraseology and Culture in English*, ed. Paul Skandera (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2007), 80.

the dream to have it still does, and it influences the choices Australians make about religion and religious duty that demands time commitment to change.

The Priority of Weekend Sport and Leisure Activities

A further pressure on limited weekend leisure time is the Australian value on sport. In research conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, it found that, “In the 12 months to April 2012, of the 2.8 million children aged 5 to 14 years, 1.7 million (60 percent) participated in at least one organised sport outside of school hours.” Participation was higher “for children in couple families (64 percent) compared with those living in one-parent families (48 percent).” Of all sports, soccer was the most popular for males and swimming and diving the most popular for females. Netball was a close second at 16 percent of the population. According to the survey, children spent on average a total of five hours participating in organized sport outside school hours.⁴² Parents spend a significant period of time outside work hours taking children to sporting activities and watching them play. This places an added pressure on attending church activities, especially since many sporting activities take place on Sunday morning, again producing a dilemma in the minds of Christians and non-Christians alike to have to prioritize their values of leisure and family as opposed to giving that time to the local church. At Hills Church this is a noticeable phenomenon during the sporting season.

⁴² Australian Bureau of Statistics, “4901.0 - Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia, Apr 2012: Sports Participation,” <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/4901.0~Apr+2012~Main+Features~Sports+participation?OpenDocument> (accessed November 6, 2012).

But extracurricular activities are not limited to sporting endeavors; parents also prioritize activities such as playing a musical instrument, singing, dancing and drama. The Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that thirty-eight percent of children aged five to fourteen years belonging to couple families, participated in at least one of these outside school activities. Females mostly participated in dancing, and most males learned a musical instrument (although there were also a high percentage of females who learned instruments as well).⁴³ The great thing about these activities is that although they do present “competition” for the available weekend leisure hours, they are mostly compatible with church programs and events, with some family based churches offering many opportunities for children to perform using the skills that they have developed. This is certainly true at Hills Church where the church’s emphasis on family has enabled members to use many of the skills and talent that have resulted from the parents’ investment of time, energy and finances in their children. Extracurricular activities and the limited time available for them make it difficult for churches to operate in the same way they have in the recent past. Families must make decisions on activities as they compete for the precious time available. This forces them to make prioritization decisions, based on personal and culturally expected norms as well as spiritual desires.

⁴³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, “4901.0 - Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia, Apr 2012: Cultural Activities,” <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/4901.0Main%20Features3Apr%202012?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4901.0&issue=Apr%202012&num=&view=> (accessed November 6, 2012).

The Perceived Irrelevance of the Church Institution in a Secular Society

While all of these things have an effect on churches in the Hills area, one cultural change experienced over the last few decades has made a major impact on the ability of churches to attract parishioners: the rapid secularization of the Australian society.

Nicholas Tonti-Filippini describes three possible senses in which a society may be secular: “A society may be secular in the first sense of religion not being a part of public life, the so-called separation of Church and State. It may be secular in the second sense of declining religious belief and practice. Finally it may be secular in the sense of secularism emerging as an alternative belief form.”⁴⁴ He asserts that Australia is witnessing what appears to be “a very aggressive exclusionist form of secularism which views religious belief and practice with arrogant intolerance and dismissiveness. This kind of secularist belief is characterised by attempts to exclude contributions to public discussion on the basis of a kind of bigotry that classifies the contributions of persons who are religious in a nominalist way.”⁴⁵

This aggressive secularism has not only pervaded the parliamentary process, but has now begun to influence the rank and file population of Australia particularly the nominal white Anglo-Saxon population that dominates much of the Hills area. In a political lobbying process where the Church is seen as out of date with the current trends in society, it is difficult for Christians to have a valid voice to hold onto current Judeo-Christian values let alone enter debate about current issues. This increasing disconnection

⁴⁴ Nicholas Tonti-Filippini, “Religion in a Secular Society,” http://www.humanrights.gov.au/frb/papers/Religion_in_a_Secular_Society.pdf (accessed November 6, 012), 3.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

and the aggressive promotion of alternative viewpoints leaves many citizens (including Christians) wary of the Christian viewpoint. Unfortunately the press also promotes the idea that “the views of Christians are associated with fundamentalism, that unenlightened and ignorantly dogmatic religion, which is impervious to science, reason, and compassion.”⁴⁶

In a survey commissioned by Olive Tree Media, McCrindle Research found that more than 50 percent of Australians were significantly repelled from Christianity and the Church because it was outdated.⁴⁷ The survey also found that the Church was held in a significantly negative light (from 58-76 percent of respondents) because of issues such as church abuse, hypocrisy, judging others, an authoritarian style and exclusivity. These mindsets pervade the Australian society making it difficult for churches to find a voice and attract people to church, especially when many leisure activities and clubs provide as much of a sense of community as any church.

These issues are rarely identified or addressed in some churches. There is a sense in which churches seem to go on as they were in the hope that somehow people from the community will be reached, or the community will change their minds. Yet there is no indication that this is the case, and churches, particularly along traditional lines, are dwindling in number. One report puts the loss in the Uniting Church alone at 30 percent

⁴⁶ Tonti-Filippini, “Religion in a Secular Society,” 7.

⁴⁷ Olive Tree Media, “Australian Communities Report,” <http://www.olivetreemedia.com.au/resources/Olive%20Tree%20Media/Apologetics%20Series/Reseach%20Summary-web.pdf> (accessed November 10, 2012), 3.

over the last ten years.⁴⁸ Overall protestant churches are maintaining their numbers because of the transfer of Christians from traditional churches to more contemporary ones,⁴⁹ but this does not seem to be making an inroad into the general unchurched population of Australia.

It seems that some Protestant churches hang onto their traditions so long that they become out of touch with the current society, and attendees lose interest and move on or out. This appears to be particularly true of families and young people since it is a common complaint in traditional churches that only a few old people are left.

Those Who Attend Church Often Demand Programs and Entertainment

To combat this some Protestant churches have moved to produce services, programs and activities that are contemporary and culturally relevant; in fact churchgoers are knowingly or unknowingly demanding this very change. When a person leaves a church because they are singing old hymns, and joins a church where they sing contemporary songs, they are reinforcing the style that they like. This also occurs with other things: when people stay because of the kids' program, or because of the preaching, or because of the air-conditioning, or because they love the fact that they can come without being asked to do too much, they are reinforcing this kind of church as a successful model of church. In his book called *Thieves in the Temple*, G. Jeffrey

⁴⁸ Naomi Selvaratnam, "Fear That Traditional Churches are in Decline as Attendance Dwindles," *Herald Sun*, November 22, 2011, <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/fear-that-churches-in-decline/story-fn7x8me2-1226202239137> (accessed November 10, 2012).

⁴⁹ National Church Life Survey, "Church Growth and Decline: Fast Facts," <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=133&page=0> (accessed November 10, 2012).

MacDonald argues, "Faith has become a consumer commodity . . . People shop for congregations that make them feel comfortable rather than spiritually challenged."⁵⁰

Some churches seem to have become good at attracting people to their church, but this seems to have overshadowed the importance of discipleship growth and character change. This is no more clearly shown than in the recent "reveal survey" conducted by Willow Creek Community Church. The authors of the study discovered that church activity did not necessarily produce spiritual growth.⁵¹

This has been observed at Hills Church. People visit and stay for a while, but then move to another church because they have a better youth or children's program, more anonymity, or more visiting speakers. Judgments about what church to join or what church to stay at are usually only made by existing churchgoers, and pastors have fallen into the trap of working to provide for the needs of these people. Tom Frame, in a study of religion in Australia, claims that the effort to modernize the "Church's outward appearance to make its message more relevant" is not the answer. He states, "If the Church's core message was little different from the assertions and aspirations promoted by popular culture, why would anyone bother with the extra effort involved in embracing religious belief."⁵²

⁵⁰ G. Jeffrey MacDonald, *Thieves in the Temple: The Christian Church and the Selling of the American Soul* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), xi.

⁵¹ Willow Creek Association, "Reveal Key Findings: Church activity had limited impact on Spiritual growth," section 2, http://www.revealnow.com/key_findings.asp (accessed November 11, 2012).

⁵² Tom Frame, *Losing My Religion: Unbelief in Australia* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2009), 74.

The Need for a Different Model

Yet there is a problem with this and it is a fundamental one. Jesus did not call his followers to make churches that keep people happy, or stay the same as one's childhood memories. It is the wrong question to be answering if one wants to know how to better keep the Christians who are coming. The right question is "How are disciples made?" The answer to this question radically changes the way one thinks about and does church, especially as it relates to those who are not in the faith yet.

The Development of Disciples Instead of Consumers

There are enough obstacles to overcome when reaching people for Jesus in the Australian culture without creating additional obstacles by making Christians into consumers. What is needed is a different model. One that follows the mandate Jesus gave to make disciples, and yet still reaches a busy, secular community who sees the Church as irrelevant in their list of priorities. The new model must take into account that Christians and non-Christians alike have limited time, and are making less and less time for churches that demand attending twice on Sunday and every other time the church doors are open. Yet it must still hold in tension the need to make disciples rather than simply offer membership to a club or entertainment for disciples for and in the kingdom of God. This is fundamentally different from simply attending a church service no matter how many times a person attends.

A Lifestyle Instead of an Attraction

The key issue is making disciples. This must be the priority of the church, and while this requires time and commitment, when it is done well it will be self-perpetuating. A church that concentrates on this will go a long way to not only following Jesus' mandate, but also transforming the society in which it lives. Christians who live like Jesus in all walks of life will be the key to reversing the trend of the perceived irrelevance of the church.

While a church should strive to be relevant, this should never be at the expense of the truth of the Word and the transformative work of God in the life of the individual, and the effect that this has on the people who surround them. A discipleship-based church should lead to a changed culture eventually based on the character and caliber of the individual. A member of the local church explained it this way, "discipleship is the most natural way to be relevant because it is born from a real believer, really following Christ, in the real world."⁵³

⁵³ Kathryn Smith, e-mail message to author, November 26, 2012.

CHAPTER 2

MINISTRY CONTEXT OF HILLS CHURCH

The Current Congregation

As with many other churches in Australia, the current congregation at Hills Church is almost entirely made up of people who transferred from other churches and denominations. Only 4 percent of the congregation became Christians at Hills Church, while 11.2 percent of the congregation indicates that they were not attending church prior to coming to Hills Church. Almost 14 percent of the church indicated that they attended a Uniting Church (from Methodist roots) prior to attending Hills Church and a further 2.4 percent say they attended a Methodist church. All together this makes 16 percent who basically come from a Methodist background. A similar number of people previously attended the Baptist church (16.8 percent). The next highest numbers of attendees are from a large local Assembly of God church (14.4 percent), although when all charismatic and Pentecostal churches are taken into account, they make up an equally high proportion of the church population. In short, almost 50 percent of the congregation originally comes from Methodist/Uniting, Baptist, and Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. However, it is quite possible that many of those who attended a Pentecostal/Charismatic church may

have transferred from Uniting churches. Almost 9 percent of attendees were previously in another Wesleyan Methodist Church and 7 percent came from Presbyterian churches. The rest are from a smattering of other churches. So while the denominational flavor of Hills Church is Wesleyan Methodist, and 25 percent have a Methodist background of some sort, the church context includes a diverse denominational mix.

Demographics: A Family-Feel, Majority-Anglo-Saxon Church

Hills Church has a family feel with a broad range of people in every age group up to eighty years of age. More than 60 percent of the church is married, and there are eighty-one family units ranging from couples with kids (attending or not) to single parent families. The average number of children per family is one point seven. About 20 percent of the church population is school age children and about 20 percent are university age. Nearly 30 percent are over the retirement age of sixty-five. The median age of the church population falls in the forty to forty-nine year old age bracket. Males make up 43 percent of the church population and 57 percent is female. While Hills Church has members from diverse ethnic backgrounds such as Tongan, Fijian and Malaysian, the majority of attendees are Anglo-Saxon. Approximately 61 percent of the church population work full or part time. Over 71 percent are white-collar workers, 36 percent are in the professional/technical field, 15 percent in service and 15 percent clerical. The median family income is \$50,000 to \$75,000 and more than 50 percent travel outside the area to work.

Personal Bible Reading and Prayer Not Regularly Practiced by All

While Hills Church is made up of Christians from many denominational and church backgrounds, the practice of Bible reading and prayer is not a daily commitment with many. In terms of Bible reading, 43 percent of the church read their Bible less than once a week. Although there are few people who never or hardly ever read their Bible, the level of engagement with the text for daily life could be improved. An anecdotal measure of the level of engagement in the biblical text comes from conversational references to what is being read. Early in the author's ministry at Hills Church this was not as noticeable among the congregational members as it could be. In regard to prayer, 21 percent of the congregation prays less than three times a week. When the measure of prayer is taken as those who attend the prayer meeting, only four members of the church attended the weekly prayer meeting at the beginning of the author's ministry.

Belief That a Good Church Has the Right Elements and Runs Multiple Programs

The general expectation of church members in the evangelical church in Australia seems to be that if a church puts together the right elements and does them with excellence, the church will grow and be successful. Although this is hard to quantify, it is something that has flavored Hills Church leadership and members over the years as they have aimed at growth. But this is not a deliberate tactic of the church – it is subtler than that. It is part of an unspoken set of rules that are gleaned from watching successful churches and desiring to be like them.

Discipleship Is Seen as a Training Program

Another generally accepted norm in the Church in Australia is that discipleship is a training program for new believers, but not necessarily for all church members. The word “disciple” has come to mean those who are in the church. Again, this view is not a deliberate view of the church members, but a subconscious and tacit acceptance of what they have experienced and what has been taught over the years in many churches. As a result of this generally accepted view, many at Hills Church saw deliberate discipleship as something for someone else in the congregation rather than for themselves.

An Unconscious Acceptance of the “Sin Management” Gospel

A further general assumption in the evangelical Church in Australia, developed over the last few decades, is that the gospel is about dealing with sin and making sure that the disciple gets into heaven. This thinking began with the understanding that Christians are saved by grace alone (Eph 2:8,9), and has been solidified in a church landscape where members are encouraged to be consumers who belong to a club. The unspoken idea is that if people get saved, they should attend church and try not to do anything bad before they die so that they can make it into heaven. Although this was not a readily expressed view of Hills Church members, it was still a factor in their understanding of Church and ministry.

The Methodist Emphasis on Holiness and Life Transformation

John Wesley believed that human nature could be perfected, and he was “cheerfully optimistic about the sovereignty and providence of God who could bring even

the most recalcitrant sinner under the rehabilitative force of grace.”¹ Michael Henderson puts it well: “With a hopeful belief in the perfectibility of man, coupled with a serious determination to save all who could be reached, he mobilized his army of Methodists to ‘spread scriptural holiness throughout the land’ and bring the outcasts back into the redemptive kingdom of God.”² This message of holiness and life transformation is foundational to Methodism and influences all branches of the Church including the Wesleyan Methodist Church and Hills Church as one of its member churches.

An Acknowledgement That People Should Grow

At the heart of the Methodist emphasis on holiness is the assumption that God wants people to grow to be more like him in word and deed.³ John states that “Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did” (1 Jn 2:6 New Living Translation). Indeed the very word holiness in Greek and Hebrew in reference to God describes his “God-ness”: the very nature of God.⁴ The message of sanctification towards holiness in Methodism is that process by which people develop “God-ness” or become Christlike. After spending most of 1779 reading and studying the Bible as the only standard of truth and pure religion, Wesley wrote: “I saw, in a clearer and clearer light, the indispensable necessity of having ‘the mind of Christ,’ and of ‘walking as Christ also

¹ D. Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting* (Anderson: Francis Asbury Press, 1997), 104.

² Ibid.

³ Bruce Bickel & Stan Jantz, *Growing as a Christian 101* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2005), 243.

⁴ Charles W. Carter, ed., *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 1984), 1:116.

walked' . . . And this was the light, wherein at this time I generally considered religion, as an uniform following of Christ, and entire inward and outward conformity to the Master.”⁵ Despite a narrow view of discipleship and a limited view on the extent of the gospel, Hills Church still maintains the Wesleyan perspective that at the heart of the Christian message is the idea that people should grow spiritually.

A Tendency to Measure by Externals Rather Than the Heart

Unfortunately, this emphasis on the outward conformity of living like Christ led some branches of Methodism toward legalism. Wesley’s aim was always the perfection of love towards God that resulted in actions that glorified him. But there is such a fine line between modified behavior and the modified attitude behind it. Sometimes modifying behavior leads to the change in attitude, but this is not always the case, and it is difficult to measure change in attitude unless it is measured by behavioral change. Hence some measures of behavior were expected of Methodists. Initially these behaviors were considered an outworking of holiness but over time they became activities or prohibitions that must adhered to for membership. Sometimes keeping these rules became more important than the change of character they were supposed to represent and this reflects on the ministry context of Hills Church over the years.

⁵ *The Works of John Wesley* (1872; repr., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 11:367, quoted in Carter, *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, 1:522.

The Impact of The Uniting Church on Wesleyan Church Planting

The Uniting Church of Australia came into being on June 22, 1977 through the union of the Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches of Australia.⁶ The broad nature of the union and the prospect of the loss of Methodist identity caused some members of the Methodist Church of Australia to leave the Union and join the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia.⁷ The Rev. Dr. Don Hardgrave states, “Union provided an honorable reason for many Methodists, who were seeking a more biblical faith, to withdraw.” He goes on to say, “A number of them joined the Wesleyan Methodist Church.”⁸ Hardgrave also admits that although the parent church in the USA had adopted the name The Wesleyan Church, the use of the name The Wesleyan Methodist Church continued to be a factor in the growth of the church in Australia⁹ since it attracted Methodists who were looking for familiar worship and theology. According to Hardgrave, “The failure of the Methodist church to provide an alternative for the evangelicals within its ranks” at the formation of the Uniting church, provided the Wesleyan Methodists with their “greatest opportunity since their inception in Australia.”¹⁰ He indicates that contacts for the new churches came from “newspapers such as *New Life* and the secular press, through friendships, family ties and such

⁶ The Uniting Church in Australia, “About the Uniting Church,” The Uniting Church in Australia, May 28, 2013, accessed May 28, 2013, <http://www.uca.org.au/about.htm>.

⁷ “Methodist Church of Australia,” Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Methodist_Church_of_Australasia (accessed May 28, 2013).

⁸ Don Hardgrave, *For Such a Time* (MacGregor: A Pleasant Surprise, 1988), 106.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

interdenominational organizations as Scripture Union and the Keswick conventions.” This allowed new churches to be planted and saved disenfranchised Methodists from being lost to the system.¹¹ These contacts also included “high quality recruits” that strengthened leadership of the Wesleyan Methodist Church “at the local level and beyond.”¹² These denominational recruiting methods were at the heart of the birth of Hills Church when a group of Uniting Church members formed the nucleus of the new church.

Methodists Who Want to Stay Methodist: No Change Please

The problem with many new churches forming out of those leaving the Methodist church was not apparent at first. Initially there was a renewed sense of life, vigor and community in the church, and the decade after union saw exponential growth. Unfortunately, the strong resolve and commitment to evangelical Methodism that caused members to leave after Union sometimes became a stumbling block to local churches and the denomination. New members became resistant to change and some innovation and at times blocked these initiatives in a desire to hold onto particular traditions or experiences. Many innovative leaders and members were lost to the movement over the years in an attempt to protect the status quo, and the denomination hung so tightly onto the message of holiness that at times it bordered on legalism. The unfortunate byproduct of this was a denomination that failed to innovate and eventually lost the momentum gained during

¹¹ Hardgrave, *For Such a Time*, 117.

¹² Ibid.

those early years after union. Many leaders and ministers from those early days lament the loss of momentum and belief in changing the Christian landscape of Australia. Over the years this denominational reluctance to change has affected Hills Church as well.

Increasing Liberal Theology Is the “Last Straw”: Stay True or Else

A strengthening of this rigidity in members of the Wesleyan Methodist Church that developed after the formation of the Uniting Church is its increasing liberal theology. Previous members of the Methodist and Uniting Churches observe the Uniting Church continually heading toward a more liberal theology, and this serves to strengthen their resolve to keep true to the original intentions and beliefs of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. While this is laudable, it does at times make it difficult for practices to be adapted and innovation to be made during changing at times. Again, this denominational resistance occasionally showed itself in the Hills Church congregation.

Pastoral Leadership and Its Impact on Hills Church Culture

Planted in 1981, Hills Church was one of the churches that was formed from those that left the Uniting Church after Union and at times the positive and negative effects of this have been felt in the church. After the church was planted, it grew by various means including the addition of groups from a couple of churches that had experienced difficulty. Nevertheless, the church has had great growth and vibrancy over the years, and owes this to the quality of the people and the strength of its leaders.

A Pioneering Spirit and a Narrow Focus

In Easter 1981 the Rev. Don Hardgrave met with four families during a camping holiday on the banks of the Burnett River. These four families formed the nucleus of the Everton Hills Wesleyan Methodist Church (now Hills Church) and on “December 6, 1981 twenty-nine people gathered in the old Baptist Union building on Queens Road, Everton Hills for worship.”¹³ The energy of those days was infectious and the pioneering nature of the founding pastor, Don Hardgrave, could be felt in many ways, especially as he helped the church to take the bold step to purchase the small church building in 1982.¹⁴ These great days continued under the leadership of Pastor Denis Hartin until 1985 and the focus in those early days was about staying true to Methodism and the Wesleyan message of heart purity and holiness. Although change always presents its problems, this pioneering spirit is still evident in the church today.

Leadership Development and Spirituality: An Open but Closed Model

After the departure of Pastor Denis Hartin, an urgent prayer meeting was held for a replacement and on that very day within one hour of the prayer meeting, a letter was sent from the USA from Pastor Phil McCallum about the possibility of serving in Australia.¹⁵ Pastor Phil McCallum served the church for ten years. During this time the

¹³ The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia, *Membership at Hills Church: A Wesleyan Methodist Church* (Everton Hills, QLD: Hills Church, 2010), 32.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Membership at Hills Church*, 32.

church experienced considerable growth peaking at 330 people on average.¹⁶ In faith the church purchased the block of land adjacent to the church and negotiated the use of government land at the rear of the property. As the church grew it moved to the local school hall and a new sanctuary and office block was built to house the growing congregation. Pastor Phil (as he was known) was not only a visionary, but also a deeply spiritual man and he brought this flavor to the church and its leaders. During his leadership the church not only experienced growth in numbers, but also a deepening of worship and preaching, and many were hungry for a deeper walk with God.

Pastor Phil also spent time developing leadership in the church and many are still in leadership today at Hills Church and other churches. With such openness to spiritual depth the church experienced a small expression of the charismatic gifts and the denomination, unused to this, stepped in to take care of the situation. The unfortunate by-product of this was the departure of Pastor Phil and a polarization of the church on the charismatic issue resulting in a number of people leaving the church initially and then over the coming years. The sensitivity to the charismatic issue in the church is still prevalent, but the church retains its passion for leadership development, vision for the future and a desire for deep spirituality.

Arts and Community Engagement: Necessary but Too Costly

After Pastor Phil's departure and six months interim leadership by Pastor Graeme Carnell, the church called Pastor Peter Breen as Senior Pastor. Pastor Peter led the church

¹⁶ From Hills Church attendance database located at the reception desk. The data shows weekly attendance figures over time.

through a season of change and helped members to embrace a more community-focused ministry. This community focus involved street ministry to the homeless as well as the addition of a counseling service for the community. Pastor Peter's love of the arts combined with his social concern also saw the establishment of "Juggler's Café" where artists were given opportunity to perform. These acts ranged from jazz, to stand-up comedy, and the artists ranged from graffiti artists to sculptors. The juggler's concept became well known and still exists today as an independent ministry under Peter Breen's leadership in an area of Brisbane called "The Valley." The counseling service remains an important part of the community ministry of Hills Church and now hosts five counselors. Like Phil Mcallum, Pastor Peter's departure from Hills Church was under painful circumstances. Disagreement arose about the balance between the human cost of community ministry and the care of the members of the church. This tension eventually resulted in Pastor Peter leaving. The difficulty of this separation is still in the minds of some members, but the legacy of community concern still exists in the church, perhaps to a lesser level. Since those days, the church has begun a low-cost second-hand clothing store and a ministry to help people who need to get out of crippling debt.

Pastoral Care and Teaching: Feels Good but Feels Selfish

Pastor Tom Markotanyos joined the team in 2001, and after Pastor Peter Breen's departure, he took over the senior role until December 2008. Pastor Tom brought a depth of biblical teaching to the church along with demonstrative pastoral care. These elements were important in the healing of the church members and in the ongoing good work of the local church. Under Pastor Tom's ministry the church grew back to health although

numbers continued to decline. Hills Church continues to value Bible-based teaching and the importance of pastoral care for the members of the church while at the same time reaching out to the community. Pastor Tom resigned as senior pastor of Hills Church in December 2008 in response to what he termed a “call to leave,” even although he did not have an appointment to which to go.

Although the local church was happy under the pastor care of Pastor Tom, there were some who felt the church needed to be more aggressive in vision, strategy, church ministry and growth. In an attempt to reach this goal, the church appointed Pastor Lyall Mercer. Unfortunately Pastor Lyall’s strategy for accelerated change and growth caused maximum tension throughout the church and after six months he was asked to resign. Once again Hills Church was in need of pastoral care and direction.

The Impact of Pastoral Change on Hills Church Culture

The transition in pastoral staff and the respective focus of each pastor cannot be ignored in the assessment of the ministry context of Hills Church. Along with the denominational focus, the demographics, and the general beliefs of local church members, it forms an important environmental consideration for the future direction of the church. Following are some key considerations for pastoral leadership into the future.

Trust Must Be Developed

The church has been ably led by a number of pastors with different values and focus over the years. Since some of the pastoral departures have been in difficult circumstances during polarizing congregational debate, it is essential for any pastoral

leadership in the future to develop trust. Change can only be undertaken if the members trust the leadership to protect the interests of the church and its members while leading them to a preferred future. The health of the church depends on all levels of the church being listened to and respected, and when this is achieved, the development of the church and its members can be achieved. In his book, *The Speed of Trust*, Steven M. R. Covey writes, “Nothing is as fast as the speed of trust, nothing is as profitable as the economics of trust, nothing is as relevant as the persuasive impact of trust. And the dividends of trust can significantly enhance the quality of every relationship on every level of your life.”¹⁷

Relationships Matter

A second consideration in the future ministry development at Hills Church is the importance of relationships. Hills Church is a family church and all ages are important to the life of the church, not just in word but also in action. Although at times forward movement can cause pain to some, it can be more smoothly accomplished when relationships are treated with value.

Purpose Must Be Connected to Biblical Theology

With the Wesleyan Methodist denomination’s strong emphasis on Scripture combined with Hills Church’s history with biblical teaching, any future direction must be firmly based in the biblical text. Members are used to hearing biblical messages and want to know that the direction they are being asked to go follows scriptural principles.

¹⁷ Stephen M.R. Covey, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 285.

Although varied methods and processes can be used, underlying principles that are grounded in Scripture will gain ready support.

The People Need a Shepherd

A further consideration in the future ministry development at Hills Church arising out of their history is that the people need a shepherd. With the many pastoral changes, at times members can feel leaderless. Many members have outlasted all the ministers, but they still desire to be led well. A shepherd knows how to lead the sheep to a green meadow or to quiet waters while taking them on a journey. Successful leadership at Hills Church will involve an understanding of the past and a gentle pathway to the future.

The Importance of Mission and the Cost Must Be Taught

Although trust, relationships, biblical theology and shepherding are important elements in the future development and direction of Hills Church, the importance of mission and the cost of that mission must still be taught and embraced. Jesus gave the church a very important mission: to go “and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them . . . [and] teaching them to observe all” that Jesus commanded his disciples (Mt 28:19,20). He also taught that the greatest commandment was to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:37,39). These great teachings of Jesus require personal and corporate commitment. They imply love and care for the individual both inside and outside the church. They demand a commitment beyond personal comfort until they have

been accomplished. The mission of the church cannot be sacrificed for the comfort of people.

Bible Reading and Prayer as a Catalyst for Change

The way forward is discipleship, but it requires a beginning point, and this beginning point is with the fundamental spiritual tools for engagement in personal prayer and Bible reading. No matter the past experience of Hills Church, its future health, relies on disciples embracing demonstrative discipleship of personal transformation and commitment to mission. To move forward, members must be taught not to rely on pastoral support or church priorities for their spiritual health, but to rely on their relationship with God, developed through prayer and reading and applying the Bible.

Moving From Programs to Solid Personal Faith

Many churches run programs for the sake of members and the community at large, and these programs are generally useful and effective. But programs, just like the disciplines are only effective if they help people connect with God. Unfortunately it is easy for churches to run programs and forget their purpose. At Hills Church the health of its members and the church at large will depend on solid personal faith rather than additional or fewer programs. If programs are to be developed, they need to be able to produce disciples with solid faith or be run by disciples of solid faith.

Moving from Consumers to Contributors

A further change that will help Hills Church to move forward is to work on changing members from consumers to contributors. Much of the modern church growth

movement brought about performances and slick marketing, but this has turned many churchgoers into consumers. While there is no problem with striving for quality, the problem occurs when members base their experience around getting their wants met. At Hills Church this is not a major problem, yet the subtlety of this can easily creep in and pastoral leadership must be vigilant to help members learn the importance of contribution to the missional mandate of the church before the personal tastes of the individual.

Moving from a Church Based Life to a Disciple's Life

Finally, if the church is to move forward and make an impact, it must move the personal focus of its members from a church based life to a disciple's life. Again this is a subtle difference, because meeting as the Church is fundamentally important to life with Christ. But the real issue here is the understanding of discipleship: discipleship is not sitting in church and trying to be good until Jesus comes. It is much deeper than that. It involves personal transformation and transmission of the message of the gospel in word and deed to others. The health and vitality of Hills Church depends on making this transition. A church full of consumers is unhealthy and unable to make an impact for the kingdom. A church full of disciples that have been trained to listen to God and obey him will go a long way to seeing those outside the church reached for Jesus.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Disciple-making has been a fundamental tenet of the Wesleyan ecclesiology since John Wesley decided to do all he could to avail himself of the means of grace, and all he could to help others do the same. His desire was to love God and love his neighbor¹ and to encourage others in the same pursuit in order to “rediscover the vitality of original Christianity.”² Over recent years, however, there have been many other great contributions to the debate about discipleship as well as the process and definition of discipleship. A review of these contributions will help address critical issues that may influence the discipleship process at Hills Church, inform a clearer understanding of what motivates Hills Church towards disciple-making, and clarify how best to carry this out.

¹ S. T. Kimbrough, ed., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), 124.

² Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 14.

Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology

Edited by S. T. Kimbrough

An understanding of the nature of the church, as seen through Wesleyan eyes, is an important beginning point for the treatment of discipleship at Hills Church. Since Wesley's ministry was not created to be a new church, it is not surprising that there is "no set doctrine of the church bequeathed to us by [him],"³ but rather a wealth of teaching and commitment to the cause of discipleship. In an attempt to bring some clarity to Wesleyan ecclesiology however, S. T. Kimbrough brings together a number of contributors to address the four notes of the church, namely "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church," especially as it relates to "ecclesiology and the gathered community."⁴

Although Heitzenrater confirms that "Wesley spent little time on the subject of ecclesiology,"⁵ he recognizes that Wesley's 'practice' gives clear pointers to an ecclesiological position.⁶ a position that places more emphasis on the faithfulness of the gathered church than on the gathering alone.⁷ To Heitsenrater this is seen in the emphasis on personal and social holiness that identifies faithful people in the Church "in a very literal sense [as] people who are full of faith."⁸ To Wesley, this faithfulness exhibited itself in " [avoiding] evil in every kind, [doing] good of every possible sort to all people,

³ Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, 76.

⁴ Ibid., 11.

⁵ Ibid., 120.

⁶ Ibid., 121.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 122.

and . . . [using] the means of grace whenever possible."⁹ By 'grace' Wesley did not mean an unmerited gift from God. He felt grace represented God's relationship with believers, and his activity in their lives. Wesley said that grace is the power of God through the Holy Spirit working in the believer to achieve what he wants.¹⁰

Kimbrough presents some significant insights as to the foundations of the Church today. To Wesley, the Methodist Church was made up of people who loved God and loved their neighbor. He called this holiness or 'genuine Christianity.' Through Methodism, Wesley was simply trying to help renew the church in light of its basic intent,¹¹ and holiness was at the heart of this renewal. Wesley felt that the Church functioned best when a "single hearted love of God and neighbour" was demonstrated by "'works of piety' (prayer, fasting, searching the Scriptures, partaking of the Lord's supper as a 'means of grace') and 'works of mercy' ('doing good unto all men to their souls and to their bodies')." ¹² It was Wesley's view that "God works [in you]; therefore you can work. God works [in you]; therefore you must work."¹³ He felt that the Church should aim "for personal, communal and social holiness" which he demonstrated himself through a deep commitment to God as well as to others through "prison visiting and

⁹ Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, 122.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹² "Sermon 85, On Working Out Our Salvation," in *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition., ed. W. R. Ward and R. P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 3:199-209, quoted in S. T. Kimbrough, ed., *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology* (Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), 33.

¹³ *Ibid.*

agitating for reform, through setting up dispensaries for the sick, combating addictions, and establishing schools for children."¹⁴ Ultimately Wesley's focus was on the individual Church member rather than in developing an extensive ecclesiology. He "sought to help the individual grow spiritually,"¹⁵ arguing forcefully that God loves his people, and empowers them to love, especially to love others.¹⁶

The limitation of this resource is that it does not offer an extensive Wesleyan Ecclesiology. The comparison of Orthodox and Wesleyan ecclesiology finds some points of similarity and some points of difference, but does not fill in the blanks. Its benefit however is to show the outstanding strengths of the simplicity of Wesley's ecclesiology: that a disciple should do all he or she can to love God and show love to others. If the Church would do this it would not be far from what it was intended to be.

The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teaching on Discipleship

by Dallas Willard

A second topic for any treatment of discipleship is an understanding of the importance of Jesus' teaching on discipleship. According to Dallas Willard, the teaching that Christians are meant to make and be disciples has been missing from the Church. He

¹⁴ Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, 33.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁶ *The Works of John Wesley*, 6:235, quoted in Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, 80.

calls this the “great omission.”¹⁷ His concern is that “so far as the visible institutions of our day are concerned, discipleship is clearly optional.”¹⁸ Willard contends that this phenomena can best be seen in church members who have never truly decided to follow Christ¹⁹ but have opted instead for what Bonhoeffer describes as “cheap grace,”²⁰ believing that, as A.W. Tozer puts it, “we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need him as Savior and that we have the right to postpone our obedience to him as Lord as long as we want to!”²¹ For Willard, this “nondiscipleship” costs a person “exactly that abundance of life Jesus said he came to bring”²² and locks them into moral defeat.²³ It is his thesis that “only avid discipleship to Christ through the Spirit brings the inward transformation of thought and feeling and character.”²⁴ He writes, “As we study with Jesus we increasingly become on the inside . . . exactly what we are on the outside.”²⁵ But, to Willard, managing behavior is not the main issue, it is “attitudes or

¹⁷ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings On Discipleship* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2006), xii.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 8.

²¹ A. W. Tozer, *I Call It Heresy* (Harrisburg: Christian Publications, 1974), 5f, quoted in Willard, *The Great Omission*, 14.

²² Willard, *The Great Omission*, 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

settled personality traits that make up the substance of the ‘hidden’ self.²⁶ in other words “transformation of the total state of the soul.”²⁷ He calls disciples to be so linked with Jesus that they are possessed and permeated by character that comes from the fruit of the Spirit which will ultimately show itself in the natural and supernatural deeds of love.²⁸ If this is the teaching that has been “omitted” from the Church then it has been lost again since the time of Wesley who saw these things as essential to the personal lives of individuals and the corporate life of the Church.

Willard goes on to suggest that as students of Jesus the goal is to be like him,²⁹ and that this can be achieved by engaging in spiritual disciplines which include solitude, silence, study, service, fasting, prayer and worship.³⁰ A spiritual discipline, Willard explains, is “an activity within our power – something we can do – that brings us to a point where we can do what we at present cannot do by direct effort.”³¹ These things will help disciples to produce spiritual fruit, which he declared is a sure sign of a transformed character.³² To Willard, this is “working out your own salvation” as spoken of in

²⁶ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 16.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

³² *Ibid.*, 28.

Philippians 2,³³ and is the “process whereby the inner most being of the individual takes on the quality of character of Jesus himself.”³⁴

Although Bible reading and prayer are not virtues in themselves, these habits can help disciples to encounter the transforming work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit in order that they live the abundant life and bring the light of Christ to their circle of influence. “Life in Christ has to do with obedience to his teaching,”³⁵ Willard says. And this teaching is found in the Word of God which should be: meditated on as a “way of filling our minds with what they need,”³⁶ kept for they are life and healing,³⁷ memorized so it influences how one thinks,³⁸ treated as a source of knowledge about the most important things in life³⁹ and obeyed so that one can be prosperous and successful.⁴⁰

The limitations of this resource to the issue of disciple-making is that, other than providing encouragement to engage in the disciplines, it does not provide practical examples of these disciplines or how to practice them. This is a weakness across the Church. Much effort is put into encouraging disciples to grow, but not enough time is spent putting discipleship tools into their hands. The benefit of this resource is the

³³ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 30.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

encouragement for churches to re-engage with disciple-making to lead members towards transformation, which exhibits itself in love for God and love for their neighbor.

The Disciple Making Church

by Bill Hull

Bill Hull has written a number of other books on Discipleship including *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker* and *The Disciple-Making Pastor*. In *The Disciple Making Church* Hull concentrates on the role of disciple-making in the church, this offers helpful insights into how the process of disciple-making can work at Hills Church. Hull writes, "Disciple-making activity is, at its heart, two things. The first part, 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them,' implies an intentional effort . . . to tell others about Jesus . . . The second part... 'teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you' . . . is called discipleship or apprenticeship."⁴¹ According to Hull, although there are signs of this occurring around the world, the Western Church has been too impatient to invest for the long-haul, which has led "a generation of Christians to believe that following Jesus in discipleship is an option - it's not necessary for salvation but is helpful only if you really want to be serious."⁴²

Hull's purpose in writing is to show that "the discipling church is the normal church . . . because 1. Christ instructed the church to take part in it. 2. Christ modeled it.

⁴¹ Bill Hull, *Disciple-Making Church: Leading a Body of Believers On the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 13-14., eBook.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

3. The New Testament disciples applied it."⁴³ He suggests that transforming a generic church into a discipling church involves three major tracks: preaching in order to present the people with God's agenda from his Word; small-groups which provide the essential elements for spiritual growth; and leadership development which happens in and through small groups.⁴⁴ In an analysis of the early church, Hull also outlines "five priorities practiced by the Jerusalem church [that] developed it into a mature, reproductive congregation: a commitment to Scripture (Acts 2:42), a commitment to one another (Acts 2:42, 44, 46), a commitment to prayer (Acts 2:42), a commitment to praise and worship (Acts 2:43, 47), and a commitment to outreach (Acts 2:45-47)."⁴⁵ According to Hull, the small group is the primary discipling vehicle and is one of the hallmarks of a discipling church.

Hull's treatment of discipleship for the Church is helpful to the project in the emphasis on small groups as the delivery mechanism for discipleship. His work demonstrates that churches should work on making disciples and that small groups are an effective discipling tool if they provide elements like Scripture, fellowship, prayer, praise and worship, and outreach. His work is also helpful confirming that preaching and leadership development are a part of the role of disciple-making. The limitation of this resource again is in its general nature. While Scripture and prayer in small groups are seen as important discipleship tools, no practical help is given on their use.

⁴³ Hull, *Disciple-Making Church*, 19.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 70-71.

After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters

by N. T. Wright

It is true that Wesley focused on methods, and his followers were rightly called Methodists, but Wesley only promoted the method in order to develop a relationship with God and the character that followed. The development of small groups at Hills Church is an attempt to do the same; the goal is the development of the character of a disciple through the disciplines of the Word and prayer. Yet the idea of working on character produces some tension when compared with the unmerited grace of salvation. Author N. T. Wright tackles the tension between doing something to help one become more like Christ, and accepting that one can do nothing to earn the grace offered.⁴⁶ He contends that “even though humans could not make themselves fit for God, could not pull themselves up to God’s moral standard by their own efforts, it didn’t mean they could shrug their shoulders and give up the moral struggle altogether.”⁴⁷ After one believes, Wright argues, “the central thing that is supposed to happen . . . is the transformation of character.”⁴⁸ The main point in his book is that “the New Testament invites its readers to learn how to be human . . . [by both informing] our moral judgments and [forming] our characters so that we can live by their guidance.”⁴⁹ Wright suggests that practicing

⁴⁶ N. T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 57.

⁴⁷ Wright, *After You Believe*, 61.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

“specifically Christian virtues” develops Christian character.⁵⁰ It is not until these things become second nature or a part of a person’s character that he or she has really discovered his or her purpose.⁵¹

Wright outlines the importance of character formation by stating, “First, you have to aim at the right goal. Second, you have to figure out the steps you need to take to get to that goal. Third, those steps have to become habitual, a matter of second nature.”⁵² Instead of insisting on a rule that disciples read the Bible and pray, they need to understand that the meaning, purpose and practice of these disciplines is to help them develop the habits that lead to a lifelong growth in character. As a person lets God work on the transformation of character through prayer and reading and applying the Bible a good portion of the character of a disciple can be formed. These are not methods to simply adhere to, but useful steps towards putting oneself in a place where one can hear from God about how he wants one to act and live out his nature in the current kingdom, and in preparation for a time when all disciples will be with him forever.

Wright outlines a model he calls the “virtuous circle,” a list of elements that strongly influence the development of virtue and character: Scripture, stories, examples, community and practices. At the top of his circle is Scripture. He says, “The practice of reading scripture, studying scripture, acting scripture, singing scripture - generally soaking oneself in scripture as an individual and a community - has been seen from the

⁵⁰ Wright, *After You Believe*, 25.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 29.

earliest days of Christianity as central to the formation of Christian character.”⁵³ To Wright, it is not so much that the Scripture has instructions to follow on a topic, but that the act of reading it represents a desire to be shaped by it and to “hear a fresh word, a word of grace, perhaps even a word of judgment as well as healing, warning as well as welcome.”⁵⁴

This resource supports the value of discipleship as a process of developing Christlike character. It reinforces that certain methods are helpful in developing this character, and that practicing them should lead to a more dynamic connection with God. The results of discipleship must include character change or the process is not working. It contends that churches, in which opportunities for members to grow are provided, will reap a harvest of disciples who know how to live the Christian life in word and deed.

Celebration of Discipline

by Richard Foster

In this classic book on spiritual disciplines, Richard Foster calls the Christian community to develop depth in their spiritual life.⁵⁵ He proposes that this can be accomplished through the use of spiritual disciplines. The problem with the use of spiritual disciplines, he points out, is the tendency for some to treat it as a religious duty leading to slavery and for others to avoid them because “faith is by grace alone” (Eph

⁵³ Wright, *After You Believe*, 261.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 261.

⁵⁵ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, rev. ed. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989), 36, iBook.

2:8). Foster argues that it is a distorted image of grace which has led to this polarization of activity: striving for one's own righteousness leads into moralism, but to cease striving at all ends in moral bankruptcy.⁵⁶

Foster cautions against the tendency to discount any spiritual effort as an attempt to win favor from God and proposes that the disciplines are a means of receiving God's grace.⁵⁷ He urges his readers to accept that "the Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us."⁵⁸ It was Dallas Willard who said, "Grace is not opposed to effort, it is opposed to earning. Earning is an attitude. Effort is an action."⁵⁹ It was Wesley who maintained that "human progress will occur if people will participate in 'the means of grace.'"⁶⁰ Although the list is by no means complete, Foster discusses twelve "means of grace" or disciplines: meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship, guidance and celebration. Recognizing the importance of all of the disciplines, the scope of this project is limited to just two – Bible reading (which Foster calls meditation) and prayer. These are most closely related to the foundational work of making disciples.

⁵⁶ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 49.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 103.

⁶⁰ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 128.

To Foster, meditation “very simply, is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word.”⁶¹ He claims the biblical foundation for meditation is the example throughout Scripture of people “hearing God’s voice and obeying his word.”⁶² Although Foster mentions other ways that Christians throughout the centuries have heard God, he prioritizes the meditation on Scripture as one of the most important. Foster seeks to clarify however, that meditation on the Scripture is not for exegesis or study, but for internalizing the passage as addressed to the disciple.⁶³ This priority on the Scripture as a means of hearing from God is a strongly Wesleyan perspective.

Foster starts his discussion on the Discipline of Prayer by stating that “real prayer is life creating and life changing.”⁶⁴ According to William Carey, “secret, fervent, believing prayer lies at the root of all personal godliness.”⁶⁵ According to Foster prayer leads disciples to be conformed to Christ and it is this fact that often leads people to abandon it.⁶⁶ He claims that “when we pray, God slowly and graciously reveals to us our evasive actions and sets us free from them.”⁶⁷ “In real prayer we begin to think God’s thoughts after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the

⁶¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 70.

⁶² Ibid., 72.

⁶³ Ibid., 109.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 110.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

things he wills.”⁶⁸ As much as prayer is an opportunity to pray for personal needs and the needs of others, it also helps people to be transformed into who God wants them to be.

The limitation of this resource is that it only addresses prayer and Bible reading in a simple way. In order to cover many disciplines, the treatment of prayer and Bible reading is minimal but helpful. In this book, Forster has provided much benefit for churches and individuals that are seeking to have a deeper relationship with God and live the disciple’s life.

A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley’s Class Meeting

by D. Michael Henderson

In his book *A Model for Making Disciples*, D. Michael Henderson outlines the educational system employed by Wesley for disciple making and leadership development. At the heart of this educational system was the small group, which Wesley referred to as the class meeting. It is Henderson's contention that by understanding this educational system and the class meeting in particular, the Church today can gain insights and methods for making Christian disciples.⁶⁹

Wesley did not begin his discipleship revolution by instituting a new system in the established church. He started with the masses. He "wanted above all else to find a remedy to the moral ills of his time and nation"⁷⁰ and beginning with the common people

⁶⁸ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 110.

⁶⁹ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 13.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 71.

he found great reception and a ready willingness to break free from the ills of society.⁷¹ He said, "I design plain truth for plain people"⁷² in order to bring clarity of understanding to the people about God and his ways. Wesley went against the prevailing thought of the day and designed a system to correct behavior first and "feelings and attitudes later."⁷³

Henderson describes how Wesley's teaching method transformed individuals and prepared them for leadership. The class meeting was designed to encourage people to maintain certain positive behaviors, prohibit certain negative behaviors and participate in the "means of grace."⁷⁴ There was frank and honest sharing about "failures, sins, temptations, griefs, or inner battles."⁷⁵ The leader modeled this by example and directed the depth of the sharing with the collective goal being personal holiness or the character of Christ.⁷⁶ It was the class meeting that was specifically designed to bring behavioral change,⁷⁷ and gave people "personal supervision of their spiritual growth."⁷⁸ Wesley believed "that human nature could improve with proper care and discipline,"⁷⁹ which included communion, baptism, Bible reading, prayer, preaching and confession. Wesley's

⁷¹ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 22.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 71.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 116.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 131.

educational system also produced a ready pool of leaders who would rise up through the ranks⁸⁰ and sustain the movement into the future.⁸¹ Almost all of Wesley's leaders were already demonstrating leadership in their own arena,⁸² and through the educational system Wesley established, faithful people were rewarded with leadership.

The limitation of this resource is its narrow focus on Wesley's idea of small groups, however this is also of great benefit since the class meeting really did work as a tool of discipleship. Although simply reading the Bible or praying has little benefit except in that it helps to produce Christian virtue, the development of the small groups to train people in the method of prayer and Bible reading is in line with the idea that behavior or habit puts a person in a place where they can more easily develop the virtues fitting of a follower of Jesus.

Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrated Approach

by Gareth Weldon Icenogle

Gareth Weldon Icenogle's book covers the extensive biblical foundations of small group ministry. Beginning with the Old Testament foundations of community and covenant, he takes the reader through the importance of the issues surrounding the small group ministry of Jesus and then the apostles as they continued the legacy of Jesus'

⁸⁰ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 101.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 151.

intentional ministry in small groups.⁸³ The main theme of Icenogle's book is that the small group is a representation of the community that exists in the Godhead, and as such is essential to developing the character of a disciple and relationships with other disciples. This reality is essential to an understanding of the small group as a delivery mechanism for training and development of disciples at Hills Church.

Because small groups are an ideal representation of the community God intended, Icenogle suggests they operate best when the foundation is based around the idea of covenant with each other and the Ten Commandments as a charter. In small groups, just like in the Ten Commandments, God is placed at the center of the group, and others are shown respect, honor and long-term commitment. This way the group can be taught material, but also learn how to relate to God and each other in the context of covenant.

Icenogle, also uses the example of Jesus' small group of twelve disciples pointing out how Jesus "drew others into intimacy with the 'Father,'"⁸⁴ while teaching them "God's way of transforming the world."⁸⁵ God is still in the process of gathering people into groups around himself and his central purpose in order to develop the character of a disciple and the leaders who will continue the process. This is because small groups are not only meant for "mutual ministry" but to act as "ministry bases" for disciples to go

⁸³ Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: an Integrative Approach* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 253.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

"into the world in the name of Christ."⁸⁶ This basis of small group ministry lines up with Wesley's idea that holiness is a result of partaking of the means of grace, and as people encounter God and are kept accountable to each other it will lead them to develop as disciples and be led out into the world.

Icenogle identifies the core practices of the small group as: the apostles teaching, the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer.⁸⁷ He indicates that these kinds of groups transform the individuals in their relationship with each other, with God, and by implication their relationship with the church and the wider community. This is especially true when it comes to "learning how to use the Bible as a tool," because it helps people to live by faith,⁸⁸ and also true when it comes to teaching the group to pray⁸⁹ because it helps them connect to Jesus and in intimacy with others.⁹⁰ Icenogle's book is an excellent coverage of the importance of small groups including the important elements of prayer and the Bible, and how they help in the development of disciples.

⁸⁶ Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 335.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 298.

CHAPTER 4

AN ECCLESIOLOGY OF DISCIPLE MAKING

It was not John Wesley's intention to begin a new denomination. His overarching desire was to bring renewal to the "stagnate structures of the Church of England."¹ Wesley's desire, however, was to make "sure that those who were serious about leading a new life were channeled into small groups for growth in discipleship."² In clear reference to Philippians 2:12, he often called this "working out your own salvation."³ To Wesley "Methodism was not just a message to be proclaimed, it was a lifestyle to be embodied."⁴ He felt that once a person heard the message of the gospel, he or she had no other choice but to live it. To Wesley, true Christianity was in the spirit and practice of the early disciples who knew and loved God and taught others to do the same.

¹ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 61.

² *Ibid.*, 28.

³ Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley A. M.* (London: John Mason, 1830), 8:269, quoted in Kimbrough, Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 85.

⁴ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 132.

The Church as a Group of Disciples Making Other Disciples

Although an extensive ecclesiology of the Church would include many nuances and elements, the central focus of the Church must be disciple-making as commanded by Jesus in the Great Commission. Indeed, if disciple-making does not take place, there will be no Church. The quest of every disciple should be to grow towards Christlikeness and to help others do the same. Wesley showed his commitment to this at two levels. His involvement in the ‘Holy Club’ and the ‘Fetter Lane Society’ as well as the development of the ‘class meeting’ illustrates his commitment to personal growth in small groups while his famous phrase, ‘I look upon all the world as my Parish,’ showed his commitment to ‘make disciples of all nations’.

The Call to Make Disciples: The Commission Statements of Jesus

An extensive treatment of Jesus’ call to disciple-making would include an analysis of the initial methods of Jesus with the twelve. At this point however, the robust and diverse nature of the commission given to his disciples before he returned to the Father will be examined.⁵ Jesus gave a total of five commission statements that shed light on his intentions for his disciples and the Church and when these are examined in detail, certain themes emerge that are germane to the discussion of disciple-making. Although it is not a usual hermeneutical process, it is possible to merge all the concepts from each great-commission statement together to form one statement that attempts to give the full

⁵ For a more extensive treatment of this subject please refer to Appendix A.

extent of the commission statements that Jesus gave to his disciples and thus to the Church. This composite commission statement would read as follows:

Therefore in the same way as the Father has sent me to bring the good news to the world, you also go and witness about me and what I have done, proclaiming the gospel, which includes repentance and forgiveness of sins, in the personal and manifest power of the Holy Spirit, and make disciples of all nations, beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then to the end of the earth. Baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Mt 28:19-20, Acts 1:8, Jn 20:21-22, Mk 16:15, Lk 24:47).⁶

From this summary one can learn many things about the disciple-making nature of the Church beginning with the fact that disciple-makers must carry out the same commission that God gave to Jesus when he was sent into the world. One also learns that disciple-makers must have a personal relationship with Jesus that enables them to witness to things they have seen and heard about him as well as proclaiming the good news about Jesus: The gospel of his death and resurrection and the hope of salvation it brings, including the importance of repentance and forgiveness of sin. Additionally disciple-makers need the power of the Holy Spirit to provide the boldness and clarity necessary for the task, including the manifestations of the Spirit and the miraculous signs, as it is necessary to complete the task. Disciple-makers must also intentionally go about the task of teaching and instructing disciples rather than waiting for something to happen in the structures of the Church as well as seeking to make disciples in their own sphere of influence. It is the collective purpose of the Church to make sure that disciple-making occurs to the surrounding region, to outcasts and minorities, and to every people group of

⁶ Each verse in this composite statement is broken up throughout the text for readability.

the world. Disciple-makers must work towards the baptism of new believers, not only as an institution of the Church, but by helping them to willingly abandon themselves to the transforming work of God through Christ. They must remember that they act as ambassadors of Christ. They do not represent themselves or work to build their own kingdom, but they act with the authority and purpose of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Disciple-makers must also be teachers, not only of the commands of Jesus, but of obedience to those commands remembering that they are not alone in the task, but that Jesus himself through the power of the Holy Spirit is with them. Finally, disciple-makers never cease to be disciples themselves, growing towards Christlikeness.

It is clear from the commission statements of Jesus that the major work of the Church is making disciples. Without it the Church would cease to exist. With it the Church will become vibrant and energetic, reaching to the ends of the earth. The task is all encompassing and challenging, but disciple-makers are not alone, they still walk with Jesus through the presence of the Holy Spirit as the Twelve did two thousand years ago.

The Mandate to Equip the Saints from the Book of Ephesians

Beyond the call to take the gospel to all the earth, the element of teaching and instruction for obedience is strong in the Great Commission. Without it, disciples would be weak and the work of the Church thwarted. The Church must be a teaching organization, and this teaching must lead to obedience and maturity. The author of the book of Hebrews gives some insight into the importance of teaching in the church, stating: “by this time you ought to be teachers” (Heb 5:12). The implication of this

Scripture is that becoming a teacher is a goal of discipleship. It is not in the nature of the church for people to continually be taught the basic; they must eventually learn to teach others. This is an important part of the discipleship process.

In Paul's letter to the Ephesians, he describes the importance of equipping "the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph 4:12, 13). Once a person has entered the kingdom, the discipleship process does not stop. The goal is maturity in Christ and love for each other. This maturity is shown by stability in the Church, clarity of doctrine, and Christlikeness. The process of discipleship requires both learning and teaching. It is this love for God and love for others that is the centerpiece of the Great Commission, the goal of discipling, and the main purpose of the Church.

The Priorities of the Early Church in Acts

The Church's role of disciple-making comes into focus in the early church as well. After many had heard the gospel and been added to the number of believers, they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Again, the priority of discipleship is both teaching and learning. New believers become disciples by a commitment to teaching, a commitment to intimacy and fellowship, a commitment to communion, and a commitment to prayer.

Clearly the apostles were carrying out the instructions of Jesus given in the Great Commission when he said, "[teach] them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:20), and the new believers were eager to hear the teaching and obey it. What was a priority to reach non-believers now continues to believers. Additional to the teaching was

modeling of community, communion and communication with God. The apostles and believers alike knew that being a disciple of Jesus required obedience to his teaching, connection to other believers, embracing the cross and its meaning, and communication with him in prayer. The importance of these principles has not diminished in the life of the Church. Devotion and obedience to the commands of Jesus contained in his Word, combined with the intimacy of fellowship with other believers, the importance of remembering the cross, and an intimate relationship with God through prayer are still essential to being a disciple of Jesus and making disciples of Jesus. In short they are essential to being the Church.

The Call to Follow Jesus' Example and Teaching

Icenogle states that the etymology of the word 'disciple' implies "one who is being influenced."⁷ Norman Kraus claims that these disciples were students of Jesus learning to "'follow,' 'obey,' 'share in,' and 'imitate' Christ."⁸ "Twice Paul calls his readers to imitate himself, naming Christ as the final object of their imitation (1 Cor 11:1, 1 Thes 1:6)."⁹ Bill Hull points out that "imitation focuses on learning characteristics from someone else . . . not clothing, haircuts and phraseology."¹⁰ Imitation was taken seriously

⁷ *Webster's New World Dictionary* (New York: World Publishing, 1970), 401, quoted in Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 119.

⁸ C. Norman Kraus, *The Authentic Witness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 17, quoted in Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*, 119.

⁹ Michael J. Wilkins, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1992), quoted in Hull, *Disciple-Making Church*, 145.

¹⁰ Hull, *Disciple-Making Church*, 145.

in the Church as it developed after moving out of Jerusalem and becomes a further focus of the Church as it continues to make disciples.

Jesus' Emphasis of Kingdom Living from the Gospels

Additional to the idea that disciples are meant to be imitators of Jesus comes the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). This teaching gives Jesus' disciples a detailed understanding of what it meant to be in the new kingdom, outlining the entry criteria and the way to maintain citizenship. This early teaching of Jesus formed the basis of what it meant to be a disciple, and most certainly influenced the apostles' teaching of the new believers. It is clear from the rounded treatment of the great commission and the ongoing nature of disciple-making, that Jesus was not focused only on salvation or getting people to heaven. His focus was on the kingdom of God and what it took to live in that kingdom. If Jesus came as the Messiah/King, then the new kingdom had arrived, and the new citizens, the disciples, needed to know how to live in the new kingdom. Scot McKnight suggests that the story of Jesus resolves Israel's story by finally ushering in the new kingdom.¹¹ Any treatment of discipleship as the major characteristic of the Church must allow for more than just the goal of heaven. Instead the command to "teach them to obey" includes living as kingdom citizens now and impacts all aspects of disciple-making and Church function in the world.

¹¹ Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 55., iBook.

The Role of the Pastor in Disciple Making

According to Hull's understanding of Paul's letters to Timothy, there are "three major leadership priorities in the discipling church."¹² These are, "guarding the gospel by commitment to the Word, guarding the church by leadership development, [and] guarding the ministry by being a good model."¹³ The Scripture in 2 Timothy 2:15 describes how a pastor should handle the Word: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tm 2:15). A pastor must be in the Word looking for the truth to share with the people. Additionally the pastor must teach others to do the same just as Paul does to Timothy. No disciples should be left solely being fed by someone else. All disciples must learn to feed themselves.

Hull explains that "the word for 'pastor/shepherd' meant 'to lead, oversee, feed, discipline, teach and equip the people of God.'"¹⁴ He also points out that "the work of pastors/teachers is 'to prepare God's people for works of service' (Eph 4:12). Simply stated, the preparation is designed to "build up" (vv. 12-14) the body so it may 'grow up' (vv. 15-16)."¹⁵ Yet this role cannot exist properly unless the pastor first develops his/her own relationship with Christ.¹⁶ A disciple-maker never ceases to be a disciple. Mastering

¹² Hull, *Disciple-Making Church*, 178.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 100., iBook.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

the Word is never the point, submitting to it is,¹⁷ and it is the starting point for any disciple of Jesus who is to help others on that journey.

A Wesleyan Ecclesiology

The trouble with articulating a Wesleyan ecclesiology is that the ecclesiology has evolved over the last three centuries. As previously stated, Wesley never really articulated an ecclesiology because he was firmly established in the Church of England. Essentially his ecclesiology was that of the Church of England as described in article nineteen: “The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's ordinance in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.”¹⁸

If Wesley did not spend time on the complete nature of the church, he did spend time articulating a theology of discipleship as essential to the Church and remedial for the Anglican Church. In a discussion of the impact of this effort, Abel Stevens makes the statement, “John Wesley founded an ecclesiastical system that has only become more efficient by the lapse of a hundred years, and that is acknowledged to be more effective, whether for good or evil, than any other in the Protestant world.”¹⁹ According to Michael Henderson this ecclesiastical system included eight major concepts:

¹⁷ Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, 118.

¹⁸ Church Society, “The Thirty Nine Articles: Articles 19-22,” Church Society, http://www.churchsociety.org/issues_new/doctrine/39a/iss_doctrine_39A_Arts19-22.asp (accessed May 17, 2013).

¹⁹ Abel Stevens, *Character Sketches* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1888), 379-80, quoted in Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 160.

1. Human nature is perfectible by God's grace.
2. Learning comes by doing the will of God.
3. Mankind's nature is perfected by participation in groups, not by acting as isolated individuals.
4. The spirit and practice of primitive Christianity can and must be recaptured.
5. Human progress will occur if people will participate in "the means of grace."
6. The gospel must be presented to the poor.
7. Social evil is not to be "resisted," but overcome with good.
8. The primary function of spiritual/educational leadership is to equip others to lead and minister, not to perform the ministry personally.²⁰

These eight principles guided Wesley's efforts to bring renewal to the members of the Anglican Church and to the purpose of the Church itself. The seeds of the Great Commission, the gospel and the Pastoral Epistles can clearly be seen especially in the claim that "The spirit and practice of primitive Christianity can and must be recaptured."²¹ According to these tenets of Wesley, if a person could not be made more like Christ by the power of God's grace, then there would be no need to put any effort into the teaching and instruction to "obey everything" as Jesus commanded. Indeed Wesley proposes that the only real way to develop obedience to the teaching of Jesus is to do his will, or more succinctly, the only way to learn obedience is to obey. He also recognized the importance of being in fellowship with other believers in order to enhance a disciple's growth towards Christlikeness. Wesley's ecclesiastical system also included the imperative of presenting the gospel as well as the importance of living the Christian life as opposed to lobbying for political change. He maintained that Christians doing

²⁰ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 128.

²¹ Ibid.

good were far more able to bring about social change than Christians who went about ‘resisting’ evil. Finally Wesley maintained that the job of Christian leadership was not to do all the work, but to “equip the saints for works of ministry” (Eph 4:12). Clearly discipleship is at the heart of Methodism even if centuries of time have eroded the power of Wesley’s system.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia, of which Hills Church is a part, has its roots in Methodism and holds to the following ecclesiological definition:

We believe that the Christian church is the entire body of believers in Jesus Christ, who is the founder and only Head of the church. The church includes both those believers who have gone to be with the Lord and those who remain on the earth, having renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil, and having dedicated themselves to the work which Christ committed unto his church until he comes. The church on earth is to preach the pure Word of God, properly administer the sacraments according to Christ’s instructions, and live in obedience to all that Christ commands. A local church is a body of believers formally organised on gospel principles, meeting regularly for the purposes of evangelism, nurture, fellowship, and worship.²²

Although the basics of article nineteen are present, it is clear that an effort has been made to clarify an ecclesiology that more suitably reflects the Church and more clearly articulates the place of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in the Church Universal. The emphasis on the Word, fellowship and sacrament are still present. The addition of the words “and live in obedience to all that Christ commands,” contains the seed of the instructions in the Great Commission. Wesleyan Methodists must be disciples of Jesus and by inference make disciples of Jesus.

²² The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia, *The Handbook of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia*, 3d ed. (Brisbane: The Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia, 2008), Paragraph 119.

A Theology of Christian Renewal Regardless of Ecclesiological Background

Wesley spent most of his life working on personal transformation. His desire was to live true religion. This desire to wholly love God and do what he commanded led him on a quest to discover the best methods to accomplish this. What began as a personal quest, however, developed into a desire to see his own Anglican Church renewed in the ways of “primitive Christianity.” When Wesley finally understood and experienced personal salvation, it led him to see that all of society could be renewed through a relationship with God and obedience to his commands. Wesley “wanted above everything else to find a remedy to the moral ills of his time and nation,” and adopted the slogan “To spread scriptural holiness throughout the land.”²³

Wesley’s focus on renewal or discipleship of the masses inevitably led him to practice a much more ecumenical ministry than his loyalty to the Church of England might suggest. If Wesley held to article nineteen of the Articles of Religion of the Anglican Church, he took a quite liberal view of it when it came to his ministry of Church and societal renewal. Henderson affirms, “There was no rule which confined membership to those who belonged to the Church of England”²⁴ Wesley writes, “I have never read or heard of, either in ancient or modern history, any other church which builds on so broad a foundation as the Methodists do; which requires of its members no conformity either in opinions or modes of worship, but barely this one thing, to fear God,

²³ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 71.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.

and work righteousness.”²⁵ The Methodist focus on personal transformation towards Christlikeness is not an exclusively Methodist distinctive. To Wesley and Methodists of all persuasions, it is a purpose of the Church and available to all Christians who will partake of the means of grace to enable them to connect with God and others.

A Practical Emphasis on the Basics of Faith and Discipleship

Although Wesley was well educated, when he began his ministry to the masses of England he deliberately determined to design “plain truth for plain people,”²⁶ so that no one would miss out on the transformation of the gospel. Wesley described the three grand doctrines of Methodism as repentance, faith and holiness. Repentance, he wrote, is “the porch of religion, faith . . . the door of religion, and holiness . . . ‘religion itself.’”²⁷ Entry to his society was equally practical and basic: a desire to “flee the wrath to come, to be saved from their sin.”²⁸ Rather than elaborate preaching, meaningless ritual, or class-based religion, Wesley kept things simple: he worked hard to provide simple teaching and practical tools that could help new disciples love God and others more successfully.

Sanctification Leads toward Christlikeness

Wesley maintained an optimistic view on the perfectibility of human nature. He argued “if any individual would respond to God in faith, repent of rebellion against God,

²⁵ *The Complete Works of John Wesley* (Albany: SAGE Digital Library, 1996), 3:517, CD-ROM.

²⁶ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 71.

²⁷ Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, 124.

²⁸ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 97.

and live in obedience to God's commands, he or she would not only find eternal salvation, but be on track toward moral purity."²⁹ It was Wesley's passionate belief that people could attain Christlike character through the process of sanctification, and this doctrine became the "grand *depositum* which God has lodged with the people called Methodists."³⁰ Wesley had a dynamic view of sanctification in line with Philippians 3: 12-16 where a person would "press on" towards the goal of perfection.³¹ Spreading "scriptural holiness throughout the land," involved preaching on "'entire sanctification' or 'Christian perfection,' understood as the single-hearted love of God and neighbor."³² This is the goal of sanctification and the purpose of the Methodists.

Certain "Methods" Assist in Spiritual Transformation

Further, Wesley proposes that "human progress," sanctification, or discipleship is developed when disciples participate in the "means of grace." Wesley described the "means of grace" as events and processes that lead a person to come into the presence of God.³³ They could be "traditional works of piety instituted by Christ and the Church," or "works of mercy through which we can experience the power of God in our lives."³⁴ To

²⁹ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 130.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, 26.

³² *Ibid.*, 33.

³³ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Wesley, it was these works of grace that assisted disciples through spiritual transformation towards a “life of holiness and the presence of God.”³⁵

Wesley stated that works of piety or “instituted” means of grace were chiefly “prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the Scriptures; (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon;) and receiving the Lord's Supper, eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Him.”³⁶ To this were added over time fasting, baptism and Christian conference, which Wesley said was “carefully guarded conversation with other Christians”³⁷ or “conversation about the good life.”³⁸

The works of mercy or “prudential” means of grace included “observance of the General Rules [of his society], attendance at class and band meetings . . . temperance,”³⁹ “watching, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, exercising the presence of God,”⁴⁰ “doing good unto all men (to their souls and to their bodies),”⁴¹ including visits to the poor and the sick, and those in prison. These are not actions to earn favor with God, but proven ways that people can encounter the power of God in their lives.

³⁵ Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, 13.

³⁶ Rev. N. Burwash, *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards Part I: the Sermons with Introductions, Analysis and Notes* (Salem: Schmul Publisers (Rare Reprint Specialists, 1982), 152.

³⁷ Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, 216.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

While Wesley was confident that certain “methods” could assist one in spiritual transformation, he was equally as adamant that the means itself was not the end. He was very careful to make sure that his hearers understood this. If the means of grace “do not actually conduce to the knowledge and love of God,” he taught, “they are not acceptable in his sight; yea, rather, they are an abomination before him, a stink in his nostrils; he is weary to bear them.”⁴² This then will remain the ongoing tension for Methodism, the means of grace are capable of helping people connect with God, but they are equally capable of becoming a snare to those who put their trust in them.

Small Groups are Essential to Growth

Since Jesus started the process of disciple-making with twelve men, and Paul organized men and women into church groups, Wesley continued in the same vein in order to recapture “the spiritual life of New Testament Christianity.”⁴³ He wrote,

Upon reflection, I could not but observe, this is the very thing which was from the very beginning of Christianity . . . those who God had sent forth ‘preached the gospel to every creature.’ And . . . as soon as any of these was so convinced of the truth, as to forsake sin and seek the gospel salvation, they immediately joined them together . . . that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort, and pray with them, and for them according to their inward necessities.⁴⁴

⁴² Burwash, *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards Part I*, 152.

⁴³ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 13.

⁴⁴ Emory, “Letter to Vincent Perronet,” in *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley*, 8, quoted in Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 13.

According to George Hunter, Wesley's preaching had two objectives: first, to awaken people and second, to enroll awakened people in a class.⁴⁵ Wesley would not preach unless he could put people into a class.⁴⁶ He knew that if they participated in the means of grace and were kept accountable for their desire to love God and love others, then in all likelihood they would grow in sanctification and Christlikeness.

Although Wesley's class meeting is more equivalent to an accountability group than are most modern small groups, they were still a source of fellowship and encouragement to members. Adam Clarke comments on the success of the class meeting:

It was by this means [the formation of small groups] that we have been enabled to establish permanent and holy churches over the world."⁴⁷ In speaking to John Pool, one of Wesley's circuit preachers, George Whitefield, the famous English preacher and evangelist said, "John, thou art in the right place. My Brother Wesley acted wisely—the souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruits of his labor. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand."⁴⁸

A Marriage of Personal Holiness and Practical Holiness

For Wesley, holiness was much more than being set apart, it had wide reaching implications for every aspect of life and ministry. "Wesley looked for personal, communal, and social holiness."⁴⁹ No matter how pious a person was, it was invalid

⁴⁵ George G. Hunter III, *To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1987), 58.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁴⁷ Holland M. McTyeire, *History of Methodism* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1904), 204, quoted in Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 30.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, 33.

unless it extended to “doing good unto all men.”⁵⁰ It is true that some branches of Methodism have lost the importance of “social holiness” but Wesley would have none of it. In fact, Wesley “coined the term ‘social holiness’ in order to counteract [the] misunderstanding of religion as simply individual piety.”⁵¹ “Love of God and love of neighbor is the heart of what Wesley calls ‘holiness’.”⁵² It is the true purpose of disciple-making and as such must be pious and practical, individual and communal, personal and social, for men and women, both inside and outside the church. These two things would become the basis of Wesley’s disciple-making ministry and must be maintained if any organization is to be truly called Wesleyan or Methodist.

Limitations of a Wesleyan Ecclesiology

With all of the strengths of discipleship as a base, and the broader development of a Methodist understanding of the Church, Wesleyan Ecclesiology still has some weaknesses. Initially those weaknesses were simply because Wesley never intended Methodism to be a church. It was a renewal movement for the Church of England and the English society in general. Wesley’s full intention was that the Anglican Church would still be the church of choice for society participants and so there was no need to develop an extended treatment of ecclesiology. While these beginnings brought strength to

⁵⁰ Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, 33.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁵² *Ibid.*

disciple-making at the time, and in the hundreds of years since, some argue they have left Methodism without a “clearly understood separate ecclesiological identity.”⁵³

Disregard for the Traditional Church Calendar

Despite the advances in ecclesiological position, in the worldwide family of Methodist churches, there is still much variety of belief and practice about the forms and structures of the Church. The Wesleyan Methodist Church occupies a position on the conservative leaning evangelical end of this spectrum, which exposes a unique set of strengths and weaknesses. One of the strengths is the ability to be free from constraint to follow the guidance of the Spirit in preaching and teaching. Pastors are free to disciple the church as they feel God leads them. This means that teaching perhaps more closely follows Wesley’s society model where discipleship is tailored to the needs of the people in the group. The downside of this and separation from the formal liturgies of the Anglican Church is that there is a disregard for the Traditional Church Calendar. A focus still remains on Christmas and Easter, but often the important lead up to these events such as Advent and Lent are ignored or forgotten. Surprisingly this also includes the post Easter ‘Eastertide’ season up to and including Pentecost Sunday as well as the wonderful post Christmas ‘Christmastide’ celebration. Additionally, the practice of following the lectionary readings is generally lost. While the upside of this lack of focus on the Traditional Calendar is freedom to teach and make disciples in a way deemed appropriate

⁵³ Ibid., 120.

for the local church, the downside is often a narrowing of focus and an overemphasis on certain parts of the biblical text.

Lack of a Properly Trinitarian Foundation for Christian Practice

Another weakness of the Wesleyan Methodist discipleship ecclesiology is the tendency to focus more exclusively on Jesus than the other members of the trinity. This is not a problem with the written theology, but more with practice. The emphasis on Jesus: his life, his call to be his disciple, and the gospel message, can sometimes overshadow the revelation of God as Holy Spirit and God as Creator. The lack of emphasis on God as Creator is less a matter of deliberate choice, but, time spent on discipleship issues surrounding the life and work of Jesus leaves little room for an extensive treatment and understanding of God the Father. Excesses in the Pentecostal Charismatic branches of the church on the other hand, have tended to cause Wesleyan Methodists to shy away from publicly embracing the work of the Holy Spirit. His role in the transformation of the believer is acknowledged, but a resistance to what some term “the manifestations of the Spirit” has resulted in an attempt to pursue discipleship and holiness without embracing the fullness of the Spirit’s work for fear that it may result in excess or hurt to the local church or denomination. Certainly the Wesleyan Methodist theology embraces this fullness and acknowledges the power that comes from the Holy Spirit’s indwelling, but the fear associated with the manifestations has left the church in an impoverished state of experience and teaching. A more Trinitarian approach to discipleship would enable the Wesleyan Methodist Church to develop more rounded disciples who understand all facets of God’s person and his interaction with them.

Right Theology of Holiness Rather Than Practice

A further weakness of Wesleyan Methodism is the careful theological presentation of holiness. Much time is spent at denominational and educational level at least making sure that churches and pastors have a right understanding of holiness and what this looks like in church members. Yet preaching on holiness and a theologically correct approach to holiness is sometimes promoted more than the practical living of holiness. This practice could be likened to presenting a well thought out doctrine of fitness or health. The reality is that teaching or preaching on fitness and health has little impact. Ultimately fitness and health are simple byproducts of good eating and exercise. In the same way, simply preaching on holiness and helping church members understand what holiness is only goes part of the way towards living it. People need to be encouraged to partake in activities and processes that naturally lead towards the holy life. Right practice is a quicker path to a holy life than right theology alone, and this is sometimes missing in the Wesleyan Methodist church. Disciple-making in the Wesleyan Methodist Church must focus on helping people to encounter God and live the disciple's life rather than helping them develop a perfect theology of holiness alone. This is why Jesus meant when he said, "teach them to obey" rather than simply "teach them."

A Tick-a-box Faith rather Than Overarching Principles

Unfortunately this is a double-edged sword. While right theology alone is not enough to help members live a holy lifestyle, right practice can be a trap as well. Wesleyan Methodists can easily elevate certain practices as being holy and make them

measures of the holy lifestyle. These practices include the ‘means of grace’ that Wesley so often talked about: things like prayer, Bible reading, taking communion and so on. As Wesley rightly pointed out, these things help disciples to experience God, and they aid in the development of an intimate relationship with God. Yet it is still possible for the point to be lost as Wesley argues:

In process of time, when “the love of many waxed cold,” some began to mistake the means for the end, and to place religion rather in doing those outward works, than in a heart renewed after the image of God. They forgot that “the end of” every “commandment is love, out of a pure heart,” with “faith unfeigned;” the loving the Lord their God with all their heart, and their neighbour as themselves; and the being purified from pride, anger, and evil desire, by a “faith of the operation of God.”⁵⁴

While Wesley knew the importance of the “means of grace,” he also knew that some would come to trust in the activity rather than the relationship with God it was meant to produce. This problem can be described as “tick-a-box faith”: the idea that completing the activity is the important thing. This view leads many to live a disciplined life without seeking the relationship that the means were designed to develop. This idea that the merit is in the means itself quickly leads to legalism and religion rather than liberty and relationship. It is not that Wesleyan Methodists teach that the merit is in the action, but that they often fail to direct members to the ultimate goal of the action: the relationship with God and others.

⁵⁴ Burwash, *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards Part I*, 151.

Although "Methodism is sometimes misunderstood as maintaining a focus on individual piety or individual holiness . . . this is not Wesleyan."⁵⁵ On the contrary, true Methodism as outlined by Wesley himself is a focus on loving God and loving neighbor.⁵⁶ The loss of focus onto the means of grace as an end or certain actions as the goal is to miss the point of what Wesley was trying to achieve all along. Wesleyan practice must be adjusted to match this main goal of the love for God and neighbor and the principles of a disciple's life rather than focusing on compliance with a list of rules.

Ecclesiological Insight from the Charismatic and Missional Communities

As can be seen from the example of Wesley, every now and then God raises up renewal movements to realign the purposes of the church. Sometimes these act in isolated pockets, but often they have a global impact on the shape, experience and processes of the Church. While often this renewal results in the formation of new denominations, it can also bring changes to current expressions of the Church or a reminder of the original purposes of a particular church or denomination. Two such movements are the charismatic and mission renewal movements. These two movements arose out of a desire to see the Church recapture its original pattern or as Wesley might put it, "the spirit and methods of primitive Christianity."⁵⁷ Each of these movements can help to realign the values and practices of the Wesleyan Methodist Church as it relates to making disciples.

⁵⁵ Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, 124.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵⁷ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 22.

Discipline Does Not Bring Power: The Holy Spirit Does That

The first of these realignments comes from the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement that has often credited its beginning to the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles California that ran from 1906-1913 which in turn draws its roots from the 1904 Welsh revival.⁵⁸ Although the beginnings were probably much further back, this renewal movement has “impacted every segment of the church in virtually all countries of the world with new vitality and fervor.”⁵⁹ The Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal movement desired to recapture the Holy Spirit power that was evident in the “primitive Christianity” of the early church and, despite various problems, to a large extent it has done just that.

While there is no doubt as to the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the revival that resulted from the work of Wesley and the Methodists, subsequent years have seen the focus shift more to the “methods” or “means of grace” than to the Holy Spirit who empowers the individual for the Christian life. With a lesser emphasis on the manifestations based on fear of excess, the natural focus became the disciplines or the results themselves. In some ways the goal is still the same, but instead of seeking the power giver himself, some members seek him through trying to emulate his fruit. Wesley anticipated this telling his followers and detractors that those who fell into this trap were:

so far from receiving any blessing therein, that they only drew down a curse upon their head; so far from growing more heavenly in heart and life, that they were two-fold more the children of hell than before. Others, clearly perceiving that these means did not convey the grace of God to those children of the devil, began,

⁵⁸ Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Mass, eds., *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 344-45.

⁵⁹ Burgess, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, xvii.

from this particular case, to draw a general conclusion, that they were not means of conveying the grace of God.⁶⁰

What Wesleyan Methodists can learn from the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement is to refocus on the Holy Spirit rather than on his manifestations or the results of his indwelling: to embrace the power of God for transforming the disciple rather than simple pious works alone. This will aid in returning Methodism to Wesley's original intent and may be good advice for the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement as well.

Right Living without Justice and Mercy Is Shallow Faith

A second renewal movement that can provide insight to the Wesleyan Methodists is the missional movement. This movement also holds as its goal a return to the original plan of Jesus. Not just in the early church, but throughout the whole Old Testament and God's relationship with his covenant people Israel. Their point of issue with the church is that it has become nothing more than a religious club that is completely out of touch with the purpose of God in the world and the ways to bring that purpose about. While some of the focus of the missional church has been to dismantle the old church structures and traditions, the argument to return to a focus on God's mission is informative.⁶¹

This renewal message is not a radical one for Methodism, but it has been lost to some extent with a focus on right living. Methodists have become renowned for telling others how to live believing that this will bring about necessary reform. But this misses what Wesley was trying to do. He was involved in helping reform behavior, but only as it

⁶⁰ Burwash, *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards Part I*, 151.

⁶¹ Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 9.

related to the goal of loving God and then loving one's neighbor. While this has been lost in many Wesleyan Methodist Churches, on any scale, it must be rediscovered. In reference to showing acts of mercy to others, Wesley said: "God works [in you]; therefore you can work. God works [in you]; therefore you must work."⁶² Wesleyan Methodists would do well to rediscover this important tenant of Wesleyan Theology and practice as they pursue discipleship and personal holiness. Discipleship is about helping people to love God and to show that love to others.

⁶² *The Works of John Wesley*, 3:199-209, quoted in Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, 33.

CHAPTER 5

THEOLOGY OF SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Methodism has been renowned for its emphasis on personal transformation. This theme was at the heart of Wesley's own quest to work out his own salvation, and it lay at the heart of the educational system that he set up for those who responded to his preaching and joined his societies. During the peak years of Wesley's societies and class meetings, not only were people transformed in their personal lives, the whole society of England and Wales underwent a spiritual and cultural transformation. It is arguable that if Wesley had not placed such emphasis on spiritual transformation then there would be little recorded in history about the movement.

The Scriptural Mandate for Growth as a Disciple

Renewal movements throughout the preceding centuries almost all had personal renewal at the center of their focus. These movements were "motivated by a desire to return to those principles and practices of the early church which caused it to be so

effective.”¹ While Wesley promoted personal transformation as paramount to what it meant to be a follower of Jesus, he was certainly not the author of this idea. He worked tirelessly to “rediscover the vitality of original Christianity,”² as exemplified and taught by Jesus, the apostles and Paul. The beginning point of this was, of course, the Great Commission that taught that subsequent disciples of Jesus ought to model what he taught and teach others to do the same.

Christ Followers are Meant to Grow: Hebrews 5:11-14

The teaching of the Great Commission is just the beginning of the scriptural mandate for the disciple to grow. The Apostle Peter explains that when disciples are infants in the faith they should “long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation” (1 Pt 2:2). In a similar way to the natural world, Peter knew that baby disciples needed to be fed on the elemental principles of faith in order that they grow. By adding “if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good” (1 Pt 2:3), Peter implies that growth is a natural and desirable quest for new disciples, and a natural outcome of spiritual feeding.

The author of Hebrews takes this idea of milk and discipleship growth a step further suggesting that at some point the elemental teaching about faith is not enough to sustain the kind of growth expected of a disciple (Heb 5:12-14). The author expects disciples to reach a point where they can teach others, and that this will not happen if one

¹ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 14.

² Ibid.

is still living on milk. In fact the author argues that staying only with the basic principles of faith shows a complete lack of understanding about what it means to be a disciple. Maturity is the goal and it comes from moving on from milk to partake of solid food.

The Role of the Word in Growth: 2 Timothy 3:14-17

The implication of the above biblical texts is that feeding and growth comes through God's word. In its simplest form, this is the gospel of Jesus as revealed throughout the Old Testament, but it can equally mean the teachings of Jesus since disciples are commanded to hear and obey them, and the whole revelation of Scripture. It is partaking of the solid food of Scripture that brings out skillfulness in "righteousness" or the ability to live in the right state before God. In the parable of the sower (Lk 8:4-15), Jesus states that the word of God planted in a fertile heart will by its very nature produce growth (Lk 8:15).

The Role of Relationship in Growth: Matthew 6:5-15

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus reveals the nature of prayer and its importance to the disciple's life. At the outset of this model prayer, by using the words "our Father" (Mt 6:9), Jesus reveals that prayer is ultimately about relationship with God, and when prayer is couched in terms of relationship, it begins to take on a greater role in the life of a disciple. No longer is prayer about presenting a list of needs to God. It is more about coming to the Father in relationship. The idea of prayer being relationship with God was amply demonstrated by Jesus who presumably had no need to go to the Father but did so

on a regular basis to maintain a relationship with him, listen to him and carry out his wishes (Jn 14:10).

Prayer as described in the Model or Lord's Prayer begins with a relationship with God but also extends to relationship with others. When disciples ask God to forgive them, they are asking for the relationship to be restored to its rightful state (Mt 6:12). When they do the same for others, it pleases the Father, and returns those relationships to their rightful state as well (Mt 6:12, 14-15). Ultimately prayer enhances and develops a disciple's relationship with God and with others, a clear connection to the greatest commandment to "love God" and "love your neighbor."

The Role of the Small Group in Growth: Acts 2:46-47

Jesus formed a small group when he selected the Twelve to be with him. It was this small group that became the focus of his plans to establish the Church when he departed the earth. Acts 2:46-47 demonstrates that the small group idea continued after Pentecost as day by day new disciples attended the temple together and broke bread in their homes. The general content of these small groups was the apostles' teaching, the fellowship with other believers, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42). With very few additions, this remains the basic content of small groups today. In the context of this passage, these small groups were to help work towards relational harmony between attendees, and small groups today are no different. They function as tools to help disciples develop their relationship with the Father and with each other.

Discipline and Obedience for Growth: Hebrews 12:1-12

The subject of discipline or suffering as a catalyst for growth is not a very popular one. Some churches and denominations shy away from this topic altogether. Yet it is quite clear from scripture that suffering and discipline are part of the Christian life and can, given the right response, produce maturity. Teaching disciples how to respond in circumstances like this, goes a long way to helping develop mature disciples of Jesus.

One of the clearest passages on this topic is in Hebrews 12 as it describes the love God has for his disciples when he allows them to be disciplined: “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Heb 12:5, 6).

The word discipline here generally means to train or tutor someone, and conveys the idea that difficult events can be used by God to develop virtue or cultivate the mind and morals.³ The reality is that when trials and troubles come the way of a disciple, they can be used by God to help them grow towards maturity. To benefit from the discipline, a disciple must learn to endure. The reward is “the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Heb 12:12).

The concept of growth through endurance is also given a good treatment in the book of James where he writes: “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jas 1:2-4). Disciples undergoing trial or trouble or temptation or discipline (the

³ Strong, *Enhanced Strong's Dictionary*, Location g3809.

Greek word allows for this variation) must take stock of what is happening, and when they recognize that God is allowing them to be proven in order to transform them towards maturity, they should be joyful at the end prospect of maturity.

A Wesleyan Theology of Life Transformation

Wesleyan Theology has its roots in life transformation. Wesley strove for this in his own personal life and also in the lives of those who were challenged to faith under his ministry. This theology is grounded in the optimistic view of the perfectibility of human nature: that given the desire for change, the use of processes that brought a connection with God, and the right kind of accountability environment, the Spirit is able to gradually transform a person to reflect the image of Christ.

Progressive Sanctification Towards Christlikeness

This “sanctification” process “is initiated at the moment of justification and regeneration. From that moment there is a gradual or progressive sanctification as the believer walks with God and daily grows in grace and in a more perfect obedience to God.”⁴ The work of sanctification is a joint effort between the actions of the new believer and the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul urges the Galatian believers to work at their relationship with God by saying, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal 5:25). Sanctification is not about more works to earn salvation. It is rather “intimately related to the initial justifying and regenerating work wrought by the Spirit on the basis of faith in Christ’s atoning work. Sanctification is not a process of meritorious

⁴ The Wesleyan Methodist Church, *Handbook*, paragraph 117.

work by the believer, but it is a new and deeper relationship of submission to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.”⁵ Wesley called his followers to do all they could to submit themselves to God, to experience his presence in their lives, and to be obedient to all God commanded them to do. His belief was that in so doing, they would be transformed, perfected in love for God and in love for their neighbor. This remains true for Wesleyan Methodists and is one of the main reasons for church ministry.

Preaching for Life Change: John Wesley

Wesley believed in preaching for life change. He demonstrated this from the early days of his ministry, but it really became evident when he took on preaching to the masses. He chose to go to the most destitute to help bring a remedy for the moral ills of his day.⁶ It was in preaching repentance, that Wesley saw his greatest fruit with “multitudes crying out, ‘What must we do to be saved?’”⁷ But Wesley did not only preach for life change to the poor, he did the same things in his society meetings where preachers would cover topics on some practical aspect of Christian lifestyle.⁸ “Wesley had little interest in that kind of preaching which made moral demands on the people or

⁵ Carter, *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, 1:496.

⁶ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 71.

⁷ Emory, *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley*, 8:468, quoted in Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 58.

⁸ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 89.

called them to a commitment without following through with specific instruction.”⁹

Practical preaching is still a hallmark of Methodism.

Small Groups as a Means of Growth and Accountability

Of course Wesley also knew that life change had to include some form of accountability and encouragement to go on with a commitment to Christ. One of the major concepts of Wesley’s educational system was that “Mankind’s nature is perfected by participation in groups.”¹⁰ Wesley’s small group was called the class meeting and it “encapsulated several of the key principles of New Testament Christianity: personal growth within the confines of an intimate fellowship, accountability for spiritual stewardship, “bearing one another’s burdens,” and “speaking the truth in love.” It serves now as a model for those who have accepted the command of Jesus to make disciples. It provides useful insights about those processes by which Christian disciples learn to ‘do everything that I (Jesus) have commanded’.”¹¹ “The organization of small groups in the Methodist societies, the classes and various kinds of bands, were designed to encourage prayer, Bible study, confession, and other works of piety to supplement the instituted means of grace found in the Church (the Sacraments).”¹²

⁹ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 90.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹² *Ibid.*, 126.

The Involvement of Lay People in Ministry

Lay people carried out most of the work of Methodism. These people rendered assistance as clergy assistants, preachers, financial stewards, and class leaders. They were drawn from all walks of life and found a ready outlet for their skills and passion especially when, for many, the opportunities of public life or leadership were scant.¹³ With the ever-increasing number of attendees, the only solution was to use lay stewards who would lead groups “involving Scripture reading, prayers, and the singing of hymns (but not celebration of Eucharist).”¹⁴ The opportunity to serve in lay ministry positions is an added incentive for disciples to grow and develop. It also provides ready opportunities for leaders to be transformed as they encounter the challenges of preparing messages, performing responsible tasks, and leading others towards discipleship transformation.

The Importance of Spiritual Discipline

Wesley believed that “Human progress will occur if people will participate in ‘the means of grace.’”¹⁵ For Wesley, the means of grace were communion, baptism, searching the Scriptures, prayer, preaching and confession. To this he added “prudential means” including preaching, studying, helping the poor and visiting the sick. Clearly there is a strong correlation between these means of grace and any list of spiritual disciplines. Richard Foster lists twelve disciplines in his book, *Celebration of Discipline: Meditation, prayer, fasting, study, simplicity, solitude, submission, service, confession, worship,*

¹³ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 147.

¹⁴ Kimbrough, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Ecclesiology*, 220.

¹⁵ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 128.

guidance and celebration.¹⁶ According to Willard, disciplines help disciples to produce fruit in keeping with a transformed character,¹⁷ and to take on the quality and character of Jesus himself.¹⁸ While the terms may be different, Foster, Willard and Wesley are declaring the importance of some “means” to help the disciple to love God and others, becoming more Christlike in the process.

The Word as a Means of Grace

Searching the Scriptures was one of the “chief” means of grace according to Wesley.¹⁹ By this he meant, “reading, hearing, and meditating” on the Word of God.²⁰ Wesley understood “means of grace” to mean “outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.” In other words, a “means of grace” is a way that God gives his grace to disciples: a way that they are able to connect with God and he with them. Using the teaching of the Church of England on this term, Wesley points out that a means of grace is “an outward sign of inward grace, and a means whereby we receive the same.”²¹ Wesley felt that reading the Bible, hearing others speak

¹⁶ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*.

¹⁷ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 28.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁹ Rev. N. Burwash, *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards Part I: the Sermons with Introductions, Analysis and Notes* (Salem: Schmul Publisers (Rare Reprint Specialists, 1982), 152.

²⁰ Burwash, *Wesley's Doctrinal Standards Part I*, 152.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 152.

on the Bible and meditating on the Bible were one of the most important and obvious ways that people can connect with God and that God chooses to connect with people.

Prayer as a Whole of Life Experience

Not only was Bible reading seen as a means of grace, but so too was “family and private prayer”²² For Wesley, these prayers ranged from extemporaneous prayers to the reading of prayers at regular times from the prayer book. In the Wesleyan Tradition, prayer is seen as a way to connect in relationship with God. It is not simply a way to get a list of requirements met. It is more about intimacy. Wesley saw prayer as one of those means that enabled the disciple to connect with God. The best way for a disciple to be spiritually transformed is to spend it with the master Disciple-Maker, Jesus. When disciples speak to and listen to God, they learn what he wants and how he operates and this leads to a gradual transformation of life and relationship with God.

The Discipleship Ethos in Other Traditions

Wesley’s emphasis on personal transformation was not unique, but it was not the only way disciples sought to be Christlike. Some groups sought to withdraw from the world to protect and develop their spirituality. Others felt that catechizing children and new believers would deliver the change necessary for a disciple to live the disciple’s life.

²² Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 97.

A Monastic Life: Draw Away from the World

For many centuries pious Christians withdrew to monasteries to concentrate on their relationship with God. They underwent strict disciplines in order to achieve some measure of holiness and personal purity. The results were often successful: the individual did become more pious and many monasteries did an extraordinary job of taking care of the poor and oppressed. Wesley would have believed in drawing away from the world to some extent, but he was looking for a different scale of result. Wesley wanted everyone to experience life transformation and the resulting impact that would have on the poor. He did not want personal spirituality or acts of mercy to be the exclusive domain of the monks, who had to leave their homes and family. He was interested in the total transformation of society towards holiness that was both personal and practical. He wanted disciples who would bring holiness and works of mercy to the local neighborhood where they lived. It was his desire that this process was repeated in every area not simply bringing change around a monastery, but change to the whole of society.

Discipleship by Catechism: it is About What You Know

If Wesley wanted disciples to be a catalyst of change in every walk of life by their love for God and their neighbor, he certainly did not want them to be catechized into being faithful church going citizens alone. This was part of what had brought stagnation to the Church of England and part of what he was attempting to address. Many churches believe that right teaching and doctrine will bring about discipleship, but often the result is faithful church attendance rather than the discipleship that Wesley believed lay at the primitive heart of the Church. True spiritual life transformation requires a change in heart

and attitude that leads to a greater love for God and a demonstrative love for others rather than merely accumulating head knowledge and attending church.

The Power of Prayer in Spiritual Formation

The role of prayer in spiritual formation has largely been underestimated. It has been seen as important, but relegated to one of the things that can help. Yet if prayer can be understood as the whole interaction between a disciple and God, it has a much more formative impact on discipling. Prayer taken in this light allows many aspects of discipleship to fall under its compass.

Created to be in Relationship: Presence and Listening

Genesis 1:27 informs the reader that “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” One of the characteristics of the image of God is relationship. The triune God lived in relational community, and Genesis 3: 8, 9 indicates that when man and woman were created, they too were invited into a walking and talking relationship with God each evening in the cool of the day. This was the intent of the first created humans and remains the intent for humanity today: God intends for humankind to be in relationship with him both now and ultimately at the consummation of all things when he will be with his people as their God (Rv 21:3). This principle is reflected in the Model Prayer taught by Jesus, where he emphasized that the starting point of prayer was by acknowledging “Our Father in Heaven” (Mt 6:9).

Yet this relationship is not to be taken for granted, the scriptures are full of encouragement to seek a deeper relationship with God for personal and corporate benefit. Take for example what The Lord said to Solomon after he completed the Temple: “if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and *seek my face* and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.” (2 Chr 7:14 *italics added*). The implication here is that even God’s people should make an effort in relationship with God and deliberately seek to be in his presence. There are many other examples of this in scripture; even Jesus chose to spend time with the Father in relationship. Luke 6:12 states, “In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.” Jesus now stands at the door knocking in order that he may come in and share relational fellowship with his disciples (Rv 3:20).

If prayer is about relationship, then rather than just being an exercise in talking, it also becomes an exercise in listening. Many times disciples have been guilty of asking God to help them and then walking away, rather than actively working on developing a listening ear to God. This is where the connection between prayer and reading the Bible becomes apparent. When disciples read the Bible, they put themselves in a place where they can listen to the Words of God. In effect, reading the Bible is just as much part of prayer as talking to God. When disciples make reading and meditation on the Bible a habit, God’s Word begins to dwell in them richly (Col 3:16), and God can bring to mind those things that are according to his will.

The Speaking Elements of Prayer and the Effect on Discipleship

Too often prayer has reduced to a shopping list of items that are needed from God, but prayer is much more. According to Jesus, after the acknowledgment of relationship, the beginning point of prayer must be praise. In his model prayer, Jesus taught that God's name must be hallowed. He said, "Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name'" (Mt 6:9).

The term "hallowed" means to revere or sanctify,²³ and gives the idea that the name of God must be venerated, lifted up or set apart as holy. Prayer that begins this way not only shows obedience to Jesus command or literally brings praise to God the Father; it also has a way of developing the understanding of the disciple. When a disciple praises God for who he is, or lifts his name up for what he does, or sets his name apart as the one true God, a subtle shift is taking place in his or her heart. Rather than seeing God as a big vending machine in the sky, the disciple who praises God and his character begins to recognize how that character plays out in the world.

A parallel to praise is thanksgiving. The Psalmist tells disciples that they should "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise" (Ps. 100:4). The way into the presence of the King of Kings is through praise and thanksgiving. Paul reminds his readers that this is God's will for them in prayer (1 Thes 5:16-18). Again when disciples learn to give thanks in all circumstances, it changes the way that they pray. The discipline of being thankful encourages the disciple to look for the activity of God in their life, reorients the disciple's thinking and changes the patterns of prayer.

²³ Strong, *Enhanced Strong's Dictionary*, Location g0037.

The act of confession also reorients the disciple's prayer life and helps them grow in their relationship with the Father. In his model prayer, Jesus said, "forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Mt 6:12). Forgiveness clears up the relationship with God. When a disciple acknowledges sin before God it helps him or her to recognize what they have done and who they should be. If disciples refuse to confess sins or cherish them, God does not hear the prayer (Ps. 66:18). When disciples approach the Father in recognition of their sin, it changes their experience of prayer and grants them more open access to the Father.

A further element of prayer that influences and reorients one's prayer life is the act of intercession. Intercession for others puts the needs of the person praying into perspective. Through intercession the disciple represents the needs of the people to God. Most often the others cannot or will not do this for themselves. Paul tells Timothy that intercession is an important part of the work of ministry: "I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people" (1 Tm 2:1). If disciples pray for other people including those in power over them as well as their enemies it will have an effect on their own lives and the prayers they normally pray for themselves. Instead of begging God for personal help, the disciple prays for God to help others. This too changes the perspective from selfishness to love for others: a clear characteristic of a growing disciple.

It is at this point that prayer for oneself makes sense. A list prepared beforehand will now be much shorter. Because now the disciple: understands who God is and how he operates, sees God at work and is thankful for this on a regular basis, is aware of sins and

confesses them quickly to keep the lines of communication open, and recognizes and prays for the needs of others especially those who are connected to his or her life.

Effective Prayer Foundations from the Teachings of Jesus

Further to the usual elements of prayer to support spiritual formation, there are some foundational principles that are revolutionary to the power of prayer to bring about spiritual life change. When understood, these elements help to shape the character and experience of the disciple as well as changing the comprehension of their place in the kingdom and also their understanding of God and how he answers prayer. These elements are: God's will, Father heart, and name, as well as faith, forgiveness and abiding.²⁴ When a disciple understands the things that God wills, he or she begins to pray more effectively for what God wants to do in the world. A disciple who understands the Father heart of God expects good gifts from God and can ask with confidence that God cares for him or her. Additionally, a disciple that learns to believe in who God is and what he does, can use this faith to gain answers to his or her prayers. Forgiveness is also essential for a disciple to be effective in prayer. When he or she maintains a clear relationship with God and others, prayers are more effective. The foundation of abiding in God allows a disciple to ask for things that are in keeping with the nature of the vine (Jesus). Finally, a disciple that learns to represent the name of Jesus well will find more ready answers to prayers as they line up with the values and intentions of the Master.

²⁴ A more detailed treatment of these foundations is contained in Appendix B.

The Role of Expectation in Prayer: Eagles Wings

As has been seen, prayer is a powerful part of the disciple's life. It is not divorceable from one's entire relationship with God and working at it brings transformation and power to the spiritual life. Yet one thing remains in prayer that will change a disciple's experience of prayer, and that is expectation. The nearest biblical word for this is "waiting" (Is 40:31). But this is not waiting in vain, it is learning to wait patiently for him to hear and answer. The implication of the Hebrew word²⁵ is not the waiting, but hope and expectation. This is the capstone to prayer. One should not pray as a matter of exercise or duty, but given the new understanding of discipleship, a disciple should now pray fully expecting that God will do as he promised and answer the prayers. This kind of prayer will change the way one experiences the disciple's life. Disciples who have an eager expectation that God will answer their prayers end up being renewed and strengthened even before the prayers are answered. A prayer without expectation is an empty prayer. But prayer based on the disciple's intimate relationship with God and the expectation that he will answer this prayer gives that disciple energy, strength, stamina and wings to fly.

The Power of the Word in Spiritual Formation

Methodists have long placed a high value on the Word of God for discipleship and transformation. Wesley said that "searching the Scriptures" were a "means of grace" that helped disciples connect with God. Jesus commanded his disciples to teach others to

²⁵ Strong, *Enhanced Strong's*, Location h6960.

“observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:20). During his life here on earth, he also taught that everyone “who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Mt 7:24). From the earliest days as a nation, the Israelites were told, “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Jo 1:8).

Jesus Example of Principle Based Preaching in Matthew Five

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus took the Scriptures that had become so familiar to the Jewish people and he extracted some principles for citizens of the new kingdom to follow. Instead of compliance to the letter of the law, Jesus was looking for the principle behind the law. He said, “I have not come to abolish [the Law or Prophets] but to fulfill them” (Mt 5:17). Instead of a tick-a-box compliance with the letter of the Law, Jesus taught that he was looking for a heart change and a compliance with the intent of the law. Instead of a disciple claiming he or she did not murder anyone, Jesus indicates that the issue of murder is deeper than the act itself. Compliance with the law was only part of the point, dealing with anger and hate was the real issue. This is the fabric of discipleship and life transformation. While behavioral compliance is good, comprehending the point behind it is better. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus offered his disciples practical teaching with application that could be understood and followed. This remains true for preachers today. The Word of God must be taught, not for simple

outward compliance or knowledge, but for the principles behind it with action steps in order for disciples to experience life transformation that comes through discipleship.

Jesus' Value of the Word and Obedience for Growth

Jesus placed a high value on the Scriptures and also on his own words. He used the Scriptures himself, often quoting from them and explaining them, and he told his disciples that love and obedience were linked (Jn 14:23,24). A disciple could not have one without the other. But if a disciple loved God he or she would naturally obey, and if the disciple obeyed this indicated love. During his own temptation in the desert, Jesus confronted Satan with the Scripture: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4). In so doing he was saying that there is sustenance in the Word that does not come from temporal sources. In his discussion with his disciples over the encounter with the woman of Samaria at the well, he indicated that this source of sustenance came from obedience to the Father's will: "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work'" (Jn 4:34). The value Jesus placed on obedience to the Word is of significant importance to the issue of discipleship and the disciple's spiritual transformation.

The Word as Coach: Paul's Instruction to Timothy

The importance of the Word and its role in discipleship is borne out in the instruction Paul gives to his disciple, Timothy, about the value of Scripture. He writes:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God and

profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tm 3: 14-17).

Paul urges Timothy to continue with the Scriptures as he did throughout his childhood, recognizing the importance that they play in the issue of salvation. Paul reminds Timothy how the reading and application of the Scriptures are able to bring about growth and maturity in the life of the disciple as well as a fundamental equipping for the ministry to which God calls each believer. In other words, reading and applying the Bible are important elements to the expected growth of every disciple, and maturity and full equipping are the goals.

According to Paul, the usefulness of the Scriptures for growth is fourfold (teaching, reproof, correction, and training), and the purpose of these is to develop righteousness. The general Greek definition for righteousness is “the state of him who is as he ought to be,”²⁶ which implies that teaching, reproof, correction, and training help to bring a disciple into the state that he ought to be before God. In a very real sense this means to be sanctified and holy: to be mature and complete, to be Christlike. The goal of reading and obeying the Scripture is that one might be transformed to be more like Christ.

Teaching refers to the elemental principles of the faith. It is the fundamental principles by which everything else makes sense. For the disciple to grow they must first have a grasp of the fundamental scriptural principles. Reproof has its origins in the word proof, which means to test or verify. Paul tells Timothy that reading and applying the Bible will test him and at times show him the reality of his life of faith exposing things

²⁶ Strong, *Enhanced Strong's Dictionary*, Location g1343.

that need to be rectified. Correction is a gentler word that implies the need for some improvement. A disciple who is going the wrong direction needs reproof, but a disciple attempting to do the right thing may need correction. Training on the other hand speaks of regular developmental exercise. It contains the idea of increasing virtue and reducing vice. Constant training enables the disciple to become more familiar with the requirements of faith and less likely to fail.

Scripture as the Revelation and Example for Living

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 Paul tells his readers that the Bible is full of examples to follow. He writes, “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did,” and “Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come” (1 Cor 10:6, 11). Paul tells his readers that stories and examples from Scripture are useful for discipleship development: that things that happened to men and women from long ago that are recorded in the Scripture have usefulness in showing disciples how or how not to live. When reading and applying the Bible, these examples are a valuable source of instruction on obedience and guide the transformation of the disciple.

Biblical Reasons Why the Scripture Should Be Read

Beyond the things already mentioned, the Bible has many other reasons as to why reading and applying the Bible is important. The starting point is the value of doing so. Paul tells the Colossians that they should “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and

spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col 3:16). Dwelling signifies a living space. When disciples let the word of Christ dwell in them, they are letting it take up residence in their lives affecting the way they live. In the parable of the wise man who built his house on the rock, Jesus tells his disciples that hearing and obeying his words brings strength and stability in a storm (Mt 7:24-27). Joshua 1:8 explains that obeying the word of God will help disciples get where God wants them to go.

This mandate from the Bible alone is encouragement enough to read and apply it, but there is more: Hebrews 4:12 tells the disciple that it can discern “the thoughts and intentions of the heart” helping the disciple to understand the heart motives at the deepest level; Psalms 119:9 tells the disciples that the Word can help them keep their way pure or “kept” by preventing wandering and sin through seeking God as a high priority, meditating and memorizing his word, and not neglecting the reading and application of the word; and Ephesians 6:17 tells the disciples that with the Word, they can defend themselves against spiritual attack just like Jesus did when he was being tempted in the desert. These principles and others mentioned in this chapter point to why the Bible is a basic source of discipleship principles and a basic tool for the disciple to use.

The Power of a Church Culture That Values Discipleship

No matter the mandate from the Scripture about the discipline of prayer and reading and applying the Word, if the church culture does not uphold and support this process, it is difficult for disciples and disciple-makers to grow. As in Wesley’s day with the Anglican Church, if the structures and processes of the church are unable to accommodate the value of discipleship, then it is difficult to be intentional about it.

The Discipleship Process Must Be Led by the Pastor

The beginning point of any church based discipleship program is the willingness of the lead pastor to support, encourage and model it. Bill Hull reinforces this: “The pastor/teacher has the responsibility to work hard at and effectively communicate the Scriptures. He is equally charged to prepare God’s people by providing training vehicles. In most cases he must lead the charge and be the model for what he wants people to do.”²⁷ One of the foremost church leadership experts, Bill Hybels, wrote “If you cannot say, ‘Follow me,’ to your followers – and mean it – then you’ve got a problem. A big one. Speed of the leader, speed of the team.”²⁸

The change process is difficult whether it is in the lives of an individual or the church. Pastors who promote that they want to make disciples but who do not model it, will find themselves frustrated along with their congregation. It is much harder on the congregation and the pastor to half commit to disciple-making than it is to fully embrace it as challenging as that can be. Pastors must preach on the purpose of discipleship as well as discipleship principles. Pastors must make disciples and encourage them to do the same. When pastors lead this process, the people embrace it and lives are transformed.

Incremental Preaching Gives Time for Truth to Germinate

While preaching is not the most effective way to make disciples, it is one of the methods that should be used. Pastors that preach for discipleship are more likely to have a

²⁷ Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, 109.

²⁸ Bill Hybels, *Axiom: Powerful Leadership Proverbs* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 94.

congregation that embraces it. A disciple-making pastor must not be afraid to take the congregation slowly through issues of discipleship. This age is one of fast pace, but skipping from one topic to another without time to engage with the teaching becomes overwhelming. Preaching like this inoculates the disciples against the very change that is being preached. Pastors should not be afraid to take their time on discipleship issues, providing incremental practical weekly instruction on issues of discipleship living. Incremental preaching takes a general discipleship topic and week-by-week adds a little more to it. Each week exercises are offered to practice this at home, encouraging people to take the next step to obey everything he commanded.

Opportunities Must Be Offered for People to Engage in Each Discipline

As Bill Hull wrote, the pastor is “charged to prepare God’s people by providing training vehicles.”²⁹ These training vehicles may be a weekly task sheet, one on one mentoring or a discipleship small group experience. Whatever the method, disciples must be given tasks in which to engage. Wesley “had little interest in that kind of preaching which made moral demands on the people or called them to a commitment without following through with specific instruction.”³⁰ He called this “speechifying,”³¹ and taught his lay preachers that they must offer practical instruction when they preached. To Wesley there was no point of preaching for holiness unless it helped a person to better

²⁹ Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, 109.

³⁰ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 90.

³¹ S. Parkes Cadman, *The Three Religious Leaders of Oxford and Their Movements, John Wycliffe, John Wesley, John Henry Newman* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916), 223, quoted in Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 89.

connect with God. He made this his mission to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land through simple and practical teaching about what it meant to follow Jesus and this remains an important process in disciple-making today.

Not only do disciples need instructions to follow, they also need opportunities to engage in the process. If the disciple needs to learn how to pray or read their Bible, and they receive practical instructions but have no opportunity to engage in these disciplines then the usefulness of the teaching is lost. A church that is committed to making disciples not only teaches discipleship principles but also works at providing opportunities for disciples to practice their new skills. This can be in prayer meetings or small groups that read the Bible together, but these things are essential to reinforcing the teaching and practice of discipleship.

Small Groups are a Catalyst for a Disciple's Lifestyle

Bo Boshers wrote, "Life change happens best in small groups,"³² and this has been shown true in many settings throughout the history of the Church. Jesus gathered twelve men around him and taught them what mattered in kingdom living. Wesley also saw the relevance of the small group from what he called "primitive Christianity," and he formed the class meeting as a result.³³ David Yonggi Cho pastors the largest church in the world based around the principle of discipling in small groups. For Wesley, "the class

³² Bo Boshers, *Student Ministry for the 21st Century: Transforming Your Youth Group Into a Vital Student Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan Pub. House, 1997), 174.

³³ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 53.

meeting was designed to implement the behavioral quest for holy lifestyle.”³⁴ He knew that in a small group, encouragement, accountability and remedial instruction were paramount behavioral change. As a result people actually did change and much of the English society as well. In small groups, relationships are tested and discipleship has opportunity to develop. Churches that want to make transformed disciples must put effort into those things that enhance the process, and small groups are one of the paramount tools of discipleship.

³⁴ Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples*, 115.

PART THREE
MINISTRY STRATEGY

CHAPTER 6

MINISTRY PLAN

Part Three of this project presents the ministry plan and the implementation of that plan. The starting point of this ministry plan is the call to make disciples. The leaders at Hills Church do not simply want to entertain members or provide programs to satisfy consumers. They want to make disciples. The imperative of the Great Commission and the call to “equip the saints for works of ministry” (Eph 4:12), are the driving factors for this focus. Additionally, since the Church is in decline in Australia overall, and Australians in general see the Church as irrelevant, it is time to change focus. The idea of simply inviting people to church is not working; disciples need to be trained to love God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and then to love their neighbor as themselves. This process begins with these disciples partaking of the “mean of grace,” particularly by learning how to feed themselves and develop a relationship with God. These foundations to a disciple’s life are built through reading and applying the Bible and a lifestyle of prayer. It is from these principles, and the resulting change in lifestyle, that disciples can more effectively live out this life in their own world. This was the intention and action of the early church. It was exemplified again through the work of John Wesley, and it

remains an essential part of reaching the nation of Australia for Christ. It was never the intention of the Church to call people into a comfortable existence in the four walls of a building or to cater for their own personal tastes in music or preaching, but to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19). Of course Bible reading and prayer alone are just the beginning of a disciple’s life, but a church that trains its members to be disciples rather than consumers, has a better chance of reaching a nation that has lost its way.

Theological Implications of Whole Church Discipleship

With this in mind, the strategies and structure of the church must adapt. Certain practices must take a back seat and new ones must take their place. While the basic elements of church may remain the same, their use, and the emphasis placed on them may be different. Preaching for example will not be designed to entertain, be clever, or simply attempt to impart knowledge. Instead it would be focused on practical teaching on discipleship with as much help as possible to implement the teaching. The Sunday use of worship music would be similar. Its focus would not be on entertaining or keeping people happy, but it would be used as a tool to help build disciples. The church would not be seen as a place to attract people to sit and increase the numbers of the church, but as a place where saints can be equipped for works of ministry. Rather than church being a simple gathering, it would be a missionary convention, where missionaries would return from the field weekly: to give testimonies of how God had helped them to reach others; to encourage each other in the ministry; to worship God together; and to receive training and equipping for further ministry. The following principles underpin this strategy.

God Uses Scripture and Prayer to Grow Disciples Spiritually

As has been amply demonstrated throughout this project, God uses Scripture and prayer to help grow disciples. Hebrews 12:11-14 teaches that maturity comes from feeding on the word of God, beginning with the simple principles and then processing to the more weighty things. There is no allowance for staying on basic principles, and no indication that disciples can remain healthy if they do not learn to feed themselves. Jesus said that hearing and obeying the word leads to wisdom, maturity and strength (Mt 7:24-27), and Paul tells disciples that the Word can train them in righteousness: to be who God wants them to be and to thoroughly equip disciples for every good work. As disciples read and apply the Bible, they grow and develop into the people God wants them to be, they learn how he wants them to act, and they can see the things that he wants them to do.

While prayer is considered an essential tool of discipleship, it is not usually associated with a discipleship growth strategy. Yet as a disciple learns to pray in the way that Jesus intended, he or she begins to understand God's character and nature, what God values, and how he or she fits into God's plan. Disciples that pray also begin to align themselves with God's purpose and will as well as with his relationship priorities. The effort put into prayer is not just about getting prayers answered, but the development of a relationship that helps to mold the Christlike character of the disciple.

The Goal of the Church Is Disciple Making, Not Entertainment

An unfortunate byproduct of the church growth movement is that some churches have focused on numerical growth as a goal to the detriment of the pursuit of maturity.¹ Although numerical growth is not a problem in itself, focusing on it can be. Combined with the focus on numbers of people in church through the 1970s and 80s came a trend towards “pastor as CEO” rather than pastor as shepherd. Colin Marshall and Tony Payne state that this model “tends to produce spiritual consumers rather than active disciples of Christ.”² At Hills Church the leaders do not want to abandon quality in weekly services, but to steer away from entertainment and embrace those activities and processes that lead disciples towards a greater love of God and a corresponding love of others both in the church and outside the church. It is by this kind of love that people discern a connection to Christ (Jn 13:35).

The “Sin Management” Gospel Is a Blockage to Discipleship

A further principle underlying the ministry plan at Hills Church is to move believers away from reliance on the “sin management gospel” to a better understanding of the kingdom work of God in the lives of individuals and in the world. The “sin management gospel” is a gospel that primarily deals with the forgiveness of an

¹ Donald J. MacNair, *The Practices of a Healthy Church: Biblical Strategies for Vibrant Church Life and Ministry* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1999), 2.

² Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: the Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2009), 106., iBook.

individual's sin but says nothing about individual transformation.³ The trouble with this kind of gospel is that it "isn't the gospel of the Bible,"⁴ as Scot McKnight adds. The gospel involves personal transformation and kingdom living, and while there is no room for earning salvation, working towards Christlikeness and the establishment of the Kingdom is of paramount importance for disciples. At Hills Church members are taught that personal transformation and kingdom living matters to the disciple as much as accepting God's grace and the gift of eternal life.

Incremental Preaching with Application Leads People to Growth

Another foundation of the discipleship ministry plan at Hills Church is that preaching for discipleship matters. It is understood that preaching is not the best method of bringing about personal transformation, but if done right, it can form an important part of the process. At Hills Church discipleship preaching is done in incremental steps with one principle building on the other until the issue has been completed. In this way members are able to grow together as they try and implement small changes to their lives over time. This approach is preferred over dealing with one major issue each week with no practical follow up or time for members to work the principle into their daily lives. The material that forms the basis of the small groups on reading and applying the Bible and prayer come from two incremental preaching series done at the church.

³ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 41.

⁴ McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 38.

Small Groups Encourage Discipleship

A final principle underlying the ministry plan at Hills Church is that small groups encourage discipleship. Jesus began the ministry with a small group of twelve men and Wesley effectively used small groups to train thousands of new believers. So the principle of life transformation in a small group has been well proven. Hills Church uses many different types of small groups, but focuses priority on the ‘Bible reading’ and ‘prayer’ small groups to develop discipleship tools in a discipleship environment.

Preferred Future: New Attendees Develop a Self-sustaining Relationship with God through the Word and Prayer That Leads to a Transformed Disciple’s Life

All of these fundamental principles are designed to lead to a preferred future at Hills Church where the goal is for members to develop a self-sustaining relationship with God through the Word and prayer that leads to a transformed disciple’s life. Hills Church’s desire is that every one of its members grows to a point where they are able to feed themselves and enjoy a dynamic personal relationship with God through prayer. The desire is to equip disciples of Jesus Christ for the ministry of making disciples, to develop resilience and perseverance in disciples, and to release disciples when and wherever God calls them.

Strategy Goals

The strategy goals for the project are threefold: first, to enhance the current discipleship strategy by the addition of a Bible reading small group and a prayer small group; second, to help those who attend the Bible reading small group to read and apply

the Bible for themselves using the SOAP⁵ method; and third, to help those who attend the prayer small group to learn and practice the biblical principles of prayer. These goals are consistent with the ongoing discipling strategy that has been progressively developed at Hills Church over the last three years. Initially, important discipleship foundations were built through leadership development and pulpit ministry, followed by the development of a more strategic small group ministry. A further widening and deepening of these strategies now requires the addition of small groups on these discipleship basics.

Addition of Bible Reading and Prayer Small Groups

The small group ministry at Hills Church has been running for twelve months. Instead of running small groups solely based on a long-term commitment to each group, a semester-based system was adapted from Nelson Searcy's model in his book *Activate*.⁶ Although many small groups are being offered at any given time, church leadership encourages newcomers to attend entry level discipleship small groups based on Bible reading and prayer as a starting point for discipleship and assimilation into the church culture. Rather than a catch-all discipleship small group, the structuring is based on the premise that there are various basic discipleship issues which need more teaching time in order to help each disciple develop the habit or principle being taught: in order to move from "teaching them" to "teaching them to obey."

Teaching Disciples to Read and Apply the Bible Using the SOAP Method

⁵ SOAP stands for Scripture, Observation, Application, Prayer. See Appendix C for more detail.

⁶ Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *Activate: an Entirely New Approach to Small Groups* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2008), iBook.

The second strategy goal is to help those who attend the Bible reading small group to read and apply the Bible for themselves using the SOAP method. Too often Christians rely on pulpit teaching for their discipleship training. Yet the Bible is full of the challenges to read and obey the Word, implying that disciples are also responsible to feed themselves (Heb 5:11-14). The strategy is founded on the belief that disciples need to be trained to feed themselves so that they are able to grow regardless of those that surround them. It is the desire of the church to train disciples that are able to grow under competent or incompetent leadership: in churches that have great programs or in churches that have none; disciples who do not always have to be taught but can learn themselves and teach others. To see this goal realized, the church's mission is to train new Christians and newcomers with tools for Bible study including how to use the SOAP method of Bible study as well as the reasons why reading the Bible is valuable for discipleship.

Teaching Disciples the Biblical Principles and Practice of Prayer

Goal three of the discipleship small group strategy is to help those attending the prayer small group to learn and practice the biblical principles of prayer. Prayer is not often taught and modeled in an apprenticeship style. In fact, despite the example of Jesus, prayer is not often deliberately taught at all. Most of what disciples learn about prayer is seen through the example of others, and while this is good, it does not often deal with the breadth and depth of prayer. Even when disciples see others pray, they are not often deliberately challenged to take the principles they have seen and practice them. At Hills Church the prayer small group will teach ten prayer principles and then help disciples to practice these both in the small group and at home. The goal is to develop an

understanding of prayer, its importance and its methodology, and to become proficient in the practice of it. Disciples who know how to pray are more likely to continue to develop their relationship with God and become more mature disciples of Jesus Christ.

Strategy Content

The content for the small groups based on Bible reading and prayer was developed over two years at Hills Church during the pulpit ministry of the church. This teaching was a part of the initial discipleship strategy of the church. A whole year was spent on each topic: one year on Bible reading and application, and one year on prayer. Take home sheets supplemented the pulpit ministry as well as weekly exercises, accountability and opportunity to participate in events that encouraged the development of each tool. Having completed this process once, it is unlikely that it can be repeated in such detail in the congregation in the near future and, for this reason, small groups have been formed to help assimilate new comers into the discipleship strategies of the church and the principles that the church expects a disciple to embrace.

Small Group Teaching on the Biblical Principles of Bible Reading for Spiritual Growth

The preaching material on Bible reading and prayer was adjusted and adapted for use in small groups and now forms the basis for Hills Church's ongoing strategy for developing various foundations for discipleship in small groups. Each small group lasts from ten to twelve weeks and involves community, accountability, teaching, discussion and homework. After a welcome, prayer and review of the last week's teaching, participants bring a weekly report of their experience with the homework, where

questions can be answered and others can be encouraged. The introductory material, including the review of the previous week's teaching should take about fifteen minutes. The review of the homework can take from fifteen minutes to half an hour depending on the size of the group. Each participant should be encouraged to share what he or she has done and learned during the week. Providing a check on homework in a group setting encourages accountability to complete the task, but it is the leader's responsibility to reinforce the learning so that it becomes familiar and the learning is retained. Before each new teaching, an "icebreaker" question is asked to help develop community but also as a lead-in to the teaching since the icebreaker topic is most often linked to a main point in the teaching. The icebreaker should take about fifteen minutes. Following the icebreaker, a twenty to thirty-minute teaching on the new topic for the week is presented and then discussion is encouraged on the topic and its relevance to the disciple. The discussion should take about fifteen to twenty minutes. Finally for the next five to ten minutes, the homework for the coming week is presented and someone from the group closes in prayer. This is the weekly pattern for both groups.

SOAP Method of Bible Reading and Application

The following material is a summary of the material presented to the small group on Bible reading and application. This group ran for twelve weeks with teaching on the biblical reasons as to why a disciple should read the Bible. These reasons build the case for reading the Word, and help the disciple to understand these values, as well as being able to recognize these principles in the Word. Each week participants were encouraged to read their Bible using the SOAP method and, along with some other small tasks,

present one of their SOAP devotions each week. The leader's role is to encourage the work that was done, correct any process errors, try to make sure that participants come up with personal application not application for the Church or others, and celebrate any personal insights that each participant may have gained from the readings. Following this is a brief summary of the content of each week's teaching. Examples of the whole small group experience are contained in Appendix D.

Why Read the Bible Week #1: Because It Tells Disciples To

Week one of the "Why Read the Bible?" small group centers around the idea that the Scriptures themselves tell the disciple to read them. In speaking with his disciples in John 14, Jesus tells them, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words" (Jn 14:23, 24). The same point is made using many other scriptures (Col 3:16, Jas 1:21, Mt 7:24-27). Finally group participants are taught that reading and applying the Bible helps them to get where God wants them to go (Jo 1:8). The word "success" in this passage is the success of making it to the Promised Land: to the place God had planned for the Israelites. Participants are taught that disciples who read and apply the word are more able to get to the place God wants them to go in their relationship with him.

Why Read the Bible Week #2: Because It Helps Disciples Grow

The second group study on "Why read and apply the Bible?" teaches the participants the importance of spiritual growth and how reading and applying the Bible

helps in that process. To do this, participants are taught about the value of the milk and meat of the Word. A parallel is drawn between the natural and the spiritual using the illustration of a baby. No one expects babies to eat meat; they must drink milk to survive. But no one expects a grown man to beg for a bottle of milk; he needs to know how to feed himself. This is the natural process of life and it is natural in discipleship as well (Heb 5:12-14).

Psalms 1:3 states that the disciple who meditates on the law “is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.” From the principles contained in this verse, participants are also taught that meditation on the Word brings strength, resilience and spiritual fruit. Another example of growth comes from the Parable of the Sower (Lk 8:4-15) where disciples are encouraged to be receptive soil for the word so that it can produce a crop. These principles of growth among others are designed to encourage group participants to persevere with the process of reading and applying the Bible that they may mature and grow in their relationship with God.

Why Read the Bible Week #3: Because It Strengthens and Equips Disciples

In week three, the value of the Word in strengthening and equipping the believer for salvation and for good works is taught. In writing to Timothy, Paul encourages him in the importance of Scripture saying that sticking to what he has learned from Scripture will make him “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tm 3:15). Paul knew that knowing the Scriptures would help Timothy stand against those who would destroy his faith by persecution or deceptive teaching (2 Tm 3:10-17). He also knew that if

Timothy allowed the Scriptures to train him, he would become complete and “equipped for every good work” (2 Tm 3:17). In this session, participants learn that reading and applying the Bible will not only protect them in their salvation, but will equip them to be everything God wants them to be so that they can undertake ministry in the kingdom.

Why Read the Bible Week #4: Because It Helps Disciples Be in the Right State

In week four, the passage in 2 Timothy 3: 16,17 is treated in more detail. The most important part of the teaching this week is the teaching about righteousness. Participants are taught that righteousness is being in the right state: the state that God wants each disciple to be in. With this definition in mind, the ideas of doctrine, rebuke, correction and training are discussed. The participants are taught: that reading the Bible helps to understand the basic “doctrines” of the faith; that a “rebuke” from the Word is when God is testing the quality of the disciple’s life and helping him or her to fix it; that “correction” from the Bible is when God sees that the disciple needs small adjustments to the direction he or she is headed; and, that “training” is when through regular use of the Word, the disciple is able to increase the virtue in his or her life and decrease the vice. This teaching will reinforce the idea that the Scriptures should be read and obeyed if the disciple wants to grow, mature and be equipped for ministry.

Why Read the Bible Week #5: Because It Judges Disciples Thoughts and Attitudes

Week five concentrates on issues of which people are generally unaware, and how “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and

intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). Participants are taught that reading and applying the Bible enables God to reveal the true intentions of the heart when they are unable to do so. The very nature of dividing thoughts and intentions means that a disciple cannot plan to it alone. As he or she regularly encounters the Word of God the scalpel of the Holy Spirit can separate issues out, expose them, and allow the real issue to be addressed.

Why Read the Bible Week #6: Because It Brings Blessing and Happiness

When Jesus was speaking to a crowd, a woman who was impressed with what he was saying exclaimed, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed” (Lk 11:27). Jesus responded “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it” (Lk 11:28). In week six group participants will learn that a life of blessing awaits those who read and apply the word of God. Jesus said, God’s favor is not on those who are born into the right family, but on those who hear the word and obey it.

Why Read the Bible Week #7: It Helps Disciples Live a Full Life

The teaching for week seven revolves around the Scripture “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Mt 4:4). Participants will be taught that there is spiritual sustenance that comes from reading and applying the Word: that even although a person can eat physical food and do physical things, they will never truly be alive until they live the way God wants and do what he commands. In the story of the woman at the well in Luke 4, Jesus teaches that natural food and drink will not satisfy, but spiritual food and drink will. The definitive part of the teaching is when Jesus says, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work”

(Jn 4:34). Jesus is reinforcing a principle that disciples must also understand: true fulfillment in life comes from being obedient to what God wants.

Why Read the Bible Week #8: Because It Reveals Jesus the Messiah

Week eight concentrates on the revelation of the messiah in the pages of Scripture. Using the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35), participants can see that Jesus was able to use the whole Law and Prophets to interpret “to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lk 24:27). As part of the training, participants are required to look up biblical passages concerning the Messiah to familiarize themselves with the way Jesus was revealed in the Scriptures. This will help them to become more aware of the content in the Scriptures that speaks directly of Jesus.

Why Read the Bible Week #9: Because It Gives Disciples Examples of How to Live

This week, participants are encouraged to begin looking in the Scripture for examples of spiritual living following the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10. After describing what happened to those who were disobedient to God he writes, “Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did” (1 Cor 10:6). Later on, Paul reinforces this: “Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction” (1 Cor 10:11). Participants in the group are taught that one of the ways they should read the Bible is to look for examples of how and how not to live in order that they do not fall (1 Cor 10:12).

Why Read the Bible Week #10: Because It Helps Disciples Stand Against the Devil

In this teaching, small group participants are taught how understanding the Bible can help them stand against the Devil. Using the Scripture in Ephesians six that states, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12), participants are taught that Christians are in a spiritual battle and that additional to all the armor mentioned in the passage, the weapon used in an offensive strategy is the Word of God. It is important for them to embrace that when they read, understand and apply the Bible, when empowered by the Holy Spirit, it can become a formidable weapon against the devil. This is especially true when being tempted or tested by the devil as is seen in the Temptation of Jesus in Matthew four where Jesus effectively used the Scriptures to address issues of temptation. Participants will be encouraged to read their Bible regularly so that they become familiar with it and even memorize it in order to help them in the spiritual battle.

Why Read the Bible Week #11: Because It Helps Disciples Keep Their Way Pure

The small group emphasis in week eleven is on purity or the lack of pollution or corruption. Psalms 119:9 asks, “How can a young man keep his way pure?” and then replies to this question saying, “By guarding it according to your word.” Participants will be encouraged to read the Bible as a way to keep a guard on the purity of their lives. The Hebrew word for “pure” and “keep” are the same and so group members are taught to keep their way “kept” through seeking God with their whole heart, making Bible reading

a priority, memorizing of the word, retelling the word, rejoicing in the word, obeying the word, meditating on the word, and being diligent in the word.⁷

Why Read the Bible Week #12: Because Disciples Need to Rightly Divide the Word

In the final week of the “Why read and apply the Bible?” small group, participants are encouraged to be unashamed of their newfound discipleship, but to be diligent in finding the truth in the Scriptures. This is what Paul told his disciple Timothy, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tm 2:15). The main purpose of this final teaching is to give participants encouragement to use the tools from the group, but to work hard to make sure they are seeking for the truth of Scripture not their own interpretation. The importance of this is impressed on them because some people add extra things to the word, “teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mk 7:7), and others just like Satan in the temptation of Jesus, twist the Scripture to suit their own ends. Participants are encouraged to avoid distortion of the word of God by: “setting forth the truth plainly” (2 Cor 4:2) and testing what is being said, like the Bereans (Acts 17:10-12).

Small Group Teaching on the Biblical Principles of Prayer

Following is a summary of the material presented to the small group on the biblical principles of prayer. This ten-week group focused on biblical answers to the question “What is prayer?” The basis for these studies is to deal with preconceived

⁷ See Psalms 119:10-16.

notions of prayers in believers as well as helping someone who has never said a prayer in their life. Each week a biblical principle of prayer is taught and discussed, and the participants get to practice the newly taught principle at home. Examples of the whole small group experience are contained in Appendix E.

Prayer Week #1: Prayer Is the Answer to Life the Universe and Everything

In week one of the “What Is Prayer?” small group, the major theme is that prayer is about a relationship with God. Participants will be taught that from creation to the consummation of all things, God desires to have a relationship with his created beings. This is seen in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve get to regularly walk and talk with God in the cool of the evening (Gn 3:8, 9), and in Revelation where God sets up his dwelling place among the people (Rv 21:3-4). When the trust of relationship is broken, Adam and Eve are banished from the Garden (Gn 3:22, 23), and relationship with God becomes something that now requires deliberate attention on the part of a believer, so that his or her goal can be “to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”⁸ The homework for this week involves: personal reflection on the way each participant is acting out the image of God; a reflection on how the participant’s relationship with God extends to all areas of life; and a reflection on any brokenness of relationship that leads to hiding from God.

⁸ Westminster Assembly, “The Shorter Catechism,” Creeds of Christendom, http://www.creeds.net/Westminster/shorter_catechism.html (accessed May 27, 2013).

Prayer Week #2: Prayer Is Seeking the Presence of God (Presence)

Week two of the “What Is Prayer?” small group follows on from the theme of relationship with God and the loss of intimacy experienced in the Garden. Using various examples of those who sought God the participants are encouraged to recognize that, although God is Savior and Father, an intimate relationship with him requires an intentional pursuit. Moses would leave his own tent and go to the tent of meeting where he had a face-to-face encounter with God (Ex 33:7-11). This encounter transformed him as a leader and as a person. Participants are encouraged to move from shouting out their requests to God from a distance and to intentionally seek to be in his presence when praying. Even Jesus who was fully God and fully man set the example for this when he regularly took time out to be in the presence of the Father.⁹ God tells his people that calling out to him, turning from sin and humbly seeking his face or presence, yields results in prayer (2 Chr 7:14). Deuteronomy 4:29 and Jeremiah 29:13 state that God is found when people seek him. Finally participants will be taught that Jesus wants to enter into an intimate communal relationship with each disciple if they will open the door to him (Rv 3:20). The homework for this week is for participants to analyze their regular requests and see what might change if they were sitting in the presence of Jesus when presenting the requests. They are also encouraged to find some time to seek the presence of God and to dwell in that presence.

⁹ See Lk 6:12 for example.

Prayer Week #3: Prayer Is Listening to God (Listening)

In the third week, the focus is on listening to God. Often Christians pray to God for his help or for an answer to something they are facing, but many times they refuse to spend time listening to the answer. In this session participants learn the value of listening to God initially through reading and meditating on the Word. The Bible contains most of God's will for his followers, and his desires for humankind; when disciples meditate on the Bible they begin to understand what God wants, and this affects their prayers. The act of reading the Bible to hear from God is a significant part of prayer. Participants are encouraged to understand that almost all that God wants to say to them in answer to their prayers comes from the Bible. This session also teaches that God sometimes speaks to disciples directly and, that just like with the boy, Samuel, in the temple, disciples need to train themselves to listen for the voice of God (1 Sm 3:1-14). Participants are encouraged to become more observant to circumstances and more sensitive in their listening to the direction and voice of God. The homework this week is for participants to start reading the Word using the SOAP method as well as training themselves to listen more intently by praying the prayer of Samuel everyday and at all times: "Speak Lord your servant is listening" (2 Sm 3:10).

Prayer Week #4: Prayer Is Honouring Who God Is (Praise)

The fourth week begins the talking elements of prayer. Participants are encouraged to think about what kind of words should preface any communication with God. Using the first words taught by Jesus to his disciples in the Model Prayer, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name," participants are taught the importance of

praise for who God is and what he does. When a disciple starts prayer by bringing honor to the name of God he or she begins to understand how God acts and operates in the world. When this happens it has a profound effect on the prayer that a disciple will pray: influencing a disciple's attitude and expectations of God and what he wants to do. The homework for this week is to reflect on a few attributes of God as to how this truth would change what a disciple prays and the way a disciple prays.

Prayer Week #5: Prayer Is Being Thankful (Thanksgiving)

In week five the theme is thanksgiving. Participants are reminded that entry in the courts of the King requires praise and thanksgiving (Ps 100:4). Paul reminds the believer that it is God's will that they "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, [and] give thanks in all circumstances" (1 Thes 5:16-18). He also tells the Philippians that, no matter what the circumstances, they should pray "with thanksgiving" (Phil 4:6). This session finishes with the example of the one leper who returned to say thanks to Jesus for healing him when nine others forgot (Lk 17:11-19). Participants are reminded that thanksgiving is a choice and requires a grateful heart that recognizes God's hand in the disciple's life. The homework asks participants to become a blessing sleuth looking for where God is at work in their life as well as beginning a list of one blessing per year for as far back as they can remember. The act of being thankful changes the attitude and prayers of a disciple.

Prayer Week #6: Prayer Is Keeping a Clear Connection to God (Confession)

This week, participants are confronted with the need for confession, not as a means of feeling guilty, but as a way to keep the lines of communication open between

themselves and God. Psalms 66:18 indicates that if a disciple cherishes sin in his or her heart, then God does not listen to their prayers; confessing the sin and seeking God's forgiveness as taught in the model prayer (Lk 11:4), helps to clear up the communication channel between the disciple and God. Using Daniel's prayer of confession as an example (Dn 9:4-6), participants are taught that disciples should confess sin, rebellion and disobedience. The disciple's confession of sin could be for known sin "For I know my transgressions" (Ps.51:3), or for unknown sins, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me" (Ps 139:23, 24). For homework, participants are encouraged to spend time in confession to God and finish with a prayer for God to reveal any hidden or unknown sins in their lives.

Prayer Week #7: Prayer Is Representing the Needs of Others (Intercession)

Week seven begins the teaching on presenting requests to God starting with intercession, which means to stand in the gap for others. Participants are taught the value of praying for others before themselves using Paul's urging to Timothy that "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people" (1 Tm 2:1). The key teaching this week is that God wants disciples to pray for others and is pleased when they do; that praying for others begins to put one's own requests into perspective and that God answers these kinds of prayers. An additional element of this session is the comparison between intercessors, who represent the people to God and ambassadors, who represent God to the people. The beauty of a disciple is that they can be both intercessor and ambassador, and that this is the role God asks his disciples to play. Participants are given extra handouts this week that list biblical examples for whom

disciples should pray and for what they should pray. The homework for this week is for participants to make a list of people to intercede for and then to pray God's will for them and any other specific prayers that are necessary. Some instruction is also given about how to organize these requests to keep order to the prayers.

Prayer Week #8: Prayer Is Asking God to Do Something That Disciples Cannot Do for Themselves

In week eight, participants finally get to learning about presenting their own petitions to God. This session helps participants to understand that petition is asking God to do something that a disciples cannot do for themselves: it is requesting help from a higher power. Jesus teaches that petition works best in the intimate relationship of a Father and his child suggesting that he knows best what to give his children and will not give them something that would harm them (Mt 7:9-11). Jesus tells disciples that they should "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened" (Mt 7:7, 8). John says something similar, "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him" (1 Jn 5:14,15). In closing this session some issues that may affect a disciple's answers to prayer are discussed. For example: not praying in the will of God (1 Jn 5:14), not being righteous (Jas 5:16), and not abiding in Jesus (Jn 15:7, 8). The homework for this week is to write out personal prayer requests in the light of all the learning on prayer so far.

Prayer Week #9: Prayer Is Keeping Watch so One Doesn't Fall Into Trouble

Week nine brings out an issue that is not often considered in prayer: watching. Jesus said, "Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Mt 26:41). By this he was saying that good intentions are not enough, the flesh will work against those good intention so that they are undone unless a disciple takes watch on his or her life. Paul says a similar thing in Colossians 4:2: "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving." To keep watch means that the disciple needs to be careful not to become lazy or careless in his or her spiritual life lest some calamity catch up to them and cause them trouble. In this session participants are taught that watching in prayer is an essential part of the disciple's life. It is when the disciple asks God to help them see what areas of their life need attention. This ongoing diligence as a disciple will change how a disciple experiences life and will strengthen his or her spiritual life. The homework for week nine is to read the life instructions in the book of Colossians and to reflect on how the disciple is doing in that area and what he or she may need to do to rectify the situation.

Prayer Week #10: Prayer Is Fully Expecting God to Show Up (Waiting)

In the last week of the "What Is Prayer?" small group the theme is expectation. Participants are encouraged to pray at all times in expectation that God will answer their prayers. The likelihood of this is enhanced given their new understanding of the meaning, purpose and practice of prayer. The idea of waiting is not to be patient, but to eagerly hope and expect for something to happen. Given a new understanding of prayer, a

disciple should fully expect that God will answer his or her prayers. This is the sentiment of Isaiah 40:31, “but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” Participants are taught that if they are obedient disciples, praying according to his will they should wait with eager expectation for the answer to come. This kind of response to God has the effect of giving energy and momentum to the Christian life and is worth every ounce of energy that is invested in the cause. The homework encourages meditation on Scripture and finishes with the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego where they had such confidence that God would show up for them, but had decided that “even if he doesn’t” they were still determined to be obedient to him (Dn 3:16-18).

Leadership and Target Population

The initial leadership of the group will be the senior pastor. The reason for this is twofold: first, so that the new curriculum can be tested and adjusted where necessary, and second so that the process of teaching the group can be modeled to future leadership that will be selected from among the participants where possible. Since the material has only recently been adapted from a preaching series into small group material, minor adjustments to content and process may need to be made. These refinements will help future leaders of the group to be more effective in teaching the material and helping participants to grow. After a couple of weeks, potential future leaders will be identified and given opportunity to lead a discussion, or ask questions of the participants. Eventually in the last three of four weeks a potential leader is selected to present one of the sessions using the teaching notes. Once the group is over, new leaders will meet with

the pastor for further training in leading a small group, and when the class is run again they will be asked to lead the group. If the new leader has questions or issue he or she may discuss this with the pastor as they progress through the material.

New Attendees Will Be Encouraged to Participate in These Groups

As an Introduction to the Values of the Local Church

Although Hills Church has a well-structured small group ministry, the Bible reading and prayer small groups are foundational groups for the church and must be maintained. Each semester new attendees and new Christians will be encouraged to join either the “Why Read and Apply the Bible?” or the “What Is Prayer?” small group. Since the church values these processes as essential to discipleship, it is important that new comers and new Christians learn to value them as well if they are to fit into the church culture. Involvement in leadership at the church will ultimately be conditional on having attended these small groups, and having embraced the values presented. Although these groups are primarily designed for new attendees because the church has already gone through this material together, the groups are not exclusive and anyone will be able to join the group to refresh their understanding and practice of Bible reading and prayer.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

Pilot project summary: This project involves a Bible reading small group and a prayer small group that offers newcomers an opportunity to be discipled as well as to understand the discipleship values of the local church.

At the project level it is hard to see the big picture, but it must not be forgotten. The big picture is discipleship. The big picture is Jesus' command to his disciples to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19,20). The big task is to "equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12). At Hills Church the priority is that members will "be" disciples of Jesus and in turn, "make" disciples of Jesus.

This project is part of that picture. While there are many processes and issues involved in making disciples, two are fundamental: Bible intake with application and a prayer relationship with God. This project is a beginning point for making disciples. It gives disciples two fundamental tools that will help them grow. Through the use of these "means of grace," disciples get to encounter God and grow in relationship with him.

Within this chapter, the implementation process for two small groups on Bible reading and prayer is defined. It also describes the assessment tools and tabulates the results of this pilot project. Results and feedback will be used to re-evaluate the program allowing for modification of process and content. This refinement may allow for the material to be used in many churches in multiple denominations. It may have particular value for new church plants all around the world as a basis for their discipleship process.

Timeline

The following paragraphs describe the timeline for implementation of the pilot project. Planning and timing are essential for successful project implementation especially since the material involves an extensive commitment of time and energy. The participants' experience depends on good planning and preparation.

Develop Small Group Material: January-December 2012

The material for these small groups was originally presented as two preaching series to Hills Church. The "Why Read and Apply the Bible?" series was taught over twelve weeks in 2010. This series was accompanied by weekly encouragement to read the Bible using the SOAP method as well as the establishment of small groups to read the Bible together. On Sundays members were encouraged to share what they had read during the week and it was clear that discipleship growth was occurring. The focus of 2010 for the whole year was reading the Bible, and the sharing on Sundays and in small groups continued throughout the year.

During 2011 the theme at Hills Church was prayer. Each time the author stood up in the pulpit during that year the topic was prayer. This “Year on Prayer” had a profound effect on the prayer life of the church. During that year, prayer meetings were attended by about 30 percent of the congregation. Many prayers were answered and lives impacted and changed. There were three series of messages during 2011, and the material for the “What Is Prayer?” small group comes from the first thirteen week segment of that year’s teaching. Each week during this year members were offered opportunities to pray and learn to pray. This came in the form of prayer groups and handout sheets designed to help attendees grow in prayer. Over the next year, both these series of messages were developed into a small group format with icebreaker questions and homework.

Small Group Sign-Up: February 2013

In keeping with the pre-existing timetable for small groups, the “Why Read the Bible?” and “What Is Prayer?” small groups were offered to new comers and existing members over a four week period. During this month, members were encouraged to sign up to a small group, and new comers were encouraged to attend the bible and prayer groups. Once the sign up period was ended groups began.

Run Small Groups: March-May 2013

The Bible reading and prayer groups were run during the months of March to May 2013. The prayer group met on Tuesday evenings from 8-9:30p.m. and the Bible reading group met on Thursday evenings from 7-9p.m. Overall the material was received positively and the groups appreciated and embraced the input and challenge.

Leadership Development

In each group, assistant leaders were chosen to help with the process. The Thursday night prayer group had twenty-four participants and so leaders were chosen to run smaller groups for homework review as well as post teaching discussions. These leaders will form the basis of future teaching of the small group. Given the late timeslot for this group, one leader was able to take a group from the main group and re-teach the material in a morning time-slot. The feedback from that group was very positive.

In the Bible reading small group, two trainee leaders were selected and given opportunity to teach the material. One will teach the material in a daytime small group next semester. The author will work with the other leader to adapt the material for use with teens and that will also begin next semester. Each of these leaders has been asked to train someone else who will be able to deliver the material in a new setting.

One goal for the use of this material is in local churches or denominational settings especially in third world countries where training is scarce. Leaders will be gathered together to go through the material over three days and then those who wish to stay will be trained to train others. The material will be made available to these churches and leaders with the only criteria being that they train others to teach the material.¹

¹ This idea adapted from the Dynamic Church Planting International training model. Dynamic Church Planting International, "Train and Equip Leaders," Dynamic Church Planting International, August 12, 2013, accessed August 12, 2013, <http://www.dpci.org/565138.ihtml>.

Resources

Since the author developed the material for these small groups, the church must print training notes and workbooks. This cost is borne by the church in the general budget, but time and effort must be put in anytime the groups are run to print, collate, fold and staple booklets. A further cost is the provision of SOAP Journals. These cost about \$7 each, but are also generally available at the church resource table. Additionally a room must be booked for each session of the small group. No additional support personnel are required apart from those who assist with printing and binding of workbooks or ordering SOAP Journals.

Assessment Tools and Plan

In order to be sure that the small group material has the desired outcome of developing prayer and Bible reading habits as part of the process of developing disciples, it is essential to do a pre and post test of the habits of the individual and their knowledge of the subject. To achieve this, a survey was taken of participants to gauge their understanding of each discipleship tool. At the end of the small group an almost identical survey was administered to determine how the participant's views or experience in the subject matter had changed or developed. All questions were based on self-reflection, and ranged from experience with the subject matter to experience in the practice of the

discipline. Participants were also asked to rate the effect that the small group experience and teaching had on their relationship with God.²

Tabulation, Analysis and Presentation of the Results

All data collected before and after each small group was entered collated using Microsoft Excel. Various trends and details were extracted to show overall and individual responses to each small group experience. The detailed analysis of these results is presented below.

“Why Read the Bible?” Small Group Survey Results

Fifteen participants attended the “Why Read the Bible?” small group. Of these, eleven listed Bible reading as an important Christian activity that should be undertaken in order to develop as a disciple. Even though more than 70 percent of participants rated Bible reading as important, almost 50 percent of participants did not read their bible even once a week prior to attending the small group. By the end of the group, however, every participant showed a marked improvement in their Bible reading with most showing an increase in Bible reading to three or more times per week.

When participants were asked if their knowledge of approaches to reading the Bible had increased, 100 percent agreed that the small group had given them a better understanding of how to read the Bible. Eighty percent of participants also agreed that the small group had taught them more about the value and importance of reading the Bible

² See Appendix F for post Bible reading small group survey and Appendix G for post prayer small group survey.

than they had appreciated before attending the small group. Of all those who attended the group, a full 100 percent showed an increase in the level of Bible reading undertaken.

About half the small group participants had no plan for how to read the Bible prior to the group, and a further half regularly used pre-written devotional books. At the end of the group, 100% were using the SOAP method of Bible study. The study proved so popular that eleven of the group participants continue to meet weekly now that the small group is over, and they share their SOAP devotions with each other once they have finished.

As a part of the survey, participants were asked to respond to a number of statements about the helpful impact of the teaching and activities of the small group. Each statement was rated on a scale of one to five, where one represents “not helpful” and five represented “most helpful.” The average score for each statement ranged from four point three to four point seven (see Table 1). More than 50 percent of respondents to every question indicated that it was “most helpful” by circling the number five.

Table 1. Results for “Why Read the Bible?” small group

Statement	Average
This small group has helped me learn more about the Bible	4.6
This small group has helped me know God better	4.5
This small group has helped me be a better disciple	4.5
This small group has helped me in self-discipline	4.5
This small group has encouraged me to follow God more	4.5
This small group has helped me in how to read the Bible	4.7
This small group has helped me learn new tools for discipleship	4.6
This small group has given me fresh revelation of God	4.5
This small group has drawn me closer to God than I have ever been	4.3

In the initial survey, participants were asked to list the three most important reasons for reading the Bible. After the small group they were asked to do the same. In most cases, the responses clearly indicated a change in thinking as a result of the twelve weeks of teaching and actual reading of the Bible using the SOAP method. Two of the respondents changed their responses from ones that reflected a self-centred application for Bible reading to ones that reflected the importance of being ready to share what had been learned from the Scripture with others when it was appropriate. They now actively look for opportunities not only to apply the Scripture to themselves, but use it to encourage and support others. Another participant recognized that reading the Bible was not simply about understanding it, but to help build a relationship with God and listening to what he says. Someone else changed their thinking from compliance with God's commands to the change that happens inside a person when they obey. Other participants shifted their thinking about reading the Bible from knowing about God to being equipped, strengthened and protected from the attacks of the Devil.

As the author observed participants, it was clear that the tools and teaching were having an impact on their ability to engage with the Bible and connect with God. Each week the sharing of the SOAP devotion and biblical application was deep and meaningful. Participants were not only learning from the small group teaching but from the personal reading of the Bible and from sharing this with each other. This can also be gauged from the comments about the impact of this small group on their discipleship journey (see Appendix H).

“What Is Prayer?” Small Group Survey Results

Sixteen participants made it through the small group called “What Is Prayer?” Of those who attended, 82 percent listed prayer as an important part of the disciple’s life. Almost 90 percent of those who attended indicated that they already pray more than four times a week. This could indicate that only those who already pray were attracted to the group. It may also be skewed a little because prayer was not defined when asking the question. Nevertheless those who indicated that they hardly ever prayed showed a dramatic increase in the frequency of their prayer by the end of the small group, and over 90 percent indicated that as a result of the small group they now knew more about how to pray. Sixty-seven percent also indicated that they now knew more about the importance of prayer.

Again participants were asked to respond to a number of statements about the helpful impact of the teaching and activities of the small group. Each statement was also rated on a scale of one to five, where one represents “not helpful” and five represented “most helpful.” The average score for each statement ranged from three point three to four point five (see Table 2). More than 50 percent of respondents to every question rated their response from four to five. The highest averages indicated that participants learned more about prayer and about how to pray in the small group. A further question in the survey asked about the overall impact of the small group. On a scale of one to ten, participants rated the change they experience in their lives as a result of the small group teaching and experience. The responses ranged from five to ten with the average of all responses being 6.4. This is a very encouraging and positive result.

Table 2. Results for “What Is Prayer?” small group

Statement	Average
This small group has helped me learn more about Prayer	4.4
This small group has helped me know God better	3.9
This small group has helped me be a better disciple	3.5
This small group has helped me in self-discipline	3.3
This small group has encouraged me to follow God more	4.1
This small group has helped me in how to pray	4.5
This small group has helped me learn new tools for discipleship	3.5
This small group has given me fresh revelation of God	3.7
This small group has drawn me closer to God than I have ever been	3.4

Participants were tested on their understanding of prayer prior to and after the small group. Generally responses moved from prayer being about presenting requests to God to prayer being about a relationship with God. One participant listed thanksgiving, petition and intercession beforehand and added communication and relationship afterwards.

Additionally participants were asked about their prayer habits. In a question about if participants pray alone, with family, with friends, in small group, at church or in prayer meetings, the majority showed no difference between before and after the small group, but 30 percent showed an increase in community prayer. Only one person showed a change in the number of times they pray each day. Two people demonstrated an increase in the number of times they prayed each week while most participants prayed the same amount of times. Again this could be hard to determine based on a lack of definition for what constitutes prayer. One person indicated an increase in the desire to attend prayer meetings. Some of the reasons given for non-attendance at prayer meetings were: needing

to work, the timing of the prayer meeting, illness, the need to look after the kids, and a dislike of corporate prayer.

In observing the participants during the small group, it was clear that the teaching was a reminder of the aspects and importance of prayer to most. Yet many were able to pick up one or two insights that gave them a deeper understanding of prayer or a practical tool to enhance prayer. The homework on prayer proved to be invaluable as a tool to deepen participants' experience of prayer. Participant feedback on the effectiveness of the group can be seen in Appendix I.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The journey into growing disciples at Hills Church using small groups based on Bible reading and prayer began with a teaching series on the value of reading the Bible. This “Year on the Bible” led to a “Year on Prayer” where the subject of prayer was the topic for every sermon during the year. The use of incremental preaching enabled Hills Church to be led through these basic discipleship principles by providing opportunities to engage in each activity and encouraging them to grasp this unprecedented whole-church opportunity with both hands. The response and growth from the church was amazing. Members began reading the Bible and sharing this with others. Many people commented on how this had helped them understand more about God and what he wanted from them. The church also embraced learning to pray and the prayer meeting grew from a handful to about one third of the church. Many prayers were answered and the excitement about God and what he was doing around the church grew. These results gave the impetus to make sure this teaching would be provided to those who joined the church in the future in order to continue to make disciples and also preserve the new culture of Hills Church.

At first, however, work had to be done with the legacy left in the church from previous pastoral departures and the experiences of the church members. This required the development of trust in the leadership and direction of the church as well as the forging of relationships of respect and integrity with as many members of the church as possible. An additional requirement was the provision of shepherding for the church especially those who had been hurt or wounded by past experiences in the church. When the discipleship direction was determined, the biblical mandate for this and the

importance of the mission Jesus gave the Church in the Great Commission was emphasized. This was necessary to overcome some preconceived ideas in the general church population about “sin management” and the anatomy of a “successful” church. It was important to move the church from programs to personal faith, from consumerism to contribution, and from a church based life to a disciple’s life. These changes have been more easily implemented by working with pre-existing values in the church that come from previous significant leadership, including: a pioneering spirit, leadership development, spirituality, community engagement, pastoral care, and biblical teaching.

The desire at Hills Church is to see the development of disciples who could not only live changed lives in the Church, but who could take the love of God to the places where they live. Since the Australian culture is more and more resistant to religion and the Church, the old ideas of inviting people to church are no longer successful. In a society that values the added comforts of life, the sanctity of the weekend, and leisure activities rather than religion, the Church must make disciples who not only take the message of Jesus to the world but who live their lives as examples of Jesus where they live. This is the way that the increasingly secular society in Australia will be reached. Disciples must be developed who do not depend on the leadership, style or structure of the church for their spiritual health, but rather the skills they have developed in Bible reading, prayer and other basic discipleship principles.

To assist in the understanding of discipleship, Bible reading, prayer, and the small group as a mechanism for developing disciples, a number of contemporary books on the subjects were reviewed. S. T. Kimbrough described the basis of Wesleyan Ecclesiology

as a people who are full of faith desiring to live lives of holiness, which Wesley described as love of God and love of neighbor. Authors such as Dallas Willard, N. T. Wright and Richard Foster describe the importance of making disciples in the church and how processes like Bible reading and prayer should lead disciples to live Christlike lives and develop Christian character. Bill Hull describes how the Church must be involved in disciple-making and that the small group is the best mechanism for bringing this about especially as the participants practice the principles of the early church using Scripture, fellowship, prayer, praise and worship, and outreach. Michael Henderson offers helpful insights into how John Wesley ran his small groups, and how this method led to character and community transformation. Finally Gareth Weldon Icenogle outlined the biblical foundations for small groups and how they can best help to develop disciples. This broad sweep of contemporary literature on the subject gave great assistance to the project at Hills Church.

The biblical principles of disciple-making begin with the Great Commission that Jesus gave to the twelve disciples that they should: carry out the work that Jesus began; witness to the things they have seen and heard; proclaim repentance and forgiveness for sins; embrace the power of the Holy Spirit; be intentional; reach their own sphere of influence; baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; teach disciples to obey Jesus' teaching; and remember that they are not alone. Discipleship must also include equipping the saints by maintaining a priority in Scripture, prayer, fellowship and communion. Wesley's principles of discipleship were derived from these. He suggested that human nature could be developed by partaking of the "means of grace" that enabled

a disciple to encounter God by using certain methods that included searching the Scriptures and prayer. To Wesley, as a person used these means to love God with all his or her heart, soul, mind and strength, he or she become sanctified and desired to show God's love to others. He also found that disciples were more likely to engage in this and be transformed if they were part of a small group.

The Scriptures clearly call disciples to grow. They state that this growth happens as a result of reading and applying the Word and as disciples are in relationship with God and with each other in the Church. According to the Bible, growth also occurs through discipline and obedience. Wesleyans call this growth towards Christlikeness sanctification and see the importance of practical preaching, small groups, and the use of the disciplines for developing this life change. The scriptural principles relating to prayer and the Word are helpful for developing disciples, as is a church and pastor that values discipleship.

The ministry strategy for developing disciples at Hills Church is based on the idea that God uses Bible reading and prayer to grow disciples spiritually. Rather than trying to emulate the style and structure of other successful churches or trying to entertain church consumers, Hills Church is trying to make disciples who understand that Christianity is not just about dealing with sin and getting into heaven, but it is about living like Jesus here on earth.

The strategy goals for discipleship at Hills Church include incremental preaching and specific small groups on prayer and Bible reading. The small group process about reading the Bible is designed to help disciples understand why reading the Bible is

important for spiritual growth as well as give participants tools that will help them to read and apply the Word. The small group process about prayer is designed to help people pray, but also to outline ten important principles of prayer.

The process of implementing these groups began with reformatting the original sermon series into small group material. Once this was done, new church members were invited to join either of the groups for between ten and twelve weeks to learn the value of the principles and how to implement them. A benefit of these small groups is the opportunity to develop leadership as well as to train disciples.

To assess the effectiveness of these small groups for making disciples, surveys were administered before and after running the group. The results showed conclusively that these small groups were able to increase the knowledge, understanding and practice of participants in the areas of reading the Bible and prayer. The greatest effect on discipleship was found with the “Why Read the Bible?” small group. Participants were encouraged and inspired in what they discovered in the Word and how God spoke to them through the process. The results for the “What Is Prayer?” group were no less encouraging however. Participants found a new depth of understanding and practice of prayer. The continuation of these small groups at Hills Church is essential to the ongoing development of disciples, but this is not the end of the matter. More tools and processes must be developed to make disciples and the material must be shared with other churches and ministries.

Further opportunity for research is evident from this project. While Wesley emphasized both institutional and prudential means of grace enabling disciples to love

God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and their neighbor as themselves, the complete scope of this was not evident from the research. It was clear that learning of the topic and engagement with God took place, but no evidence showed this love extending to others. This may be a limitation of time or a limitation of testing, but there is further opportunity for researchers to assess the long-term impact of a self-feeding discipleship life and its impact on sharing this love with one's neighbor.

The core business of the Church, of Hills church, is to make disciples. The disciplines of Bible reading and prayer are foundational for the transformation of lives as well as how men and women relate to God. The prayer of the church is that these tools and others that will be developed may facilitate ongoing personal growth at Hills as well as supporting Pastors and churches elsewhere that share the passion for the Great Commission and developing disciples.

APPENDIX A

Commission Statement One

The most well-known of the commission statements of Jesus is what has been called the “Great Commission.” This statement gives the clearest indication as to the mission of the disciples of Jesus and the Church: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:19-20). This command indicates that disciples are made by the intentional actions of other disciples acting on behalf of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and by baptizing and teaching them to obey everything that Christ commanded.

The command to “go” must be taken as an extension of the authority given to Jesus after his resurrection. He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. *Go therefore* and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28: 18-19a italics added). As his disciples, this must be received as a call to action: as a commission given to disciples from the master disciple-maker; not only as the purpose and direction of his original disciples, but by implication the disciples who followed and indeed the whole Church. But not only this, the word “go” is also in indication of a renewed scope. During the training days of the disciples, Jesus clearly articulated that his mission was to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 15:24). Even when he sent his disciples out the first time, he gave them these instructions: “Go nowhere among the Gentiles and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Mt 10:5-7). As a consequence of being granted “all authority,” Jesus now expands the mission to “all nations” or all ethnic groups. Disciple-making was no longer to be confined to the “house of Israel” but to the whole earth. Finally, the command to “go” reflects the idea of living the gospel rather than completing an activity. This command could be rendered “as you go make disciples,” which better describes disciple-making as a natural part of a disciple’s life.

Additionally the word “make” is of importance to the discussion on the purpose of the Church. “Make” signifies intention and purpose. The idea is that disciples are made through instruction and teaching. Too often the work of disciple-making is left to chance. Some have believed that if the church goes on with Sunday activities, the members will become disciples. While this may happen, it was not the intention of Jesus’ commission. What Jesus is saying is that disciple-making is an intentional effort of teaching and instruction done by men and women enabled by the power of God, spurred on by the authority of Jesus’ command, and helped by the grace of God those being discipled.

Baptism should not be glossed over in the Great Commission as simply a clearly understood sacrament of the Church. While it is true that the Church has practiced the rite of baptism for many centuries, the importance of its meaning is paramount to the discussion of discipleship. If the church is to intentionally make disciples by teaching and

instructing them based on the authority of Jesus, then a part of this intentionality includes baptism. The Greek word means to “dip, immerse or submerge.”¹ It was often used to describe the process by which a piece of cloth was dyed.² The true intention of baptism was to symbolize a complete change of character. Just as cloth is dipped completely into the dye, so to the dye enters completely into the cloth. The two can no longer be separated. This is amply sustained in Romans 6:4: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3-4). Paul tells his readers, “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come” (2 Cor 5:17, New International Version). The clearest example of the change that baptism represents comes from an ancient Greek recipe for making pickles. Written by Nicander around 200BC, the recipe gives instruction on how to make a pickle. “In order to make a pickle” Nicander states, “the vegetable should be first ‘dipped’ (bapto) into boiling water and then ‘baptised’ (baptizo) in the vinegar solution . . . the first is temporary. The second, the act of baptising the vegetable, produces a permanent change.”³ An ancient word often used for this kind of immersion is “whelmed.” Its meaning is to be completely immersed. This is often associated with the word overwhelmed where the word “over” is perhaps redundant. Far from being a word that implies the act of baptising, it reveals more of an ideal state for an individual. The implications of this state for the discipling process are profound: it is the job of the disciple-maker not only to teach and instruct a new disciple, but also to lead them to a point where they are willing to let Christ so transform them that they are no longer recognisable. To lead someone to baptism is not just to fulfil a rite of the Church, or to lead them to sit in church, but to encourage every disciple to be overwhelmed by Christ: to be turned from a cucumber into a pickle by the power of God.

A final implication of this commission statement of Jesus is that new disciples must be instructed and taught, and the extent of this teaching, is everything that Jesus commanded the original disciples. Often discipleship is pared down to a short course of basic instruction, but the kind of teaching implied here is an ongoing and lifelong process of helping someone else to not only learn what Jesus commanded, but to obey it. This is why preaching or teaching from the pulpit alone can fall short of the mark. Jesus intention in this “Great Commission” was not to pass on information, but to work towards transformation. This is a very hard, but very important job for the Church and takes a large amount of intentional effort to complete. It is not measured by the number of people in church on a Sunday, but by lives that are completely given over to Jesus and lived in obedience to his commands. But lest one think that this is the disciple’s task

¹ James Strong, *Enhanced Strong’s Dictionary* (Spokane: Olive Tree Bible Software, 2011), Olive Tree Bible Study App Edition: Location g0907.

² *Ibid.*, Location g0907.

³ *Ibid.*

alone, Jesus reminds his disciples that he will assist them by the presence of the Holy Spirit. He said, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28: 20).

While the significance of this statement to the disciples and the Church is profound, it is not the only great-commission statement made by Jesus. Its prominence may be due to the fact that it is the only great-commission statement made before his death and resurrection. But this does not mean that the other statements of Jesus are of little or no value. The opposite is true. The four commission statements made by Jesus post resurrection help to clarify the task of the Church and the disciples that make it up.

Commission Statement Two

The second commission statement to be examined is from Lk 24: 45-49 where Jesus appears to his disciples post resurrection and gives them these words:

Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high (Lk 24: 45-49).

Jesus was helping his disciples to understand his mission as outlined in the Scriptures. He wanted them to know that after his death and resurrection, they should proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations. This had been the hallmark of John’s ministry: “John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins” (Mk 1:4). After this “Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Mt 4:17), as well as demonstrating that he had the power to forgive sins.⁴ And now he was commissioning his disciples to do the same with special reference to his own name: the repentance and forgiveness of sin was to be from Jesus. The commission statement in Luke reinforces that this message is for “all nations” as contained in Matthew’s account, but it also gives some clarity to where this proclamation should begin as well as offering the promise of power to undertake the task as is seen in a further commission statement of Jesus.

Commission Statement Three

Perhaps the second most commonly referred to commission statement of Jesus is found in Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” This mirrors the statement in Luke: “and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high” (Lk 24: 47-49). In

⁴ See Mt 9:6 for example.

some circles the emphasis is placed on the power particularly as this statement refers to what happens in the upper room during Pentecost. However, in this statement, as at Pentecost, the point of the Holy Spirit's power was for witnessing, and it is this "extra" commission information that is helpful in understanding the mission of the Church. A witness is "one who sees an event."⁵ Additionally a witness is a person who testifies to what they have seen.⁶ The disciples of Jesus had witnessed his ministry, miracles, teaching, death and resurrection. "You are witnesses of these things," Jesus said (Lk 24: 48). As Christ's witnesses, it was their job to testify to what they had seen and heard of Jesus and his ministry. The power of the Holy Spirit and the manifestations that accompanied it were for this purpose. This remains true for disciples today. In keeping with the commission of Jesus, a modern day disciple should not only make disciples through baptism and teaching, but by testifying to the good news of Jesus death and resurrection, with the accompanying need for repentance and forgiveness, as well as to what they have seen and heard of the work of Jesus in their own lives. This is profoundly important to baptism, which can only take place for a person who has heard the good news about Jesus, repenting of their sin and receiving forgiveness, and decided that they are willing to let him transform their lives. In fact no real discipling can take place without someone first telling the good news of the gospel and what they have seen and heard of Jesus. It is incumbent on the disciples in the Church that they not only tell what that have seen and heard, but that they have something to tell: that they have actually seen and heard something about Jesus from their ongoing relationship with him. The idea of witnessing not only includes the gospel, but also points to a disciple who has a living and active relationship with Jesus that leads to real life testimony of how Jesus transforms and enables the disciple's life.

Further help is gained from this commission statement in its application as an expansion of the command to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Mt 28:19) Jesus instructs his disciples that when they have received the power of the Holy Spirit, they should witness about him "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Luke's reference, on the other hand, states that the proclamation of the gospel should begin in Jerusalem (Lk 24:47). Instead of an overarching command to go to all ethnic groups, these statements direct the disciples to a more specific process to accomplish the task. If they are to complete the commission of Jesus, they should begin in Jerusalem, then move to Judea and Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. Although it took persecution, the disciples eventually enacted this command and the gospel spread. Of course it would be problematic to send every new disciple to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria before allowing them to spread the good news in their own country so this passage is commonly interpreted as meaning local then regional and then elsewhere. Jerusalem was right where the disciples were, Judea is the surrounding region, Samaria represents those who are outcasts in the society, and the ends of the earth represents all

⁵ Oxford Dictionaries, s.v. "Witness," accessed May 16, 2013, <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/witness>.

⁶ Ibid.

nations and ethnicities of the world. Beyond knowing that Jesus commissioned the twelve to make disciples of all nations, it is helpful to see this extra detail in this additional commission statement of Jesus. The implication for disciple-making today is that it should always begin at home. The place to witness to the gospel and what God has done for disciples starts right where they are, which coincidentally will always be wherever they are even if they move to the ends of the earth. A believer's sphere of discipleship must be to those around him or her first. While disciple-making is usually confined to one disciple making another one, the command to reach Judea and beyond implies a concerted effort by a group of disciples like the twelve and now the Church. Jesus never expected that one person must reach all, but that together everyone is reached. Disciples are commanded not only to reach people who are similar, or the people they associate with, but also to reach out to those who are the modern-day Samaritans of this world. These could include refugees, outcasts, gays or even some subcultures in the local area. Intentional discipleship must move towards reaching these people. And finally, intentional discipleship must move beyond people who speak the same language but are different, to people whose culture and language are entirely unlike one's own. In making this command, Jesus was calling his Church to a diversity beyond Judaism and even Western Christianity.

Commission Statement Four

The fourth commission statement of Jesus comes from John 20:19: "Jesus said to them again, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.' And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (Jn 20:21-22). One can again see the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit, but an additional emphasis is the sending nature of the commission. Jesus says, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (Jn 20:21). This is a profound statement and gives meaning and purpose to the unfolding understanding of the commission statements. Jesus is saying here that his disciples are sent in the same way that the Father sent him from heaven. It is the disciples who carry on the work of the Father. He sent Jesus into the world to bring the good news of the Kingdom and to bring the world into reconciliation with the Father through his death and resurrection. In this passage Jesus is sending his disciples out with the same heaven-delegated task. True disciples of Jesus are continuing the commission that Jesus was given by the Father. This understanding adds a great deal to the initial commission of Jesus. Each disciple gets to carry out an extension of the work the Father intended for the world through Jesus. The reality of this is echoed in the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20:

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God (2 Cor 5:18-20).

Commission Statement Five

The final post resurrection statement of Jesus comes from Mark 16:15-18: “And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mk 16:15-16). Again the emphasis is on going to the whole world with the proclamation of the good news about Jesus. The extra information here is that some will believe and some will not. The implication of this decision will lead some to salvation and others to condemnation. This new information puts the whole job of the Church into perspective. The Church must do all it can to reach everyone with the gospel because the stakes are eternal, and all those who want to accept the message will be saved and must be trained to play their part. But not everyone will accept the message and, as a consequence, will ultimately receive condemnation for their sins.

APPENDIX B

God's Will

For prayer to be effective in spiritual formation it is vitally important to gain an understanding of God's will. This is especially evident when considering the following statement by Jesus in 1 John 5:14-15: "And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." At first glance, this passage goes against general experience of prayer: disciples do not generally get everything they ask for. But, the clear issue here is to ask according to his will. For the disciple then, knowing God's will is foundational to prayer. If God's will consists of the thing that he wants to accomplish, then knowing God's will means that a disciple will know what God wants to accomplish. And knowing what God wants to accomplish changes the way a disciple prays. This is formative for the disciple in that instead of praying prayers that are selfish or misguided, he or she prays prayers that align themselves with the things that God wants to accomplish in the world. According to Jesus, these kinds of prayers are not only readily heard but also readily answered. And again the connection between prayer and reading the Bible becomes evident. The clearest description of the things that God wants to achieve is outlined in the Bible. In fact it is by offering oneself wholeheartedly to the Lord, not conforming to the pattern of the world, and allowing one's minds to be renewed by the Word of God, that disciples are able to know God's will. A student of the Word need not be confused about what God wants whether it be plainly written or revealed by the Holy Spirit who "will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26). A disciple, who reads the word and submits to the Holy Spirit to know God's will, can pray with great effect.

The Father Heart of God

A second foundation to prayer that aids spiritual formation is an understanding of the Father heart of God and is amply demonstrated by the Scripture in Matthew 7:7-11:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

In the context of asking for something in prayer, Jesus suggests that God wants to answer their requests with things that are good. Some have come to think of God, as a person who punishes and denies the disciple good things, but this is not true. God the Father knows how to give good gifts and wants to give those gifts to his children. On the other hand, a disciple that knows that God will give good gifts is less likely to ask for or

expect bad ones. This understanding changes the way a disciple prays and relates to God. In fact praying to the Father assumes that one is living as a child. Living outside the realms of family or living independently of God leads to frustration in prayer. Andrew Murray writes “Those who give themselves to be led by the Spirit in their lives will be led by Him in their prayers too. They will then find that Father-like giving is the divine response to Child-like living.”¹ Getting God to answer one’s prayers is not about perfection. It is about relationship. Again Andrew Murray puts it well: “The Lord does not demand that we fulfil the law perfectly. All he requires is our childlike and wholehearted surrender to live as children with Him in obedience and truth. He asks nothing more, but will accept nothing less.”²

Faith

Faith is the third foundation of prayer that helps a disciple develop and grow. The Author of Hebrews wrote, “Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.” According to the Scripture, faith is “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Heb 11:1 NIV1984): being sure and certain of what God will do. Simply put, faith is a firm belief in God: who he is and what he does. Faith is not power or spirit or effort or concentration. It is not faith in the miracle or the process, the event or in one’s ability to pray. Faith is simply placing full trust and belief in God and what he will do. It is this kind of faith that Jesus talks about when he says, “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours” (Mk 11:24).

According to Jesus it does not take much faith to accomplish a lot. He said, “If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you” (Mt 17:20). But faith can still exist in degrees. A Canaanite woman had great faith (Mt 15:28), and the people of Nazareth had little (Mt 13:58). The Centurion had great faith (Mt 8:10), but at times Jesus’ disciples had little (Mt 8:26). This is because many things can weaken or enhance faith, and when a disciple learns these things, his or her faith will grow “abundantly” as it was intended.³

Of course there are a number of things that can weaken faith, and understanding this will not only increase the effectiveness of prayer, but also deepen the spiritual life of the believer. These include doubt (Jas 1:5-8), a poor response to trials,⁴ the love of money

¹ Andrew Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer* (North Brunswick: Bridge-Logos, 1999), 56-57.

² *Ibid.*, 57.

³ 2 Thes 1:3 and 2 Cor 10:15 for example.

⁴ James 1:2-4 speaks of trials testing faith and producing maturity. If a person responds badly to a trial the benefits to faith and maturity are negated.

(1 Tm 6:10), petty arguments about theology (1 Tm 6:20, 21), poor company,⁵ and fear (Mt 8:23-27). Disciples who realize these things can work on them and be transformed into who God wants them to be.

Forgiveness

The fourth foundation to prayer that will lead to a transformed life is the foundation of forgiveness. When a disciple prays, God makes it clear that the effectiveness of those prayers is dependent on mended relationships. He says, “And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses” (Mk 11:25). Prayer and relationships are connected. A disciple cannot have a strong relationship with God if there are unresolved issues with a brother or sister. This is certainly the point of the Model Prayer where Jesus taught his disciples to pray: “forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Mt 6:12). Clearly God is interested in his disciples passing on the mercy, grace and forgiveness that he has given. Why else would he proffer this command after completing his teaching on the model prayer: “For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mt 6:14, 15). This emphasis on relationship ties in with Jesus emphasis on relationship in the greatest commandment: “‘you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mk 12:31, 31).

Abiding

Abiding is the fifth foundation. Jesus said, “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (Jn 15:7). When a disciple learns to abide in Jesus, he or she has an improved relationship and a more powerful prayer life. Again this is the reflection of prayer being a relationship with God and the Bible being a significant part of that relationship. The job of disciples is to work on staying connected to God as well as letting his words and teaching dwell in their hearts and minds. The effort put into this process is part of prayer and brings the kind of personal transformation that is part of the disciple’s life. Andrew Murray put it this way, “Your willingness to accept his words will determine the power your words have with him.”⁶ Yet abiding is not really about the effort, it is more about being connected. Murray brings this out in his closing prayer for this chapter in his book *With Christ in the School of Prayer*:

⁵ In 1 Thes 3:2, Timothy came to strengthen the faith of the believers and in the same way, others can weaken the faith of believers as in 1 Cor 15:33 which says, “Bad company corrupts good character.”

⁶ Murray, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*, 180.

You abide in me. O my Master, my life, my all - I do abide in You. Allow me to grow up in all Your fullness. It is not the effort of faith (trying to cling to You and trusting You to protect me), or my will (obeying You and keeping Your commandments), that alone can satisfy me. Only You yourself, living in me as you do in the Father, can satisfy me. It is You, my Lord . . . united with me.

In His Name

The final foundation to effective prayer and the transformed life of a disciple is learning what it means to pray in the name of Jesus. Jesus taught his disciples “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (Jn 14:13). There are many places in Jn where Jesus repeats this (Jn 14:14, 15:16, 16:23,24), but the main point for the disciple to understand is that one never operates in this Christian life using one’s own name. Additionally, to act in his behalf means that a disciple must have the same intentions and aspirations at the core of his or her being as well as being a good reflection of that name. A disciple that recognizes his or her connection to the name of Jesus learns how to act on his behalf and ends up with a powerful prayer life.

APPENDIX C

SOAP is an acronym that stands for Scripture, Observation, Application and Prayer. A SOAP study can be completed on any passage of the Bible. Each day on a separate page of a notebook the following method is followed:

Scripture: A passage of Scripture is read (usually following a Bible reading plan), then verses of interest are highlighted or underlined. After the reading is finished, the participant goes back over the verses and finds one verse that stood out to him or her. This verse is written out in full with the reference.

Observation: Next the participant writes down why that Scripture stood out to him or her. They look for something that they observed from the verse.

Application: Once this is done, the participant writes down how this applies to his or her life. Scripture is not about knowledge; its best effect is in application. This is the most important part of taking what is read and making it meaningful. Participants must ask the question, "How does this verse apply to me?"

Prayer: This application then becomes the substance of a prayer to God for help in making the application.

APPENDIX D

“Why Read the Bible?” Group Week #6:

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Teaching Preparation/Icebreaker

- Tell of a time when you were very happy? What made you happy? How long did it last?
- Give an example of when it has been most difficult to put something God has asked you to do into practice.

Teaching from Week #06: Because it Brings Blessing and Happiness

After-teaching Discussion.

- What was one thing that stood out to you from this week’s teaching?
- Tell about your experience of hearing God speak through the Word.
- How did you go about obeying what He told you?

Homework

1. Obedience list: In your notebook, list down all the things you can remember you felt God was asking you to do and then indicate if you have been obedient yet.

What I felt God said I should do	How obedient I have been to this

2. God’s Voice: Take time to answer these questions; How long ago was the last time you felt God speak to you? What did he say? Have you done it yet?
3. SOAP: Do at least three SOAP studies this week.

“Why Read the Bible?” Small Group Week #12:

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Teaching Preparation/Icebreaker

- What is the hardest thing you have ever had to study?

Teaching From Week #12 - Because We Need to Rightly Divide the Word of Truth

After-teaching Discussion.

- What was one thing that stood out to you from this week’s teaching?

- Have you ever had the experience where someone used a Bible verse out of context? Give an example.
- How do you think it is possible to make sure that you don't take a Bible verse out of context and use it wrongly?

Homework

1. Rules of Interpretation: Although anyone can read the Bible and God can speak to them, it is helpful to follow some basic rules of biblical interpretation so that we can make proper sense of what was written. The following rules were adapted from the book *Studying, Interpreting and Applying the Bible* by Walter Henrichsen and Gayle Jackson.¹ This week take time to reflect on how these rules will change the way you read and apply the Bible.
 1. Work from the assumption that the Bible is authoritative
 2. The Bible interprets itself; Scripture best explains Scripture.
 3. Saving Faith and the Holy Spirit are necessary to understand and properly interpret the Scriptures.
 4. Interpret personal experience in the light of the Scripture not Scripture in the light of personal experience.
 5. Biblical examples are authoritative only when supported by a command.
 6. The primary purpose of the Bible is to change our lives, not increase our knowledge.
 7. The church does not determine what the Bible teaches, the Bible determines what the church teaches.
 8. The promises of God throughout the Bible are available via the Holy Spirit for the believers of every generation.
 9. Interpret words in harmony with their meaning in the times of the author.
 10. Interpret a word or passage in relation to its context in the passage.
2. SOAP: Do at least three SOAP studies this week and every week from now on.

¹ Walter Henrichsen and Gayle Jackson, *Studying, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 147-188.

APPENDIX E

“What Is Prayer?” Small Group Week #5

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Teaching Preparation/Icebreaker

- Tell the group one thing that you are thankful for?

Teaching From Week #5 Prayer Is Being Thankful (Thanksgiving)

Post-Teaching Discussion

- What one thing stood out to you from the teaching today?
- When do you feel most thankful/least thankful?
- What is one thing that you can do to become more thankful?

Small Group Prayer

- Spend some time praying prayers of thanksgiving to God.

Homework

God wants us to be thankful. This week begin the process of cultivating a thankful heart.

1. **Make a thanksgiving list**

Spend a few moments writing down anything and everything you can remember that God has done for you in your notebook. Start with the BIG things like your salvation or a time when you knew God had specifically helped you. Then try and think of some of the things that are easily missed like your health or that you have a house to live in. If you want to do a thorough job think back year by year starting with this year and try and think of the significant things God did for you in each year. If you get the courage send me an email (akerslex@yahoo.com) and/or come prepared to tell us a few of these next week. But don't forget to sit down with God and tell him. Keep this list so you can add to it in the future.

2. **Become a blessing sleuth**

I also want you to become a Blessing Sleuth. Every time you experience something of the blessing of God this week, I want you to write it in your notebook. Even if it is as small as a smile or as big as an understanding of His grace to you, put it on your list. Do this to help raise the awareness of what God has done for you even in the space of a week. Then like the one thankful leper, return to God with a thankful heart and tell him. You can also send me an email and/or tell us all in church next week.

“What Is Prayer?” Small Group Week #10

Welcome/Prayer/Homework Review

Teaching Preparation/Icebreaker

- Tell of the longest time you have had to wait. Was it worth it in the end?

Teaching From Week #10 Prayer is Fully Expecting God to Show Up (Waiting)

Post-Teaching Discussion

- What one thing stood out to you from the teaching today?
- How good have you been at waiting on God or expecting him to do what you have asked him to do?

Small Group Prayer

- Spend time praying for God to help you wait in expectation.

Homework

Think through your experience of prayer. Are you the kind of person who prays as a duty or ritual? How often do you fully expect that God will answer your prayers? Waiting implies that you wait in expectation for God to answer your prayers - for him to show up in your life. It changes the way you live.

1. Meditate on these Scriptures

This week I want you to meditate on the following Scriptures: Psalms 40:1, Isaiah 33:2, Isaiah 40:31, Psalms 33:22, Micah 7:7, and Psalms 38:15.

As you finish your meditation remember what Mark said *“Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”* (Mk 11:24)

2. Now Wait!

Finally I just want you to wait. Be expectant, be believing, be faithful. Know that God is good and he wants to help you but even if he doesn't he is still God and he is still good. I love the story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I feel it puts our waiting on God into perspective.

“Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.”
(Dn 3:16-18)

So wait and believe and see what God will do.

APPENDIX F

Hills Church: “Why and How to Read the Bible?” POST Small Group Survey

*The following questions relate to your **current** understanding of Bible reading since completing the small group. Answer the questions in relation to your current or new practices.*

READING THE BIBLE

B1. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, how often do you read the Bible?

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Never | <input type="checkbox"/> A couple of times a month | <input type="checkbox"/> About 4 times a Week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally | <input type="checkbox"/> Once a Week | <input type="checkbox"/> About 5 times a Week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Once or twice a year | <input type="checkbox"/> Twice a Week | <input type="checkbox"/> About 6 times a Week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> About once a month | <input type="checkbox"/> About 3 times a Week | <input type="checkbox"/> Every Day |

B2. When you think about your NEW Bible reading habits above, what would you say is the major reason for your NEW choice?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I value reading the word | <input type="checkbox"/> I hate reading |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am a naturally disciplined person | <input type="checkbox"/> I can't see the point of reading the Bible |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I do not have enough time | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't understand what I read |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am a naturally undisciplined | <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer to listen to someone else |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I procrastinate and run out of time | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

B3. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, when you read the Bible do you find it
 Helpful Challenging Confusing Other _____

B4. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, with regard to the focus of *your* church on reading the Bible, is the level of encouragement to read the Bible
 Appropriate Too much Not enough Annoying

B5. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, in terms of the tools offered by *your* church to help you read the Bible, are they
 Helpful Not helpful Adequate Not adequate What tools?

B6. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, do you use a specific reading method?
 No I don't read the Bible Yes I use a reading plan (Which one _____)
 No I don't use a plan Yes I use a devotional booklet
 Yes I use the SOAP method Other _____

B7. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, what would you say are the three most important reasons for reading the Bible?

B8. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, How would you rate the importance of reading the Bible? Not important Somewhat important Important Very important Of utmost importance

B9. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, how has your appreciation of the importance of reading the Bible changed?

- I know more about the importance of reading the Bible
- I know less about the importance of reading the Bible
- I have always thought it important
- other _____

B10. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, how has your knowledge of approaches to Bible reading changed?

- I know more about how to read the Bible
- I know less about how to read the Bible
- I know about the same about how to read the Bible

B11. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, has your Bible reading increased, decreased, or remained the same? Increased Remained the same Decreased

B12. In a paragraph please explain what you have learned about reading the Bible SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP.

B13. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being not helpful and 5 being most helpful) please circle how helpful this small group has been to you:

- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has helped me learn more about the Bible
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has helped me know God better
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has helped me be a better disciple
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has helped me in self-discipline
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has encouraged me to follow God more
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has helped me in how to read the Bible
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has helped me learn new tools for discipleship
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has given me fresh revelation of God
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has drawn me closer to God than I have ever been

APPENDIX G

Hills Church: "What Is Prayer?" POST Small Group Survey

*The following questions relate to your **current** understanding of prayer. Answer the questions in relation to your practices since completing the small group.*

PRAYER

P1. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, how often would you say you pray?

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Never | <input type="checkbox"/> Once a Week | <input type="checkbox"/> About 6 times a Week |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Occasionally | <input type="checkbox"/> Twice a Week | <input type="checkbox"/> Every Day |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Once or twice a year | <input type="checkbox"/> About 3 times a Week | <input type="checkbox"/> Twice a day |
| <input type="checkbox"/> About once a month | <input type="checkbox"/> About 4 times a Week | <input type="checkbox"/> Many times a day |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A couple of times a month | <input type="checkbox"/> About 5 times a Week | <input type="checkbox"/> I am always in prayer |

P2. When you think about your NEW prayer habits above, what would you say is the major reason for this NEW choice?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I value my relationship with God | <input type="checkbox"/> I don't like praying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am a naturally disciplined person | <input type="checkbox"/> I can't see the point of praying |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I do not have enough time to pray | <input type="checkbox"/> God never answers my prayers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am naturally undisciplined person | <input type="checkbox"/> I prefer to leave the praying to someone else |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I procrastinate and run out of time | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

P3. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, when you pray do you find it

- Easy Difficult Challenging Other _____

P6. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, with whom do you usually pray?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I pray on my own | <input type="checkbox"/> I pray at church |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I pray with my family | <input type="checkbox"/> I pray at the prayer meeting |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I pray with a friend | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I pray in my small group | |

P7. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, I pray? In the morning In the afternoon In the evening During the night Often throughout the day

P8. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, do you use any aids to help prayer?

- No Sometimes Yes (I use _____)

P9. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, do you pray for others while with them? (e.g. Someone mentions a need and you offer to pray right there) No Yes

P9a. If yes how often? rarely regularly All the time

P10. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, when a prayer meeting is held at church do you attend as often as I can attend occasionally do not attend at all

P11. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, when you think about your attendance at prayer meetings, what would you say is the reason for your pattern?
 I don't know when they are on I value prayer and wouldn't miss it for the world
 I am working I don't want to attend the prayer meeting
 I have to look after the kids I don't like corporate prayer
 The prayer meetings are held at the wrong times Other _____

P12. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, how would you rate the importance of prayer? Not important Somewhat important Important Very important Of utmost importance

P13. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, how has your knowledge of the importance of prayer changed?
 I know more about the importance of Prayer
 I know less about the importance of Prayer
 I have always thought it important Other _____

P14. SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP, how has your knowledge about how to pray changed? I know more about how to pray I know less about how to pray I know about the same about how to pray Other _____

P15. Using up to 10 single words or phrases answer the question: What is prayer?

P16. In a short paragraph please explain what you have learned about prayer SINCE ATTENDING THE SMALL GROUP.

P.17. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being not helpful and 5 being most helpful) please circle how helpful this small group has been to you:

- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has helped me learn more about Prayer
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has helped me know God better
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has helped me be a better disciple
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has helped me in self-discipline
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has encouraged me to follow God more
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has helped me in how to pray
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has helped me learn new tools for discipleship
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has given me fresh revelation of God
- 1 2 3 4 5 This small group has drawn me closer to God than I have ever been

P18. On a scale of 1-10 (1 being not at all and 10 being completely), how much have you changed as a result of this group? _____

APPENDIX H

“Why Read the Bible?” Sample Participant Feedback

The following comments indicate the impact of the “Why Read the Bible?” small group on the discipleship journey of the participants:

- “I can read and apply the Word to past and present life experiences and make it real for me. I found the SOAP experience a challenge at first and now a joy – I don’t just read but I think.”
- “The more I read the more I want to, and the points you gave us to check helped. It’s good having a plan to go by, I am understanding the bible more.”
- “The scriptures are far more important than I realised. The course has shown me just how vital reading the Word and applying it is to be able to live a Christian life and be a good disciple of Christ.”
- “Enlightenment and growth are not confined to Sundays”
- “By using the SOAP method I get much more from reading the Bible. I don’t know why I haven’t read it more often”
- “It is not as confusing as I thought it was. Also it’s easier to talk to others in the church or not in the church as to how God would want us to live.”

APPENDIX I

“What Is Prayer?” Sample Participant Feedback

The following comments give an indication of the learning that took place during the “What Is Prayer?” small group:

- “I learned that reading the Bible is an act of prayer. Prayer is not just a list of requests.”
- “Prayer is more important now. I need to pray with greater expectation”
- “In particular I have learned to revere God more. Also to just spend time seeking and being in His presence.”
“God wants to be in relation with me. He wants to listen to me he speaks to me through His word”
- “I learned to consider Gods will and others first.”
- “There is much more to learn. Having a relationship with God and exposing myself to his examination is far more confronting, and challenging, but also far more rewarding than it might have been in the past. Learning to focus more on my growth and behaviour and less on others.”
- “There is more to prayer than you initially think, but once you've unlocked and learned some simple and basic principles (that we don't often think about) it becomes easy and it's actually simpler than you think. Ultimately, God just wants us to be real and honest and have us just tell him what's on our heart, just talk to Him”
- “I was challenged to examine my motives in prayer and to make sure I line my prayer requests up with God's will. I must be prepared to wait expectantly - prayer is asking God do what I can't - that was a good reminder.”

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