

PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Divinity

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

Title: A PROGRAM FOR EMPOWERING PASTORS AND LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS IN NEKEMTE DISTRICT TO DEVELOP EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP STRATEGIES FOR THEIR CHURCHES

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Date Completed: October 2024

The study assessed discipleship practices in Nekemte District churches, identifying challenges, providing training, and enhancing accountability among pastors. It aimed to offer tools for monitoring and evaluating initiatives, fostering mutual support in discipleship efforts. Using a multiphase methodology, the study involved identifying problems, analyzing the target population, and developing a discipleship plan. Data collection included questionnaires to assess congregation awareness and expectations, with effectiveness evaluated through pre- and post-intervention questionnaires.

While college degrees are not a must to be a disciple, promoting gender diversity and discipleship growth is essential. Notably, 75% expressed eagerness to

learn new techniques, and 25% were aware of local training resources. Churches should implement structured plans to foster diverse leadership and ongoing training.

Key words: Church, Discipleship strategies, Leadership, Pastors, Plan

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A project

presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Divinity

by

Daka Geremew Biru

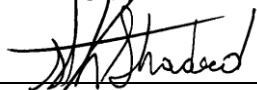
October 2024

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Date: February 2025

This paper is dedicated to the God who created the heavens and the earth.

May His Name be glorified forever!

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Melak Tsegaw and Dr. Stkesworth Shadeed for their invaluable support and guidance throughout my research. Their expertise, mentorship, and encouragement have been instrumental in the success of this work.

I am also deeply grateful to Pr. Yohannes Olana Beyane and his wife, Mrs. Regatu Daba, for their generous financial support, prayer and advice, which made the study and this research possible. Their willingness to invest in its success is truly appreciated.

Special thanks go to my beloved wife, Sister Abebech Kebede, for her unwavering support and prayers throughout my studies and the writing of this project. Her presence has been a source of strength and inspiration.

I extend my appreciation to Dr. Keno Telila (PhD), Assistant Professor of Accounting and Finance at Wallega University, Certified Management Consultant Authorized Accountant for his invaluable assistance in interpreting the SPSS results and tables, which were critical to the analysis of this work.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge Mr. Adamu Daniel for his significant contribution to the editorial work of this project. His attention to detail and dedication have greatly added to the quality of this document.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The Nekemte District, which encompasses eight organized churches, is administered by a leadership team consisting of two pastors and six evangelists. Despite the enduring presence and dedication of these religious leaders to promoting spiritual development, the district has experienced minimal growth in both the urban center of Nekemte and its surrounding areas over an extended period. This stagnation poses a significant concern that warrants thorough examination and targeted intervention to address the underlying factors contributing to the lack of growth within this religious community.

Among the various factors shared with other districts, such as distance from the center of administration, a glaring challenge faced by the churches in this district is the absence of structured and intentional training on how to formulate and implement effective local church plans. This lack of guidance over the years has created a significant void in strategic planning and organizational development, leading to inhibited growth experienced by the churches within the district.

The historical challenge of not having much documentation during the Ethiopian Communist Revolution has concealed the knowledge of what happened prior to the revolution. However, there is the testimony of pastors and believers who were effectively witnessing and proclaiming the Adventist message in the Nekemte district during the 1970s, in spite of facing persecution during the communist

government's rule. However, the establishment of organized churches in the district has been limited, with only 11 congregations founded in the past fifty years, going back to the initial introduction of the Adventist message in the Nekemte area. This context highlights a significant need for instructing members of the local church to enhance their understanding of their roles and responsibilities within the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) framework. Such educational projects are essential for creating a more cohesive and effective church community, and ultimately contributing to advancement of the Advent message in the whole district.

The lack of discipleship training programs has significantly impacted pastors and church leaders, hindering their ability to devise comprehensive and proactive discipleship plans tailored to the unique needs of their congregations. A deficiency in strategic planning not only hinders the churches' capacity to address current challenges but also limits their potential for growth and community impact.

While the churches have demonstrated their commitment to spiritual service, the absence of a structured plan has hindered their ability to reach and engage with the local community. The significance of an active discipleship plan cannot be overstated because it helps in fostering a conducive environment for growth within the churches.

Recognizing this critical gap in training and planning, the project "A Program for Empowering Pastors and Local Church Leaders in Nekemte District to Develop Effective Discipleship Strategies" aims to meet these challenges directly. Through training sessions and cooperative efforts, the project seeks to equip pastors and local church leaders giving them useful skills and awareness to develop and implement effective discipleship strategies in the local churches. By doing so, the project aims to stimulate growth, enhance community engagement, and ultimately empower the churches to fulfill their spiritual mission more effectively in the Nekemte District.

Background of the Problem

According to Dr. Melak Tsegaw, local churches face a significant challenge in the development and implementation of effective ministry plans.¹ A prevalent observation is that many congregations are neglecting approaches that could significantly enhance their capacity to fulfill their mission. This situation is often encapsulated by the notion that "non-discipleship" represents a critical issue within contemporary Christian communities. Dallas Willard aptly describes this troubling phenomenon as the "Great Omission from the 'Great Commission.'"²

The implications of this oversight are manifested in the struggles many churches encounter in both growth and member retention. A contributing factor to this stagnation may stem from the absence of a vibrant and active discipleship framework. There exists a notable lack of understanding regarding the role and significance of active discipleship within church communities. It is essential that members are guided and encouraged to engage meaningfully in the church's mission. The prophetic insights on this matter are compelling: "The work of God on this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers."³ This underscores the critical notion that every church member possesses a unique and vital role in advancing the mission, particularly in preparing individuals and communities for the anticipated Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

¹ Melak Alemayehu Tsegaw, "Refocusing on Discipleship," *Ministry*, April 2019, accessed 29 August 2024, <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2019/04/Refocusing-on-discipleship>.

² Ibid.

³ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2005), 250.

However, the observational data collected by the researcher indicates a notable absence of systematic and actionable discipleship programs within the churches under study. This lack of structured engagement may impede congregational members' opportunities to actively cultivate their faith. The absence of a comprehensive discipleship strategy in the overarching plans of ministry personnel suggests that local congregations may be deprived of essential frameworks that facilitate spiritual growth and community engagement. As articulated in relevant literature, it is crucial for ministers to equip church members with the understanding that spiritual development is closely linked to their commitment to fulfilling the divine mandate of evangelism: Ministers must "teach church members that in order to grow in spirituality, they must carry the burden that the Lord has laid upon them—the burden of leading souls into the truth."⁴ Such an emphasis on active participation in the discipleship process is vital for fostering a vibrant church environment conducive to holistic growth.

The present study seeks to delineate the factors contributing to the stagnation of church growth within the Nekemte districts. To address these challenges, a collaborative approach involving district and local church elders were employed to facilitate targeted training for church leaders. This initiative aims to establish a robust discipleship program, which will be implemented across all local congregations in the Nekemte districts, accompanied by systematic follow-up mechanisms.

The goal of this initiative was to foster an environment in which all church members actively engage in their faith, thereby becoming effective Disciples of Christ, noting that "a disciple is the kind of person who becomes the kind of person

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1915), 142.

Jesus would be.”⁵ This transformative process entails emulating the teachings and example of Jesus, as disciples are fundamentally characterized by their intent to mirror their teacher’s life and values. As articulated in Matthew 4:19, “And he saith unto them, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men,” the call to discipleship necessitates a commitment to follow Christ authentically, cultivating a community of believers who actively embody and propagate His teachings. This study aims to explore the efficacy of the proposed strategies in revitalizing church growth and enhancing the spiritual vitality of its members within the region.

Statement of the Problem

The churches within the Nekemte district are currently experiencing a significant deficiency in structured discipleship programs, which are crucial for the effective execution of their mission as delineated in the *Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church Manual*:

Church Manual:

Making disciples is a continuous process by which a person becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ, matures as His disciple, and makes more disciples. Baptism is an essential part of the discipleship process, but it is not the end result of that process.⁶

The absence of a comprehensive discipleship plan impedes the spiritual development of congregants and hinders growth and vitality of the church community. This gap in discipleship framework necessitates an urgent examination and strategic development to align with the mission-centric directives provided by the SDA Church, thereby fostering a robust and engaged membership within the district.

⁵ Bobby Harrington, “The Definition of ‘Disciple,’” October 22, 2021, accessed 29 August 2024, <https://discipleship.org/bobbys-blog/the-definition-of-disciple/>.

⁶ General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 2022), 44.

The *SDA Church Manual* furthermore states that “it is one of the primary functions of the board to ensure that members are nurtured and mentored in a personal, dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ.”⁷ Therefore the central impetus for the existence of the church is the intentional cultivation of disciples among its members, aimed at fostering their active and fruitful engagement with Christ and His ecclesiastical community. Disciple-making must be understood not as a singular event or a one-time service, but as an ongoing, lifelong process that underscores the dynamic relationship between the individual believer and the church. This continuous engagement is crucial for spiritual maturation and the fulfillment of the church’s mission in a complex and evolving societal landscape.

Moreover, an exploration of effective strategies for sustaining disciple-making within church communities is imperative; “The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ, who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the Three Angels’ Messages in preparation for His soon return (Matt 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, Rev 14:6-12).⁸ The members of the church must recognize their responsibilities as constituents of the familial structure of the House of God. This awareness is essential for fostering a sense of collective identity and accountability within the spiritual environment. “When souls are converted, set them to work at once. And as they labor according to their ability, they will grow stronger”⁹

As the body of Christ, the Church exists to purposefully develop disciples so that they can live out their lives in active and productive relationships with both Christ and the Church. Making disciples is predicated on a continuous, lifetime connection

⁷ *Church Manual* (2022), 135.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1946), 355.

with Jesus. A believer's commitment is to “abide in Christ” (John 15:8), to train others to be fruitful disciples by sharing Jesus with them, and to mentor other believers to be obedient disciples as well. It is the obligation of the Church, both individually and collectively, to see to it that each member remains connected to Christ.¹⁰

The Great Commission cannot be fulfilled without intentionally pursuing the lost. Just as he was sent by his Father, Jesus has sent us out in deliberate quest to win nonbelievers to faith in Christ (John 20:21, 31). Those who are sent are disobedient until they go.¹¹

Despite the recognized importance of local church leadership in fostering effective discipleship, there exists a significant deficit in training programs designed to empower these leaders in the creation and implementation of strategic frameworks for discipleship. This critical gap not only hinders the churches’ capacity to fulfill their mission but also underscores the need for urgent intervention to align with established organizational guidelines. Addressing this issue is essential for enhancing the overall mission impact of churches in the Nekemte district.

Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to equip pastors within the Nekemte District with the requisite knowledge, skills, and resources essential for the effective implementation of discipleship strategies across their local church congregations. This research endeavors to address the critical need for intentional discipleship within the churches of the Nekemte District by empowering pastors to formulate comprehensive discipleship plans that are specifically tailored to the unique needs and contexts of their respective congregations. Through this initiative, the study seeks to enhance

¹⁰ *Church Manual* (2022), 44.

¹¹ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . . : How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013), 4.

pastoral leadership and promote a robust framework for fostering spiritual growth and community engagement within the church.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to achieve several key goals. First, it will assess how discipleship is currently practiced in local churches in the Nekemte District. Second, it will identify the challenges and obstacles that make effective discipleship difficult in this area. The study also intends to provide pastors with specific training and resources that cover the essential principles and best practices of discipleship. Additionally, it plans to work with pastors and church leaders to create customized discipleship plans that fit the needs of their congregations. The study will also equip pastors with the necessary tools to evaluate and monitor their discipleship efforts, which will help improve accountability and effectiveness. Another important aspect is to create opportunities for pastors to network and learn from each other, encouraging the sharing of successful approaches in discipleship. Ultimately, this study aims to help pastors and elders in the Nekemte District become effective leaders in guiding and nurturing believers. By doing so, it hopes to encourage spiritual growth, promote unity, and improve the overall mission of local churches.

Significance of the Study

This study holds multiple significant implications for church operations, community engagement, and broader organizational development. The following delineates the various significance associated with the study.

Adherence to Church Manual

Adhering to established norms and implementing a discipleship plan in line with the *Church Manual* is an important step toward fulfilling the mission of the

church. This alignment ensures that church activities are conducted within the framework delineated by the manual, fostering consistency and a collective commitment to the foundational principles and practices sanctioned by the governance structure.

Facilitating Church Growth

The discipleship plan has the potential to act as a catalyst for church growth, offering a framework for outreach, community engagement, and spiritual enhancement. By prioritizing discipleship initiatives, the church can cultivate a loving community, thereby attracting new members and enhancing the sense of belonging among current congregants.

Resource Generation for Other Districts

The outcome from this project will not be confined to the Nekemte district; rather, it will serve as a valuable resource for other districts encountering similar challenges. By documenting and disseminating the experiences, methodologies, and successes associated with this initiative, the project can be a source of knowledge for others. This can empower other districts to implement effective discipleship plans, thereby contributing to the broader advancement of the church.

Union-Wide Impact and Replication

The West Ethiopian Union Mission will also gain benefits from this study, which will offer them insights into the feasibility and efficacy of local-level discipleship plan implementation. A successful outcome in the Nekemte district can serve as a model that is capable of being adapted in other church contexts within the Union.

Limitations

This study faces the following limitations. First, the geographical dispersion of churches across the district poses challenges, in regards to the coordination of meetings and training sessions. There is also the issue of travel times and costs which may reduce participation in the study.

Financial constraints are another issue, since the lack of funding for transportation and accommodation limits the ability to mobilize leaders from distant churches, making the organization of regional gatherings difficult. Additionally, there are risks of civil conflict as our areas is in turmoil and this can disrupt planned events, create safety concerns, and deter attendance, thereby impacting the initiative's overall progress.

Differences in access to educational resources and prior experience may also negatively impact the outcomes of the intervention. In addition, limited technological access also poses a challenge, as many leaders may struggle with communication and collaboration due to economic hardships or unfamiliarity with digital tools.

Cultural diversity within the churches may also limit the ability to design a unified discipleship plan that embraces various cultures while adhering to biblical principles. Moreover, many pastors have additional pastoral duties that restrict the time available for this initiative, making it difficult to maintain enthusiasm and momentum.

Delimitation

This study specifically concentrated on the discernible context of 8 churches proximate to Nekemte town within the district leaving the companies excluded from the training due to distance and financial inability to involve every church. While it is acknowledged that the identified problem might be prevalent in other geographical locales, the scope of this investigation is deliberately delimited to the aforementioned

area. The decision to narrow the focus to this specific subset of churches is made to provide a targeted and in-depth analysis of the issue within a defined context. By delimiting the study to these 8 churches, the research aims to offer a detailed examination of the challenges and opportunities unique to this particular locality, contributing valuable insights that can be applied to similar contexts with comparable characteristics.

Methodology

This project adopted a systematic approach to address the issue of low church growth in the Nekemte District by implementing a multiphase methodology, informed by Vyhmeister's systematic approach.¹² The methodology begins with the identification and definition of the problem of Low Church growth, alongside its underlying factors. This initial phase utilized qualitative and quantitative methods to delineate the scope of the issue, ensuring a clear understanding of contextual elements affecting growth.

Following the problem definition, a thorough analysis of the target population was conducted. This analysis includes evaluating the strengths, weaknesses, and shortcomings of local church leaders within the Nekemte District, as well as examining the challenges such as the distances between local churches and the district office. The analysis aims to provide insights into the capabilities and limitations of the church leaders and congregations.

Next, the study mentions specific goals and objectives designed to provide a clear direction for the research, ensuring that the intervention is purposeful and measurable. A comprehensive literature review is presented in the next chapter to

¹² Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson, *Quality Research Papers for Students of Religion and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 45.

inform the reader of the development of the proposed discipleship plan, using relevant biblical passages and analyzing similar projects to draw on existing theories and practices that may contribute to addressing the problem in Nekemte.

The data collection involved the administration of pre- and post-intervention questionnaires to assess the current state of awareness and expectations among the congregation. The pre-intervention questionnaire helped to establish a baseline for understanding the perception of the participants prior to the intervention, while the post-intervention questionnaire was distributed after intervention to evaluate its impact and identify changes in the participants' understanding.

Based on the information gained from the literature review and the findings from the questionnaires, a discipleship program was developed and implemented, to meet the needs and context of the Nekemte District and its local church leaders. Following the implementation, the program's effectiveness was evaluated through a detailed assessment, involving a comparison of data collected before and after the intervention and focusing on key indicators of success, such as changes in engagement and understanding.

Finally, a comprehensive project report was compiled to document the research process, including findings, analyses, and conclusions. This report serves as a resource that contributes to the broader discussion on church growth and discipleship in the Nekemte District. Therefore, the projects method will be as follows;

Quantitative Research Design

To address the challenges of limited church growth and insufficient discipleship within the Nekemte District, a quantitative research approach was employed. This research design entailed the administration of pre- and post-intervention

questionnaires. These instruments were specifically developed to measure the efficacy of the discipleship program and to assess changes in the awareness, engagement, and practices of both church leaders and members.

1. **Pre-Intervention Questionnaire:** This was administered to determine what the current discipleship practices are, the church growth metrics, and leader and member perceptions about discipleship before the intervention. The key metrics were the frequency of discipleship activities, church attendance, and the self-reported effectiveness of leaders and members.
2. **Post-Intervention Questionnaire:** After the implementation of the discipleship program, a follow-up questionnaire was administered to evaluate changes in the same metrics. This allowed a comparison of the data from both interventions to assess the impact of the discipleship training.

The questionnaires were structured using Likert scales,¹³ multiple-choice questions, and rating systems to quantify changes and gather statistical data. This approach enabled the identification of trends and correlations related to discipleship practices and church growth.

Data Collection and Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed statistically to identify significant changes and emerging trends in discipleship practices and church growth metrics. Specifically, the data obtained from the surveys was analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. This analysis aimed to extract meaningful insights and discern patterns pertaining to discipleship and church growth dynamics, thereby

¹³ SurveyMonkey, "What Is a Likert Scale? Definition, Examples, and Tips," accessed 10 September 2024, <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/likert-scale/>.

contributing to a more balanced understanding of these phenomena within the context of contemporary practice in Nekemte.

Target Population

The target population for this study included:

1. Pastors: The primary focus was on pastors in the Nekemte District who are directly responsible for implementing and overseeing discipleship strategies.
2. Elders: Church leaders were also included since they play a significant role in supporting and executing discipleship initiatives at the local level.

Sampling Design

1. Purposive Sampling: The pastors and elders were selected purposively based on their roles and responsibilities within the churches. This approach ensured that those with direct influence on discipleship strategies were included in the study.
2. Convenience Sampling: For those church leaders of the field and the West Ethiopia Union, a convenience sampling approach was used, selecting individuals from participating churches who are available and willing to participate in the training sessions.

Sample Size and Description

Approximately four to six pastors and five to seven elders were selected as participants from the identified target churches to ensure an ample representation of diverse perspectives within the congregation in the district. The study was centered on engaging a targeted population of pastors and church leaders who interact directly with church members, as their insights are crucial for understanding the complexities

of congregational issues and leadership challenges. By incorporating a varied range of experiences and viewpoints, this project aimed to capture a holistic understanding of the pastoral and elder roles within the church community.

Consent Form

A consent form was given to all participants, telling them the purpose of the study, procedures, possible risks, benefits, and measures to ensure confidentiality. Participants were required to sign the consent form prior to their involvement in the training and filling the pre and post intervention surveying questionnaires as the completion of the survey.

Research Tools

The research tools include:

1. Questionnaires: The questionnaires were structured with Likert scale items, multiple-choice questions, and rating systems to gather quantitative data on discipleship practices and church growth metrics.
2. Training on discipleship materials: During the intervention, semi-structured guidelines with open-ended questions helped to promote in-depth conversations with pastors, elders, and evangelists.

These tools were designed to ensure that they understood the factors affecting the active discipleship and church growth in the Nekemte District.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theological Base: The General Meaning of the Word Discipleship

The practice of following and learning from a teacher or leader is referred to as discipleship, and it is most frequently connected to religious contexts, especially in the context of Christianity.¹ In its most fundamental form, discipleship entails the following: a teacher or master.

Adherence to Instruction

In the Christianity, discipleship is often characterized by a dedication to upholding and implementing the teachings and precepts of Jesus Christ.² The commitment to adhering to the teachings of one's master is a fundamental aspect of discipleship, and it requires a deep understanding and embodiment of the values and principles espoused by the teacher. As such, discipleship is not merely a passive reception of knowledge, but rather an active process of learning and growth.

¹ Christy Hill, "What Is the True Meaning of Christian Discipleship?" posted December 9, 2021, accessed 1 September 2024, <https://seminary.grace.edu/what-is-the-true-meaning-of-christian-discipleship/>.

² Discipleship.org Partner, "Jesus-style Disciple Making and True Discipleship," posted January 26, 2021, accessed 1 September 2024, <https://discipleship.org/blog/jesus-style-disciple-making/>.

Learning and Growth

Through this process of learning and growth, Christians engage in a pursuit of intellectual and spiritual development, seeking to absorb knowledge and integrate it into their daily lives. As they apply the lessons learned from Jesus to their own experiences, they undergo a process of introspection and self-reflection, refining their understanding of themselves and their place in the world. This introspection is a critical component of the discipleship process, as it allows individuals to better understand themselves and the concepts they learn from their teacher.³ The church leaders in and around Nekemte will play a vital role in declaring the situation and see themselves if they are performing the work in ways, it should be.

Community and Relationship

Finally, discipleship often occurs within a community setting, where individuals can associate with those who share values and beliefs. This was seen in the early church of Acts 2. This community provides a supportive environment for growth and development, as individuals engage in experience-sharing with one another, and learn from the collective wisdom of the group. Through this shared experience, individuals can develop deeper relationships with others who are committed to similar values and principles, creating a belongingness and solidarity which is important to the discipleship process.

³ Tamara L. Anderson and Shelly A. Skinner, "Feelings: Discipleship that Understands the Affective Processes of a Disciple of Christ," *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 16, no. 1 (2019): 66-78, 1 September 2024, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0739891318820333>.

Defining Discipleship: Characteristics and Commitments in the Christian Faith

In his book “Discovering an Adventist Approach to the Life and Mission of Local Church,” Russell C. Burrill delineates the characteristics of a disciple.

According to Burrill, a person who exhibits a readiness to put up with suffering and mockery for the cause of Christ is called a disciple. A disciple also demonstrates complete loyalty to the Lordship of Christ, which means being willing to give up everything in order to devote oneself to His cause, including friends, family, and possessions. Furthermore, a disciple is someone who has a thorough comprehension of and dedication to the core teachings of Jesus.

Central to this identity is the capacity to express unconditional love, known as agape love, which is derived from being intimately connected to Jesus Christ. Lastly, a disciple is characterized by the ability to bear fruit, particularly in the form of creating other disciples for Jesus. This composite definition emphasizes the multifaceted nature of discipleship within the Christian faith, underscoring both personal commitment and communal responsibility.⁴

Ongoing support and guidance for church members regarding their responsibilities, commencing from the moment they commit to the congregation, significantly enhances the likelihood of church growth. This systematic approach not only aids in the retention and development of new members but also encourages them to bring additional individuals into the church community, thereby fostering a cycle of expansion. However, a prevailing emphasis within contemporary church communities is placed on weekly worship attendance. While such an emphasis can be beneficial, it is crucial that it serves to cultivate authentic transformation among members. Thus,

⁴ Russell C. Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church* (Fallbrook, CA: Hart Research Center, 1998), 47.

the focus on attendance should be accompanied by a commitment to nurturing deeper spiritual growth and connection within the congregation. When one closely examines the teachings of Jesus, they will find that there are three components that must be developed by the power of the Holy Spirit in connection to discipleship. They are of witnessing, fellowship, and worship.⁵ Thus, the church needs to move away from the mindset that attending services weekly and participating in occasional events is sufficient.

To know the meaning of disciple and discipleship, it is important to see the Greek term *μαθητεύσατε* (*mathēteusate*). The Greek term “μαθητεύσατε” (*mathēteusate*), as found in Matthew 28:19, is taken from the original word “*mathētēs*,” which means “disciple.”⁶ This term suggests that the act of becoming a disciple involves a conscious and willing acceptance of instruction from a particular religious leader, educator, or philosophical school. Such acceptance is not merely an intellectual exercise; rather, it signifies a commitment to follow the teachings and lifestyle of the chosen mentor throughout one’s life.

Discipleship is characterized by voluntary alignment with a specific teacher or belief system, rather than coercion. Once an individual assumes the role of a disciple, it is anticipated that they will embody the teachings and values espoused by their master. This dynamic of mentorship and commitment to learning is evident throughout both the Old and New Testaments, where various leaders and teachers attracted followers who dedicated themselves to understanding and implementing their teachings. In the initial stages of Christianity, early believers of Jesus were

⁵ Tsegaw, “Refocusing on Discipleship.”

⁶ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary 33B (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2018).

referred to as disciples before adopting the designation of “Christians.” These early disciples demonstrated profound devotion, willing to make significant sacrifices, potentially even to the point of martyrdom, in light of their deeply held convictions regarding their beliefs.

The Greek term *mathētēs* indicates one who temporarily and socially submits one’s life and/ or education to a teacher, school of thought, or religious leader, and biblically, a devoted believer and follower of Jesus Christ (cf. Luke 6.13). Discipleship is completely volitional (cf. Luke 9.57; John 6.60-66), and may have had no gender biases (cf. Luke 8.1-3). Jewish authorities considered themselves ‘disciples of Moses’ (John 9.28), and followers of the Baptist were called his ‘disciples’ (Mark 2.18). It was from within the greater quantity of disciples that the twelve were chosen by Jesus (cf. Matt. 10.2-4; Mark 3.13-19), and when he commissioned them and bestowed them with authority over principalities, they were subsequently named apostles (Mark 3.14; cf. 6.7, 30). In the early Church, we see the expression ‘disciple’ transform into ‘Christian’ (Acts 11.26). Later, the term disciple transformed into ‘saint’ for those who were martyred or showed exceptional dedication to the Church.⁷

The Concept of Discipleship in Old Testament

In the Old Testament, the concept of discipleship is predominantly characterized by the dynamic relationship between a teacher, often a prophet or a religious leader, and their disciples. Followers demonstrated a profound commitment to understanding and embodying the teachings and values disseminated by their leaders. This relationship embodies a few critical dimensions: submission to the authority of the teacher, rigorous study, and steadfast obedience to their precepts, as well as a commitment to transmitting these teachings to subsequent generations. Significant discipleship instances in the OT include the associations with figures like Moses and Joshua, Elijah and his protégé Elisha, as well as various other prophets and

⁷ Mary Ann Beavis and Michael J. Gilmour, eds., *Dictionary of the Bible and Western Culture*, (2012), s.v. “Disciple.”

their disciples. “These disciples are those who ‘follow the Lamb wherever He goes.’”⁸

These leader-disciple relationships serve to illustrate the foundational principles of faith and the transformative power of mentorship within this sacred context.

Moses and Joshua

Moses and Joshua exemplified a profound teacher-discipleship relationship. Moses mentored Joshua through guidance, leadership principles, and spiritual lessons (Exod 24:13; Deut 31:7-8). He entrusted Joshua with responsibilities, preparing him to lead Israel into the Promised Land (Josh 1:1-9), highlighting the importance of faith, obedience, and continuity in leadership.

Elijah and Elisha

Elijah occupies a significant position as a prominent prophet within the historical and theological narrative of ancient Israel. His ministry is marked by profound acts of faith and divine intervention. Elisha, who emerged as his disciple, demonstrated unwavering dedication and commitment to Elijah’s prophetic mission. Throughout his time with Elijah, Elisha not only served him faithfully but also engaged in a rigorous process of learning and spiritual development. Following the dramatic event of Elijah’s ascent to heaven, as described in the biblical texts, Elisha received a “double portion” of Elijah’s spirit, signifying both a continuation and an enhancement of his mentor’s prophetic authority. This transfer of prophetic power enabled Elisha to carry on and expand the prophetic ministry initiated by Elijah. Their dynamic mentor-disciple relationship is meticulously chronicled in the biblical accounts found in the books of 1 Kings and 2 Kings, which provide valuable insights

⁸ Keith T. Marriner, *Following the Lamb: The Theme of Discipleship in the Book of Revelation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2016), 13.

into their contributions to the historical context and theological developments of the Israelite community.⁹

David and Solomon

Discipleship is prominently illustrated in the dynamics between David and Solomon, figures of paramount significance in the history of Israel. King David, as the second monarch of Israel, played a pivotal role not only in the establishment of a unified kingdom but also in the cultivation of his son Solomon's potential for leadership. In preparation for Solomon's eventual ascendancy to the throne, David actively entrusted him with critical responsibilities and imparted essential wisdom, thereby facilitating a comprehensive mentoring relationship that underscores the principles of effective discipleship.¹⁰

These examples represent only a fraction of the numerous leader-disciple examples documented in the OT, each of which underscores the fundamental principles of mentorship and the transmission of leadership roles and responsibilities across generational lines. Such relationships are critical in establishing continuity within the communal and spiritual life of ancient Israel, reflecting a deliberate and structured approach to leadership succession. The instructional dynamics between leaders and their disciples not only facilitate the cultivation of individual capabilities within the context of communal governance but also ensure the preservation of shared values and beliefs. By examining these relationships, one can gain insight into the methodologies employed in leadership development and the importance attributed to

⁹ David Beck, *The Discipleship Paradigm: Readers and Anonymous Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Brill, 2021).

¹⁰ Ralph F. Wilson, *Life of David: Discipleship Lessons from 1 and 2 Samuel* (Loomis, CA: Jesus Walk Publications, 2012).

wisdom, moral integrity, and experience in the preparation of future leaders within the biblical narrative.

The Concept of Discipleship in the New Testament

In the New Testament, discipleship is a central concept that involves following Jesus Christ, learning from his teachings, and imitating his example. It emphasizes a personal relationship with Jesus, characterized by obedience, self-denial, and a commitment to spreading the gospel message. Discipleship involves not only acquiring knowledge but also embodying the values and attitudes of Jesus, growing in faith, and making disciples of others. It is a transformative journey of spiritual growth and service, guided by the Holy Spirit and rooted in love for God and others.

According to Ng, this was only one instance of how mentors or spiritual advisors have assisted people in the past in staying spiritually focused and leading virtuous lives. These partnerships included focused wisdom-seeking, skill-training, obedience, and nurturing. The idea of discipleship in Greco-Roman and first-century Jewish culture is significant as a background to better comprehend its usage, even if this practice is present in most ancient civilizations, particularly in the New Testament period.¹¹

The first-century church was able to spread the gospel of the risen Lord throughout the Roman Empire in a single generation thanks to the mission granted by the Holy Spirit at the time of Pentecost. It focused on making disciples among all people groups, to accomplish that goal, the church continually adapted itself to the various cultures confronting it without changing its basic message because of its

¹¹ Kleber de Oliveira Gonçalves, “SigaMe (Follow Me) An Experience in Creating a Culture of Discipleship,” in *Discipling Nurturing and Reclaiming: Nurture and Retention Summit*, ed. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2020), 27.

emphasis on disciple making, its focus was on planting indigenous churches which did not have settled pastors. Thus, churches grew both locally and abroad.¹²

The Theological Discipleship Principles from the Old Testament

The theological principles of discipleship as evidenced in the OT provide a foundational framework for understanding the responsibilities of church members following baptism. Each church member is called to be a witness for Jesus, an obligation that cannot be overlooked or diminished. One soul has immeasurable value; Calvary attests to this. When one person is converted to the truth, they will help win others over, and blessings and salvation will result in ever-growing numbers.¹³

However, it is often observed that many members remain stagnant in the initial stages of discipleship. While they may have learned about Christ and identified themselves with Him, this represents only the beginning of their journey. The process of discipleship involves not just personal transformation but also the imperative to evangelize and nurture others. Individuals are called to become disciples themselves, fostering a culture of discipleship that emphasizes mentorship and the multiplication of spiritual leaders within the community. Thus, a disciple is a person who has experienced a new birth, joined the church, recognized their gifts, agreed to carry out a role in the church that is compatible with those gifts, and is dedicated to carrying out that role without constant motivation.¹⁴ This cycle of learning, growth, and outreach reflects the theological principles derived from the Old Testament, which emphasize

¹² Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church*.

¹³ White, *Christian Service*, 69.

¹⁴ James W. Zackrison, *From Spectators to Disciples: A Biblical Strategy for Church Growth: How to Organize and Run a Great Commission Adventist Church* (Lincoln, NE: AdventSource, 1990), 27.

the importance of communal responsibility and the continuity of faith across generations.

Developing a comprehensive plan to empower pastors and local church elders in the Nekemte District to cultivate effective discipleship strategies for their congregations requires the thoughtful integration of theological principles derived from the Old Testament. Discipleship, at its core, entails the process of learning and following the teachings of a mentor, and in the Christian context, believers are called to emulate the path of the Lord, who serves as the ultimate master teacher. This approach necessitates a structured framework that not only emphasizes the theological underpinnings of discipleship as presented in the Old Testament but also provides practical guidelines for local church contexts. Every Christian should be a disciple who obeys their master and follows His instructions to make new followers. A disciple should be a leader who mentors others in the process of becoming disciples.¹⁵

The disciple is fundamentally engaged in the process of emulating the character and teachings of the mentor, or teacher. This dynamic relationship necessitates a meaningful connection between the disciple and the teacher, allowing individuals to receive knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual guidance. In turn, the disciple is called to share these insights and resources with those in need, thereby fostering a community of learning and support.

To effectively guide this process, several key principles derived from the Old Testament can be identified. These principles offer valuable insights into the nature of discipleship and underscore the importance of mentorship, community, and the ethical dimensions of teaching and learning within a faith context.

¹⁵ Gerson P. Santos, "Discipling, Nurturing, and Reclaiming," in *Discipling Nurturing and Reclaiming: Nurture and Retention Summit*, ed. General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2020), 278.

Covenant Relationship

In the context of implementing a discipleship program in Nekemte, it is crucial to emphasize the concept of covenant as a central theme found throughout the Old Testament. The covenant signifies a profound relational dynamic characterized by God's unwavering faithfulness to His people, coupled with their obligation to adhere to His commandments. This bilateral relationship serves as a foundational framework for understanding the dynamics between God and His disciples, illustrating the expectations and responsibilities inherent in their faith journey.

I am almighty God, walk before Me, and be thou perfect.' In awe, the Patriarch fell up on his face and the message continued: 'Behold My Covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.' In token of the fulfillment of this covenant his name heretofore called Abram was changed to Abraham, which signifies father of a great multitude.¹⁶

By exploring the theological implications of covenant, church leaders can facilitate a deeper comprehension among congregants regarding the importance of obedience and commitment in their discipleship. This understanding not only reinforces the accountability of believers to respond to God's faithfulness but also cultivates a community that values relational integrity and spiritual loyalty. Incorporating covenant theology into the discipleship program can thus enhance participants' awareness of their identity as members of God's covenant community, encouraging them to actively engage in activities that develop their spirituality and fulfill the church's broader mission.¹⁷ Furthermore, this framework can serve as a catalyst for fostering intergenerational relationships, as individuals learn to mentor

¹⁶ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1988), 137-138.

¹⁷ Rekha M. Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006).

and guide one another in their commitment to live out covenantal principles in their daily lives.

God's faithfulness to His servants is not limited to the first receiver of the blessing. Therefore, it is possible to drive the truth that God blesses one to make him a blessing to the others. "God's covenant with him embraced all the nations of earth."¹⁸ (Gen. 12:2, 3).

Teaching and Instruction

Encouraging pastors in the Nekemte District to draw inspiration from the exemplary leadership of figures such as Moses is essential for the effective implementation of a discipleship program. Moses, as a pivotal leader, consistently engaged in the diligent instruction of the Israelites regarding God's laws and ways, thereby establishing a model for contemporary church leaders.¹⁹ To facilitate this process, it is crucial to provide comprehensive resources and targeted training that equip pastors with the necessary tools to articulate biblical principles and doctrines effectively to their congregations. This training should include methodologies for teaching, mentoring, and engaging congregants in meaningful dialogue about scriptural teachings. Furthermore, incorporating historical and cultural contexts from the Old Testament can enhance the understanding of these principles and their application in modern church settings. By fostering an environment of continuous learning and support, pastors will be better prepared to cultivate a robust discipleship

¹⁸ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 2000), 368.

¹⁹ Ralph F. Wilson, *Moses the Reluctant Leader: Discipleship and Leadership Lessons* (Loomis, CA: JesusWalk Publications, 2011), accessed 1 October 2024, <https://www.jesuswalk.com/books/moses.htm>.

culture within their communities, ultimately enabling congregants to deepen their faith and commitment to Jesus.²⁰

Community and Fellowship

Emphasizing the significance of community and fellowship among believers is paramount in the implementation of an effective discipleship program in Nekemte. Drawing from biblical precedents, particularly the examples of the Israelites gathering for communal worship and participation in sacred festivals, we can illustrate the transformative power of collective faith experiences. These gatherings were not merely social events; they served as vital opportunities for spiritual renewal, mutual encouragement, and the reinforcement of communal identity centered around shared beliefs and values.²¹

In light of this, it is essential for pastors to actively facilitate environments that promote meaningful connections among disciples. This can be achieved through structured small groups, communal worship services, and other fellowship opportunities designed to foster relationships rooted in faith. By creating spaces where believers can interact, share their experiences, and offer support to one another, pastors can cultivate a culture of discipleship that emphasizes growth in both personal faith and communal unity. The reason being is “the more one tries to explain the Word of God to others, with a love for souls, the plainer it becomes to himself.”²² Such interactions are conducive to spiritual development, as they allow for the

²⁰ Yesu Vi, *Cultivating the Vineyard: A Comprehensive Guide to Church Leadership and Growth* (Sudbury, MA: eBookIt.com, 2024).

²¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1900), 3:9-40.

²² Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1900), 354.

exchange of insights, experiences, and challenges that believers face in their spiritual journeys.

Furthermore, the communal aspect of discipleship aligns with the biblical concept of the Body of Christ, wherein each member contributes uniquely to the health and vibrancy of the community.²³ By encouraging believers to engage intentionally in fellowship, pastors can help nurture a supportive environment that not only strengthens individual faith but also enhances collective resilience and outreach. Ultimately, this approach to discipleship, grounded in the rich tradition of communal worship exemplified in the Old Testament, will lay a robust foundation for spiritual growth and mutual accountability within the Nekemte District's church community.

Justice and Mercy

In the context of implementing a discipleship program in Nekemte, it is essential to underscore the Old Testament principles of justice and mercy. These principles highlight the moral imperative of caring for the vulnerable and marginalized individuals who are often subjugated by the injustices that arose from sin. By teaching these foundational concepts, pastors can cultivate a theological understanding that encourages congregants to recognize their responsibilities toward those in need within their communities.

Empowering church leaders to develop discipleship plans that incorporate opportunities for service and outreach is important. Such initiatives should engage all members of the church, fostering a holistic approach to discipleship that not only

²³Philip Jenkins, *The Lost History of Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins eBooks, 2008), 55-56.

emphasizes spiritual growth, but also practical, compassionate action.²⁴ This dual focus on spiritual growth and social responsibility aligns with the scriptural directive to practice justice and to love mercy (Mic 6:8), ultimately transforming the church into a vibrant agent of change within the broader society. Through the integration of justice-oriented practices into discipleship, the Nekemte District can cultivate a community of believers who are actively participating in meeting the needs of the oppressed, thereby reflecting the heart of Divinity as shown in the OT Scriptures.

Faithfulness and Obedience

Implementing a discipleship program in Nekemte requires a focus on faithfulness and obedience, illustrated through the lives of Old Testament figures such as Abraham and David. Abraham's readiness to leave his native country in compliance to God's command exemplifies the essence of trust and commitment inherent in discipleship. This theme is echoed in the New Testament, where Jesus instructs His disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). Such a command confirms that following God is not optional but an essential call for all believers.

Pastors in the Nekemte District should emphasize these principles to help their congregations understand the importance of obeying God's commands and accepting His guidance. By integrating faithfulness and obedience into the discipleship program, church leaders can foster a culture of commitment to God's mission.²⁵ This approach will cultivate active, faithful disciples equipped to engage in the universal call to

²⁴ Alton Garrison, *A Spirit-empowered Church: An Acts 2 Ministry Model* (Springfield, MO: Influence Resources, 2015), 15.

²⁵ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 3rd ed. (Greenville, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2017).

disciple-making, promoting both personal and communal transformation in alignment with biblical teachings.

Prayer and Worship

In the context of implementing a discipleship program in Nekemte, it is essential to note the importance of prayer and devotion in the life of a disciple. The Old Testament provides numerous examples, notably the Psalms, which tell of the connection between God and the believer through prayer and worship.²⁶ Additionally, the prayers of prophetic figures, such as Elijah, highlight the significance of seeking divine guidance and fostering an intimate communication with the Lord.

To effectively cultivate a healthy discipleship philosophy within congregations, pastors are encouraged to promote a culture that prioritizes witnessing, prayer, and worship.²⁷ This can be achieved by creating opportunities for disciples to engage in collective and individual worship experiences, as well as facilitating environments where they can encounter God in profound and transformative ways. Such initiatives might include regular prayer meetings and community outreach events that emphasize witness as an integral aspect of discipleship. By implementing these practices into church life, congregations can nurture deeper spiritual engagement, equipping a community of disciples who are prepared to bear witness of their faith both within and beyond the local context.

²⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002).

²⁷ Mark Naylor, "Cross-cultural Impact for the 21st Century: Articles on Cross-cultural Issues, Bible Translation, Disciple Making etc.," May 3, 2024, accessed 2 September 2024, <https://impact.nbseminary.com/category/disciple-making/>.

Holiness and Purity

In the context of implementing a discipleship program in the Nekemte District, it is essential to emphasize the significance of holiness and moral purity as mentioned in the OT laws and commandments. These Scriptures provide a comprehensive framework for understanding moral and ethical conduct, which is vital for nurturing a culture of discipleship. Pastors play a critical role in guiding disciples to comprehend the divine mandate to lead lives that are set apart for God's purposes. This involves not only an educational approach to teaching scriptural principles related to holiness but also the cultivation of an environment conducive to spiritual development.²⁸

By integrating these principles from the Old Testament into their discipleship plans, pastors in the Nekemte District can more effectively equip their congregations to become active and committed followers of Jesus. Such an approach encourages believers to recognize the transformative power of living in accordance with God's will, fostering deeper spiritual maturity and commitment within the community of faith. Moreover, instilling an understanding of holiness as a framework for ethical behavior can enhance the moral fabric of the congregation and promote a collective witness to the public, thereby fulfilling the church's calling as a light in the world.

Integration of Old Testament Wisdom into Modern Discipleship

Psalm 78:3-4 highlights the imperative of transmitting faith to future generations through deliberate teaching and discipleship. The scripture states, "Things that we have heard and known, that our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord,

²⁸ Graham Joseph Hill, "The Plurality of Gifts and the Importance of Pastors: Towards a More Polycentric, Polyvocal, Intercultural Church," last modified December 15, 2023, accessed 2 September 2024, <https://grahamjosephhill.com/pastors-and-plurality/>.

and his might, and the wonders that he has done.” This passage underscores the necessity of an intentional discipleship program in Nekemte, reinforcing the role of church leaders in educating the next generation about the transformative power and attributes of God. By embedding these principles into the discipleship curriculum, local churches can foster a robust faith community committed to sustaining the legacy of faith across generations.

The Context of Discipling One’s Children

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 presents a foundational framework for understanding the role of parental discipleship within the context of religious education and moral formation in children. This scriptural passage emphasizes the gravity of parents’ responsibilities in imparting their faith and values to the next generation. The first commandment within this passage is the internalization of God’s commandments, asserting that they should not merely be taught but should also permeate the parents’ daily lives. “These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts” (Deut 6:6), directs parents toward a lived example of faith, suggesting that the authenticity of their belief system must be evident in both thought and action.

The next command to diligently impress these teachings upon children demonstrates a proactive approach to discipleship. It shows several contexts for discussion and teaching—at home (“when you sit at home” Deut 6:7), during everyday activities (“when you walk along the road” Deut 6:7), and at bedtime or wakefulness (“when you lie down and when you get up” Deut 6:7). This framework indicates that the process of nurturing faith is not confined to formal settings, such as religious services or educational institutions, but rather should be integrated into the fabric of everyday life. By embedding spiritual discussions into ordinary family

interactions, parents provide a holistic model of faith that transcends ritual and fosters a deep, personal relationship with the divine.

Dear children, if you have praying parents, prize their prayers, heed their instructions, and remember that you will have to give an account for the privileges you now enjoy. All heaven is interested in your salvation. God has given his only beloved Son to die for your transgressions, angels are watching over you, and are trying to turn your attention to God, to seek your soul's salvation.²⁹

In summary, the passage from Deuteronomy encapsulates a profound understanding of parental discipleship, which underscores the necessity of authenticity, habitual teaching, and environmental integration of faith in influencing the Spiritual growth of children. This ancient text continues to resonate in contemporary discussions surrounding parenting, emphasizing the pivotal role that parents play in shaping the moral and spiritual compass of future generations. By recognizing and embracing these principles, parents can nurture their children in a way that fosters enduring faith, resilience, and moral integrity.

Passing on Tradition

The psalmist begins by acknowledging the importance of tradition and heritage in the transmission of faith. In Psalms 78 the affirmation is given that they speak of what they have “heard and known,” indicating that their understanding of God’s faithfulness has been passed down through generations. This highlights the role of parents and elders in passing on the stories and teachings of faith to their children. If disciplining others is important, then how much more is the disciplining of our children. The discipline includes the following.

²⁹ Ellen G. White, “Communications,” *The Youth's Instructor*, December 1, 1852, last modified 2007, accessed 30 August 2024, [https://egwwritings.org/read?panels=p469.49\(469.50\)&index=0](https://egwwritings.org/read?panels=p469.49(469.50)&index=0).

The psalmist in Psalm 78:3-4 underscores the intentional nature of educating the next generation about God's faithfulness, reflecting a commitment to actively share these truths rather than conceal them from children. This deliberate effort in teaching and discipleship ensures that the younger generation is equipped with the knowledge of God's glorious deeds and wonders.

Moreover, the psalmist emphasizes the importance of recounting and celebrating God's works, suggesting that by sharing stories of divine faithfulness and intervention, parents and mentors can instill deep faith and trust in God within their children. This practice cultivates a profound sense of awe and reverence for God's power and goodness.

Ultimately, the purpose of discipling one's children, as articulated in these verses, is to foster a deep understanding of and relationship with God. By transmitting stories and teachings of faith, parents and mentors establish a foundation for the spiritual development of the next generation, enabling them to navigate life in accordance with the ways of the Lord. When parents invest in nurturing a strong base of faith within their children, the likelihood of church growth is significantly enhanced. "The Sowers of the seed have a work to do in preparing hearts to receive the gospel . . . the love of Christ, revealed in personal ministry, may soften the stony heart, so that the seed of truth can take root."³⁰

In summary, Psalm 78:3-4 accentuates the significance of intentional teaching and discipleship in the transmission of faith to future generations. The passage emphasizes the responsibility of parents and church elders in sharing the narratives and teachings of faith, celebrating God's works, and fostering a vibrant relationship

³⁰ White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, 57.

with God in the hearts of children and the latest generation. Thus, incorporating Old Testament wisdom into the development of contemporary discipleship programs for local church elders, leaders, and pastors in the Nekemte District necessitates a thoughtful synthesis of ancient principles with modern needs and methodologies. This integration can be approached by strategically aligning foundational biblical teachings with innovative practices that resonate with the current context of the church.

Proverbs as a Foundation for Leadership

To enhance leadership development within the context of the local church, it is essential to draw upon the wisdom literature of the Old Testament, particularly the Book of Proverbs. This book offers valuable principles that can inform modern-day church leadership practices. By heeding the foundational tenets related to wise decision-making, effective communication, and servant leadership found in the book of Proverbs, church leaders can be equipped to guide their congregations with both wisdom and integrity. Such an approach not only promotes a deeper understanding of biblical wisdom but also endorses a model of leadership that prioritizes ethical conduct and relational accountability within the church community.

Narratives for Inspiration and Instruction

The narratives of the Old Testament, notably those of Moses, David, and Esther, offer profound inspiration and instruction for pastors serving as spiritual leaders to their congregations. These accounts exemplify essential virtues such as faith, courage, and obedience, which are crucial for effective ministry and discipleship. By reflecting on these biblical figures, pastors and elders can draw valuable lessons that equip them to navigate the complexities and challenges inherent in their roles. This engagement with scriptural narratives not only enriches their

understanding of leadership but also reinforces their commitment to guiding their communities with integrity and purpose. Ellen G. White emphasizes that “the work of God in this earth can never be finished until the men and women comprising our church membership rally to the work and unite their efforts with those of ministers and church officers.”³¹

A dichotomy between clergy and laity persists among many churchgoers, who often perceive clergy as the sole practitioners of ministry. This perspective contrasts with the Scriptural instruction that emphasizes the active role of all people (laos) that believe in Jesus to minister and serve, as articulated in Ephesians 4:12. Consequently, many Christians view the church primarily as a venue for worship attendance, with the pastor functioning as the primary minister. This understanding undermines the collective responsibility of the congregation in the work of ministry.³²

Applying Mosaic Law Principles

In the context of implementing a discipleship program in Nekemte, it is essential to acknowledge the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law in Christ while also extracting enduring principles of justice, compassion, and righteousness. These principles can guide the development of discipleship initiatives that address contemporary issues such as social injustice, poverty, and ethical living. Effective programs should integrate relevant Old Testament laws, focusing on community outreach, advocacy, and ethical decision-making to create a holistic approach to discipleship that resonates with current societal challenges.

³¹ Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1991), 56.

³² Thom S. Rainer, *The Book of Church Growth, History, Theology and Principles* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1993), 195-196.

Wisdom for Community Building

Emphasizing the communal dimensions of Old Testament wisdom literature is essential in the development of discipleship programs aimed at fostering authentic Christian community and fellowship. Pastors are encouraged to utilize the insights from Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon to guide congregational efforts in building relationships, resolving conflicts, and cultivating a culture of love and unity within the church. These texts provide valuable perspectives on interpersonal dynamics, which can be instrumental in enhancing discipleship initiatives.

Theological Framework of Redemption

Discipleship plans should be founded on the theological framework of redemption seen in the Old Testament, which presents Christ as the antitypical fulfillment of the Creator's promises and the source of hope and transformation for believers. It is essential for pastors and church boards in local churches to develop discipleship programs that prioritize the centrality of Christ in all dimensions of Christian life and ministry. By combining Old Testament wisdom with contemporary program development, pastors and church leaders in the Nekemte District can create culturally relevant discipleship initiatives that are rooted in Biblical truth, effectively equipping believers for growth in faith and ministry.

Jesus' Model of Discipleship in the New Testament

In empowering Nekemte District Pastors and local church front-runners to create active disciple making tactics, examining Jesus' ideals for discipleship in the NT provides a powerful framework. To effectively implement a discipleship program in the Nekemte District, pastors can draw from the example set by Jesus in several key areas.

First, a relational approach is essential; Jesus prioritized cultivating deep, personal relationships with His disciples, highlighting that no single method exists for mentoring and multiplying teachers. Pastors in Nekemte can emulate this by embracing authentic connections with congregants through one-on-one mentoring, small group settings, and active pastoral care.

Second, intentional training is critical. Jesus equipped His disciples through both teaching and practical experience, suggesting that Nekemte District pastors should develop a discipleship strategy that combines biblical instruction with hands-on ministry opportunities. This aligns with the teaching in Luke 6:40 that emphasizes transformation through effective training, underscoring the notion that every congregation should function as a training ground for church members.

Furthermore, modeling servanthood is equally important. Jesus demonstrated humility and service by washing His disciples' feet and encouraging them to adopt the same practice. Pastors can integrate this principle into their discipleship frameworks by promoting servant leadership, inspiring believers to serve others with love and humility.

Lastly, the principle of multiplication is crucial for sustained impact. Jesus invested deeply in a small number of disciples who would, in turn, disciple others. Pastors in Nekemte should adopt a similar strategy by equipping and empowering believers to disciple those around them, thereby creating a ripple effect of spiritual growth and multiplication within the local church community. By integrating these principles into their discipleship programs, pastors can foster a more engaged and effective ministry.

Discipleship Strategies

In the context of implementing a discipleship program, a strategy constitutes a broad framework for achieving specified goals or addressing identified challenges, without focusing on minute details. In other words, strategies are our declaration of faith about what we think the future should look like and how we should go about getting there.³³

Biblical Example of Strategic Discipleship

The Apostle Paul's overarching objective was to disseminate the message of Christ globally. Although the specifics of his day-to-day execution varied, his foundational strategy remained consistent throughout his early missionary journeys. This principle can guide the development of a discipleship program by clarifying its ultimate mission while allowing for adaptable methods in its implementation.³⁴

Life-on-life discipleship. In implementing a discipleship program, it is essential to draw from Jesus' model of life-on-life discipleship, wherein He actively engaged with His disciples in their daily lives, imparting lessons on the Kingdom of God through both teaching and exemplary actions. Pastors can adopt this holistic approach by addressing all facets of believers' lives, including spiritual growth, personal development, and relational health.

Prayer and dependence on God. Furthermore, as exemplified by Jesus' reliance on prayer and communion with the Father for guidance and strength, it is vital for pastors in the Nekemte District to emphasize the importance of cultivating a

³³ Edward R. Dayton and David A. Fraser, *Planning Strategies for World Evangelization* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1920), 16.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

vibrant prayer life among believers, encouraging them to depend on the Holy Spirit for wisdom and empowerment in their daily lives.

Commissioning and sending. Finally, in alignment with Jesus' commissioning of His disciples to spread the Gospel, pastors can equip believers in Nekemte to fulfill the Great Commission by providing essential training, resources, and opportunities for both local and global mission and outreach efforts.

By emulating Jesus' example in their discipleship plans, pastors and church leaders in the Nekemte District can foster a culture of active discipleship within their congregations. This approach will empower believers to deepen their relationship with Christ and effect meaningful Kingdom impact within their communities and beyond.

This is notably because "the primary focus of local church ministries is not to win souls ... but to train and equip members to win souls."³⁵ "Ministers, preach the truths that will lead to personal labor for those who are out of Christ. Encourage personal effort in every possible way."³⁶

Paul's Model of Discipleship

The Apostle Paul's writings provide essential insights regarding discipleship and church growth, which pastors in Nekemte District can leverage to develop effective discipleship programs aimed at fostering growth in various dimensions: numerical, spiritual, and financial. Spiritual growth is particularly crucial, as it enables the church to perceive the lost as Christ does. When each member is equipped with biblical truth, they become empowered ambassadors, actively engaging in the

³⁵ White, *Christian Service*, 69.

³⁶ Ibid.

mission to reach the perishing. This holistic approach can significantly enhance both individual and collective ministry effectiveness.

As stated in 2 Peter 3:18, we are to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Additionally, it says that spiritual gifts are meant to "build up the body of Christ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the Knowledge of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Eph 4:12, 13). And according to Ellen G. White, "Christ will come to claim them as His own when the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in his people."³⁷ Undoubtedly, achieving spiritual development and becoming more like Christ must always be a top priority for the church.

Foundational Teaching

Paul's emphasis on sound doctrine and teaching (Titus 1:9) underscores the importance of providing solid Biblical instruction in discipleship plans. He says that in order to be able to train others in the right doctrine and correct those who err, he (the disciple maker) must continue to uphold the honorable words that have been taught. Pastors can ensure that their discipleship programs prioritize teaching the foundational truths of the Christian faith, equipping believers with a healthy understanding of Scripture. "In every church the members should be so trained that they will devote time to the winning of souls to Christ. ... Let those who have charge of the flock of Christ [*pastors*] awake to their duty, and set many souls to work."³⁸

³⁷ Roger L. Dudley and Des Cummings Jr., *Adventures in Church Growth* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1983), 16.

³⁸ White, *Christian Service*, 61.

Spiritual Development

Paul's emphasis on spiritual growth and maturity (Eph 4:13) highlights the need for intentional discipleship that fosters spiritual development. Pastors can develop discipleship plans that incorporate practices such as prayer, study of Scripture, and spiritual practices to help believers grow in their relationship with God and become more like Christ.

Equipping for Ministry

Paul emphasizes the role of church leaders in equipping believers for ministry (Eph 4:12), highlighting the importance of empowering individuals to minister using their talents and gifts. Pastors can design discipleship plans that identify and develop the spiritual gifts of believers, providing opportunities for them to use their abilities in meaningful ways within the church and community. "In every church the members should be so trained that they will devote time to the winning of souls to Christ. . . Let those who have charge of the flock of Christ [*pastors*] awake to their duty, and set many souls to work."³⁹

Community and Fellowship

Paul's emphasis on the importance of Christian community (Rom 12:4-5) underscores the value of fostering a sense of belonging and connection among believers. Pastors can develop discipleship plans that prioritize building authentic relationships and fostering a supportive community where individuals can grow together in their faith.

³⁹ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1905), 147.

Multiplication and Reproduction

Paul's model of discipleship emphasizes not only the making of disciples but also their multiplication, as articulated in 2 Timothy 2:2, which underscores the significance of reproduction in church growth. The directive to commit learned truths to faithful individuals who can, in turn, teach others reflects a process of multiplication where each disciple shares their knowledge with others. To facilitate this, pastors should develop discipleship plans that empower believers to disciple others, equipping them to invest in the spiritual growth of their peers. This approach ensures that every church member actively participates in disseminating the truths they have received, thereby enhancing the overall impact of their ministry.

Mission and Outreach

Paul's dedication to spreading the Gospel and establishing churches, as highlighted in Romans 15:20, emphasizes the significance of mission and outreach in discipleship initiatives: "so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation." This principle encourages pastors to design discipleship programs that effectively equip believers for evangelism and mission efforts at both local and district levels. Furthermore, Seventh-day Adventism embodies a missionary ethos; its members, who are baptized into this truth, are compelled to share the beliefs they have embraced. The church is a dynamic missionary endeavor that serves the whole world's population by virtue of its very existence and design in the Lord's plan (Matt 28:19).⁴⁰

The SDA Church is a global organization dedicated to disseminating the message of salvation, particularly through the Three Angels' Messages as outlined in

⁴⁰ Zackrison, *From Spectators to Disciples*, 5.

Revelation 14:6-12. The church accomplishes this mission through various methods, including discipleship initiatives. Early Adventism clearly was motivated by the desire to fulfill the Great Commission. The evangelistic strategy developed by those early Adventists, similar to that of the New Testament Church, has been almost lost in present-day... Adventism. It is not our concern merely to recapture *the form of* early Adventism or the New Testament era, but it must be our concern to recapture the spirit of both early Adventism and early Christianity.⁴¹

Perseverance and Endurance

In 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, Paul's writings address the reality of suffering and persecution faced by believers, highlighting the need for perseverance and endurance in the Christian life. He states that "we are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." Persecution and challenges are inevitable; and such should not make us disappointed. Pastors can develop discipleship plans that prepare believers to face challenges with faith and resilience, equipping them to stand firm in their commitment to Christ.

By incorporating these principles from Paul's writings into their discipleship plans, pastors in Nekemte District can empower their congregations to grow in their faith, engage in ministry, build supportive community, multiply disciples, reach out to others with the gospel, and persevere in their walk with Christ, leading to vibrant and thriving local churches.

⁴¹ Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church*, 47.

Discipleship and Church Growth Planning for the Contemporary Church

In his message featured in the *Ministry Magazine*, Dr. Tsegaw asserts that discipleship constitutes the core of the Great Commission. He emphasizes that it should serve as the primary focus for every believer, as well as for all local church ministers, and should represent the singular vision of the local church.

In conclusion, discipleship, the heart of the Great Commission, needs to be the great obsession of the church, not the great omission. The three irreducible elements of discipleship—worship, fellowship, and witnessing—should be the focus of every believer and all local church ministries. Discipleship should be the single focus of local church vision, the church should center all the plans of its ministries on this focal point, and churches should encourage members to develop personal, active discipleship plans to ensure their growth in the three core elements of a life of discipleship.⁴²

Discipleship is vital for the existence of the church and individual believer.

Therefore, the glory of God serves as the structuring basis. To elaborate, 1 Corinthians 10:31 states "Therefore, do everything for the glory of God, regardless of what you eat, drink, or do." It is God's glory. Similarly, the disciple's organizing concept. When the apostle John states, "My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be My disciple," he is tying the glory of God and being a disciple together (John 15:8).⁴³

“Since the mandate of the Great Commission constitutes the reason for the existence of the church, and the commission commands the church to make disciples, it is essential that we clearly understand from a Biblical basis what a disciple is.”⁴⁴

This paragraph suggests that a comprehensive understanding of the concept of

⁴² Tsegaw, “Refocusing on Discipleship.”

⁴³ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 15.

⁴⁴ Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church*, 15.

discipleship can be attained by examining the intentions behind Jesus' pronouncement of the Great Commission.

Yet something so crucial to the fulfillment of the Great Commission as the making of disciples demands that disciple making be understood as Jesus defined it. It would be the definition that Jesus would have had in mind as He commended His followers to go forth and make disciples. How can evangelism be understood if the product that evangelism attempting to produce is not clear. According to the Great Commission, that product is disciple.⁴⁵

God possesses a distinct purpose for His followers on Earth; however, many individuals remain unaware of this divine agenda. The fundamental principle of bringing God glory and fulfilling God's will must be tied to each step of fulfilling this purpose. The exaltation of God's name is the aim of a disciple. Moving people on to God's agenda is how this aim is achieved.⁴⁶

The Influence of Intentional Discipleship on the Life of the Church

Planned or intentional discipleship within a church context presents numerous benefits that significantly develop the spirituality of individuals and the wider congregation.⁴⁷ First, it fosters spiritual growth by offering a structured framework through which members can grow in faith, enhance their knowledge of the Word of God, and strengthen their relationship with God. This intentional approach provides essential guidance and resources for individuals seeking to mature spiritually, facilitating a richer comprehension of their identity and purpose in Christ.

⁴⁵ Burrill, *Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church*, 15.

⁴⁶ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 17.

⁴⁷ Ken Adams, "Intentional Disciple Making," accessed 2 September 2024, <https://discipleship.org/blog/intentional-disciple-making/>.

Moreover, discipleship programs serve to cultivate a sense of community and accountability among congregants, establishing a supportive environment conducive to encouragement, fellowship, and mutual accountability.⁴⁸ Within small groups and mentorship arrangements, individuals are afforded the opportunity to share their challenges, celebrate spiritual victories, and collectively advance in their spiritual journeys.

Additionally, such planned discipleship initiatives equip believers with the necessary tools, skills, and biblical knowledge that enable effective ministry and service. This empowerment encourages individuals to identify and leverage their spiritual gifts, talents, and passions to fulfill the Great Commission and engage in acts of service motivated by love.

Finally, intentional discipleship emphasizes the importance of reproducing disciples who, in turn, can engage in the process of discipling others. This multiplying effect not only nurtures individual growth but also contributes to the broader expansion of the Kingdom of God as more individuals come to know Christ and engage in their own faith development.⁴⁹

The absence of discipleship within a church context bears profound implications for both the spiritual development of individual believers and the overall health of the congregation.⁵⁰ A notable consequence is the occurrence of shallow spiritual growth; in the absence of intentional discipleship, believers may encounter

⁴⁸ Joshua P. Smith, “Discipleship in Community,” posted April 9, 2010, accessed 2 September 2024, <https://jofum.com/articles/discipleship-in-community/>.

⁴⁹ Bobby Harrington, “Why Is Reproducing Disciples So Important?” posted July 22, 2014, accessed 2 September 2024, <https://discipleship.org/multiplication/why-is-reproducing-disciples-so-important/>.

⁵⁰ Allen White, “The Deficit of Discipleship: How the American Church Is Off-mission,” Allen White Consulting, last modified September 18, 2019, accessed 2 September 2024, <https://allenwhite.org/the-deficit-of-discipleship-how-the-american-church-is-off-mission/>.

significant challenges in deepening their faith and understanding of Scripture.

Without the necessary guidance and support, they may struggle to navigate life's complexities and effectively apply biblical principles to their daily experiences.

“The disciples weren't just called to spend time with Him. They were also sent forth with an important mission to fulfill.”⁵¹ This fragmentation can further exacerbate individual struggles, as members may feel they do not have the communal support essential for robust spiritual development.

Moreover, insufficient equipping and training through discipleship can impair the ministry effectiveness of the church. Believers may find themselves ill-prepared for engagement in service and outreach, subsequently hindering the congregation's capacity to fulfill its mission and effectively disseminate the gospel message within the community. Without a foundation of discipleship, the church risks becoming less impactful within its surrounding society.

Finally, the absence of a deliberate focus on discipleship can obstruct the church's potential to multiply disciples, thereby forfeiting the opportunity to make a more significant impact for the Kingdom. This lack of emphasis on discipleship may cause stagnation and impede the congregation's ability to fulfill Christ's command of making disciples of all nations. Consequently, the failure to prioritize discipleship not only undermines individual spiritual growth but also diminishes the collective mission and effectiveness of the church as a whole. “Every true disciple is born into the Kingdom of God as a missionary.”⁵²

⁵¹ Don Hawkins, *Master Discipleship Today: Jesus' Prayer and Plan for Every Believer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Oak Industrial, 2019), 37.

⁵² Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940), 195.

Overall, the absence of discipleship can hinder the spiritual vitality and effectiveness of both members individually and the congregation collectively. Therefore, prioritizing intentional discipleship is essential for fostering spiritual growth, community, ministry effectiveness, and the multiplication of disciples in the church.

What is planning? Planning is the setting of goals, determining actions to achieve those goals, and outlining the strategies and resources required for successful implementation.⁵³ It involves envisioning the desired future state, assessing the current situation, and devising a systematic approach to bridge the gap between the two.

In Luke 14:28-30, NIV, Jesus stated, “suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’” He used the analogy of planning and counting the cost before building a tower to illustrate the importance of considering the implications and requirements of discipleship. Jesus emphasizes the need for careful planning to avoid embarrassment and failure: This teaching underscores the principle of wise planning and foresight before embarking on any endeavor.

In the context of organizational management or project management, a plan is a detailed proposal outlining a sequence of activities or steps designed to accomplish a specific aim or objective.⁵⁴ Plans provide a roadmap for how resources will be

⁵³ Kreston Pedabo “The Significance of Goal Setting and Strategic Planning in Organisations,” posted November 13, 2023, accessed 2 September 2024, <https://krestonpedabo.com/the-significance-of-goal-setting-and-strategic-planning-in-organisations/>.

⁵⁴ Pedabo “The Significance of Goal Setting and Strategic Planning in Organisations.”

allocated, tasks will be accomplished, and timelines will be followed to accomplish the desired outcome. This framework functions as a help for policymaking and resource allocation throughout the execution phase.

Plans can be categorized based on their scope and complexity, with significant types including strategic plans, which offer long-term organizational direction; operational plans, which specify short-term actions; and project plans, which detail the tasks, timelines, and necessary resources for particular initiatives.⁵⁵ A comprehensive plan typically encompasses several essential components, such as clearly defined goals and objectives, detailed action steps, established timelines, assigned responsibilities, resource allocation strategies, risk management approaches, and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation. The importance of documentation in this process cannot be overstated; it is fundamental for promoting clarity, communication, and accountability among stakeholders involved in implementation. Written plans serve as a reference point, ensuring alignment among participants regarding expectations and duties.⁵⁶ Furthermore, documentation facilitates progress tracking, aids in the early identification of potential challenges, and allows for the recalibration of strategies when necessary.

Plans function as dynamic instruments that not only guide decision-making and actions throughout the course of a project or initiative but also ensure that efforts are coordinated, resources are utilized efficiently, and progress is rigorously assessed. They empower organizations to remain adaptable in the face of changing

⁵⁵ David S. Bright, Anastasia H. Cortes, and Eva Hartmann, *Principles of Management* (Houston, TX: OpenStax, 2019), 559, accessed 2 September 2024, <https://openstax.org/books/principles-management/pages/17-3-types-of-plans>.

⁵⁶ David Hartshorne, "What Is a Project Plan? How to Write One + 5 Ready-Made Templates," December 29, 2020, accessed 2 September 2024, <https://monday.com/blog/project-management/how-to-write-a-killer-project-plan-in-6-simple-steps/>.

circumstances, enabling proactive responses to unforeseen challenges or emerging opportunities.

In summary, plans are essential documents that provide a structured approach to achieving goals and objectives. They serve as roadmaps for action, facilitating coordination, communication, and accountability within organizations or projects.

The significance of planning in discipleship. Planning is essential in discipleship as it provides a clear direction, structure, and effectiveness in fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20). Generally speaking, planning in discipleship ensures effectiveness, sustainability, and spiritual maturity, leading to the transformation of lives and the expansion of God's kingdom.

The Importance of Structured Training in Local Churches

It is essential for local churches to implement comprehensive training programs for all members, emphasizing the importance of collective participation in a well-structured plan. "The Dissemination of the truth of God is not confined to a few ordained Ministers. The truth is to be scattered by all who claim to be the disciple of Christ."⁵⁷

This initiative is underpinned by the belief that divine support will be bestowed by the sending Lord. When such endeavors are developed with careful consideration, thorough understanding, and fervent prayer, they are more likely to be blessed by God.

The process of discipleship, characterized by continuous learning and growth, necessitates that individuals actively assess their spiritual progress and contributions, reflecting an ongoing commitment to their faith and community engagement.

⁵⁷ White, *Christian Service*, 68.

There is no point in beginning something one cannot complete. Such a project absorbs time and energy without bringing any comparable reward. The ‘cost’ of discipleship is complete and permanent renunciation of personal ambitions and of worldly interests. He who is not willing to go all the way may as well not even start.⁵⁸

This passage emphasizes the necessity of full commitment in discipleship, suggesting that starting a journey without the intention to complete it is not only unproductive but also a misuse of time and resources. It highlights that true discipleship demands a complete denial of personal desires and worldly comforts, underscoring the importance of total dedication. The warning against half-hearted participation calls for self-reflection and discernment in spiritual endeavors, underscoring the sacrifices required for authentic commitment to the path of being a disciple.

As the result of various church growth studies, it has conducted, the Institute of Church Ministry has designed a survey instrument for Adventist pastors. Three of the questions have particular relevance to this chapter. They ask the pastor whether or not his church has (1) specific written objectives, (2) planned methods to reach them, and (3) a functioning evangelism council.⁵⁹

The above passage accentuates the importance of structured planning in church ministry, as demonstrated by the Institute of Church Ministry’s survey for Adventist pastors. By focusing on the existence of specific written objectives, planned strategies to achieve those objectives, and a functioning evangelism council, it highlights a systematic approach to church growth. This framework promotes accountability, collaboration among church leaders, and ultimately enhances the effectiveness of evangelism and outreach efforts, contributing to sustainable

⁵⁸ “Counteth the Cost” [Luke 14:28], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1978), 5:812.

⁵⁹ Dudley and Cummings, Jr., *Adventures in Church Growth*, 67.

congregational growth. Another widely accepted definition of planning can be seen below:

The planning process is a process used to develop objectives, develop tasks to meet objectives, determine needed resources, create a timeline, determine tracking and assessment, finalize the plan, and distribute the plan to the team. The process can be used by large organizations, management teams, or individual staff to develop and complete a plan.⁶⁰

This definition underscores several essential aspects of planning. Firstly, it is goal-oriented, as it involves identifying specific objectives that an individual, organization, or community seeks to accomplish. Secondly, planning precedes action, highlighting the necessity of thoughtful consideration and strategic decision-making. Additionally, planning is a process that entails gathering information, analyzing data, generating options, and making informed choices. It also requires selecting the most appropriate means or strategies to achieve the desired goals.

Furthermore, planning is forward-thinking, emphasizing the importance of foreseeing future challenges and opportunities rather than merely reacting to current circumstances. Collectively, these elements illustrate that planning is fundamental to effective decision-making, resource allocation, and goal achievement across various fields, including business, government, urban development, and personal growth.

Planning involves determining what actions to take and how to implement them. This is a fundamental managerial responsibility. Before undertaking any task, managers must evaluate and decide on the most effective approach, which is closely linked to discovery and creativity. Setting clear goals is a prerequisite for effective planning, as the process encompasses selecting the best course of action from various

⁶⁰ Jillian Huot, "Planning Process Definition, Steps & Examples - Lesson," accessed 2 September 2024, <https://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-the-planning-process-steps-lesson-quiz.html>.

alternatives. Thus, planning is a crucial step that managers at all organizational levels must undertake to ensure strategic decision-making and successful execution.⁶¹

The Importance of Planning

Planning is essential for empowering pastors in the Nekemte District to formulate effective discipleship strategies for local churches. It serves as the bridge between the current state and future goals, particularly in the face of inherent uncertainties. By utilizing present resources and information, planning enables pastors to navigate and address future challenges, facilitating proactive and informed decision-making in discipleship initiatives.

Clarity of Vision

Effective planning equips pastors and church leaders with a clear vision for achieving discipleship within their congregations. By establishing specific goals, objectives, and strategies, pastors can articulate an active discipleship vision and communicate it effectively to their members, helping them understand their roles as children of God. Historically, many church members have perceived their participation solely as individualistic, often viewing congregational attendance as sufficient for spiritual fulfillment.⁶² This misconception has sometimes led to a lack of clarity in purpose and engagement within the church community. To foster a transformative shift, it is essential that church leaders provide a cohesive vision that encourages all members to actively participate in their faith, thereby cultivating a more involved and purpose-driven community.

⁶¹ BYJU'S, "Planning," accessed 2 September 2024, <https://byjus.com/commerce/planning/>.

⁶² George W. Bullard, *Pursuing the Full Kingdom Potential of Your Congregation* (Saint Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2009), 66-67.

Strategic Direction

Planning helps pastors identify the most effective ways to achieve their discipleship goals. By assessing the current state of discipleship within their churches, pastors can strategically plan the steps needed to enhance and expand discipleship activities, ensuring that their efforts are focused, intentional and purposeful.

“Churches are to be organized and plans laid for work to be done by the members of the newly organized churches. This gospel missionary work is to keep reaching out and annexing new territory, enlarging the cultivated portions of the vineyard. The circle is to extend until it belts the world.”⁶³ Gospel workers should implement structured programs that encourage church members to create personalized lists of individuals for whom they can pray and evangelize. Such initiatives foster a sense of communal responsibility and active participation in outreach efforts, facilitating deeper connections between church members and their broader communities. By systematically engaging congregants in the practice of prayer and evangelism, churches can enhance their overall effectiveness in fulfilling their mission.

Engagement and Participation

Planning involves engaging key stakeholders, including church members, leaders, and volunteers, in the discipleship planning process. By involving the broader church community in planning efforts, pastors can create a sense of proprietorship and participation, contributing to greater commitment to discipleship initiatives. “Is it not your duty to put some skill and study and planning into the matter of conducting

⁶³ White, *Evangelism*, 19.

religious meetings—how they shall be conducted so as to do the greatest amount of good, and leave the very best impression upon all who attend?”⁶⁴

Adaptability and Flexibility

Effective planning empowers pastors to anticipate challenges in the discipleship process and develop contingency strategies to address unforeseen obstacles. By remaining adaptable and responsive, pastors can navigate unexpected circumstances while keeping discipleship efforts on course. Additionally, it is essential to train church members adequately, equipping them with the knowledge of what to communicate, where to do so, and how to effectively convey their messages. This preparation not only enhances the overall effectiveness of discipleship but also fosters a cohesive and confident congregational response to challenges.

Measurable Progress

Planning allows pastors and local church leaders to establish clear system of measurement and indicators for evaluating the progress of discipleship initiatives. By setting measurable goals and objectives, pastors can track the effectiveness of their efforts over time and make data-driven decisions to refine and improve their discipleship plans.

Long-Term Sustainability

Planning promotes long-term sustainability by providing pastors with a roadmap for ongoing discipleship efforts. It saves time, energy and maximize the result. It also helps which work should come first.

⁶⁴ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald: The New Heart* (Hagerstown, MD, Review and Herald Published House, April 14, 1885)

Especially when it comes to professional life, planning is essential. It assists people in setting priorities for their work, making efficient use of their time, and eventually achieving their objectives. Planning is even more crucial in today's fast-paced environment, as people are continuously overwhelmed with responsibilities and information.⁶⁵

Comprehensive and well-structured discipleship plans are essential for pastors to establish a foundation for sustained growth and development in their local churches, ensuring that discipleship remains a priority over time. Effective planning can empower pastors and church leaders in the Nekemte District to implement active discipleship strategies by providing clarity of vision and strategic direction, facilitating resource allocation, promoting engagement and participation, and allowing for adaptability and flexibility. Furthermore, a solid planning framework enables measurable progress and long-term sustainability, equipping pastors to lead their congregations effectively in the journey of discipleship and spiritual growth

How to Plan

Effective planning for empowering pastors and church leaders in the Nekemte District to develop active discipleship strategies requires a systematic approach that considers multiple factors, stakeholders, and resources. This process begins with an assessment of the church's current state, followed by the establishment of clear, shared objectives that engage all participants in the program. Church leaders must identify readily available resources to train members in discipleship efforts. This structured planning aligns with biblical principles and the spirit of prophecy, which advocate for thoughtful preparation in determining the church's goals and activities.

⁶⁵ Karthik Chidambaram, "How Planning Ahead Helps You Maximize Productivity," accessed 2 September 2024, <https://www.karthikchidambaram.com/how-planning-ahead-benefits-your-life/>.

“The work you are engaged in cannot be done except by forces which are the result of well-understood plans.”⁶⁶

Assess Current State

The initial step in enhancing discipleship within the local churches of the Nekemte District is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the current state of discipleship. This evaluation should focus on existing discipleship programs, if any, alongside an analysis of available resources, strengths, weaknesses, and potential areas for improvement. Such an assessment will yield critical insights into the specific needs and challenges faced by pastors and congregations, informing effective strategies to foster deeper discipleship practices and address existing gaps in the district’s ministry efforts.

Set Clear Objectives

Define clear objectives for empowering pastors to develop active discipleship plans. “These objectives should be specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART).”⁶⁷ Examples of objectives may include increasing participation in discipleship activities, enhancing biblical knowledge among church members, or equipping pastors with effective discipleship strategies. Leaders are not only preachers and spokesmen but also disciple makers. By so doing they will become example for others. “Moses in his role as God’s chosen leader of His people, was not

⁶⁶ White, *Evangelism*, 94.

⁶⁷ CFI Team, “SMART Goals,” accessed 2 September 2024, <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/management/smart-goal/>.

only a prophet-God’s spokesman-but also the people’s teacher and trainer so that they in turn would become God’s [disciple].”⁶⁸

Engage Stakeholders

The involvement of key individuals, including pastors, church leaders, volunteers, and congregants, is a necessary element in the process of planning. Seek input and feedback from stakeholders to ensure that their perspectives and concerns are considered in the development of discipleship plans. Foster a collaborative and inclusive planning environment that encourages participation and ownership.

Identify Resources

Identify the resources needed to support pastors in developing active discipleship plans. This may include financial resources, training materials, mentoring programs, and support from denominational or organizational partners. Determine how these resources will be obtained and allocated to effectively empower pastors and strengthen discipleship efforts.

Provide Training and Support

Offer training and support to pastors to enhance their skills and knowledge in discipleship ministry. This may involve organizing workshops, seminars, or conferences focused on discipleship principles, teaching methodologies, leadership development, and pastoral care. Provide ongoing mentorship and coaching to pastors as they implement discipleship plans in their churches. “It is clear in the New Testament that God intended for the church to be a center for discipleship.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Willie Oliver and Elaine Oliver, with Claudio Consuegra and Pamela Consuegra, *Strengthening Discipleship* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2018), 51.

⁶⁹ Oliver and Oliver, with Consuegra and Consuegra, *Strengthening Discipleship* 51.

Develop Action Plans

This project collaborated with pastors in the Nekemte district to create meaningful action strategies for implementing discipleship initiatives within their local churches. These action plans are designed to specify activities, establish timelines, assign responsibilities, and define success to effectively achieve the desired discipleship objectives. By encouraging pastors to customize their plans according to the distinct needs and the contexts of their congregations, the project aims to enhance the relevancy and impact of discipleship efforts in fostering spiritual growth and community engagement.

Monitor and Evaluate Progress

Establishing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating discipleship plans is essential for local churches in Nekemte to effectively implement their strategies. Churches should regularly review key performance indicators, including attendance, participation rates, spiritual growth outcomes, and stakeholder feedback. This data-driven approach allows for a proper assessment of the effectiveness of discipleship efforts. It also facilitates necessary adjustments to enhance outcomes. By focusing on continuous improvement, churches can ensure that their discipleship initiatives remain relevant and impactful, ultimately promoting meaningful spiritual engagement within the congregation.

Celebrate Successes and Learn from Challenges

Celebrating the successes and milestones in discipleship ministry is important for recognizing the contributions of pastors and congregants, reinforcing a feeling of a common and shared goal. Also, it is crucial to reflect on challenges and setbacks to gain lessons and identify opportunities for growth. By endorsing a culture of

innovation, resilience, and continuous learning within the Nekemte District churches, congregations can enhance their ability to adapt and thrive, ultimately strengthening their discipleship efforts and enriching the spiritual journey of their members.

Sustain Momentum

To effectively implement a discipleship program in Nekemte, it is essential to maintain the momentum by remaining focused on long-term objectives. This involves communicating the significance of discipleship to both pastors and congregants, thereby fostering a common understanding of its importance. Providing ongoing support and encouragement is important to sustaining the enthusiasm and efforts of those involved. Additionally, seeking opportunities for collaboration and working with other churches and ministries within the union can enhance the program's effectiveness by facilitating the sharing of best practices and resources. Through these strategies, the discipleship initiative can achieve greater impact and resilience within the community. The Pastor and church members, "are intricately related to disciple-making and disciple growing. We have the common goal of working together until we all reach the stature of the fullness of Christ at His return."⁷⁰

Review and Revise Plans

To enhance the effectiveness of discipleship programs in the Nekemte District, it is essential to review and revise discipleship plans in light of evolving needs, priorities, and opportunities. Communicating with pastors and stakeholders for feedback allows for a comprehensive evaluation process. This ensures that planning efforts are informed by direct insights from those involved. By adapting and refining discipleship strategies based on evaluation findings, planners can maintain the

⁷⁰ Oliver and Oliver, with Consuegra and Consuegra, *Strengthening Discipleship*, 50.

relevance and impact of their initiatives in strengthening discipleship within local churches of Nekemte. This approach will promote spiritual growth, enhance community engagement, and contribute to a more significant impact throughout the region.

The Keys for Effective Church Planning in Nekemte

Developing an effective discipleship program in Nekemte requires an understanding of several key factors. First, a thorough assessment of the local cultural, social, economic, and spiritual dynamics is essential to plan discipleship strategies that address the specific challenges and opportunities within the district. Furthermore, presenting a clear vision and mission for discipleship ensures alignment among pastors and congregants, facilitating engagement in shared goals such as spiritual growth and community involvement. Involving key stakeholders—including church leaders, volunteers, and congregants—in the planning process fosters collaboration and ownership of the discipleship initiative.

Additionally, empowering pastors with the necessary training and resources is important for effective implementation. Setting specific, measurable, and time-bound goals allows for a focused approach, while comprehensive plans should encompass various discipleship activities, such as Bible studies and mentoring programs, to meet diverse needs. Providing ongoing support and resources will equip pastors to effectively implement their discipleship plans within local churches.

Establishing accountability mechanisms and cultivating a culture of discipleship within the churches will enhance engagement and commitment among church members. Regular evaluation of discipleship initiatives will facilitate continuous improvement, ensuring that strategies remain meaningful and effective.

By addressing these factors, churches in the Nekemte District can develop vibrant discipleship programs that promote spiritual growth and significant community engagement.

The Challenges of Effective Church Planning in Nekemte

Developing active discipleship strategies for local churches in the Nekemte District presents several challenges. Among these are, first of all, limited resources. This includes inadequate funding, staffing, and infrastructure which hinders the abilities to implement effective programs. The district's diversity of languages and cultures also complicates the creation of inclusive discipleship initiatives that resonate with all the various ethnic groups. Additionally, many gospel ministers lack formal training in pastoral leadership and discipleship, resulting in a lack of support and mentorship essential for developing successful programs.

Resistance to change among congregants, influenced by existing traditions, poses further obstacles to innovation. Many churchgoers are accustomed to their established practices and may be reluctant to try new discipleship efforts. Secular pressures can also diminish the emphasis on discipleship, making it challenging for pastors to inspire meaningful participation among church members who may prioritize worldly concerns over spiritual growth.

Geographical barriers present additional challenges, as some communities in the Nekemte District are isolated or difficult to reach. This hampers the pastors' abilities to access resources and support for discipleship initiatives. Limited access to technology further restricts outreach and training opportunities, as many pastors may struggle to use digital platforms effectively for communication and educational purposes.

Finally, broader societal issues such as poverty and political instability impact the congregation's participation in discipleship activities. Government regulations may also impose constraints on religious practices, complicating the development and implementation of discipleship programs. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive strategy that involves collaboration with the West Ethiopia Union Mission, ECD division leaders, and other administrative bodies in the SDA Church. By proactively tackling these barriers, pastors can empower local churches in the Nekemte District to implement discipleship strategies that foster spiritual growth and promote community transformation.

Planning in the Adventist Church

Planning within the Adventist Church for the empowerment of pastors in fostering active discipleship and facilitating church growth requires a systematic approach that encompasses several key steps and considerations. The following outlines a comprehensive strategy for implementation:

Understanding the Church's Mission

It is essential to reaffirm the assignment of the SDA Church, which is to disseminate the everlasting gospel worldwide, as articulated in Revelation 14:6. All planning efforts must be systematically aligned with this mission and dedicated to the fulfillment of Christ's command to make disciples of all people groups. The efficacy and integrity of the congregation's existence are contingent upon its commitment to this foundational role.

The very life of the church depends upon her faithfulness in fulfilling the Lord's commission. To neglect this work is surely to invite spiritual feebleness

and decay. Where there is no active labor for others, love wanes, and faith grows dim.⁷¹

Assess Current State

Conduct a thorough evaluation of the current status of discipleship and church growth within the local Adventist Church framework. This assessment should encompass a detailed analysis of existing discipleship programs and resources, with particular attention to their strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, it is essential to identify areas that require enhancement to foster effective discipleship and promote sustainable church growth.

Setting Clear Objectives

Establish clear and measurable objectives aimed at empowering pastors to engage in active discipleship and church growth initiatives. These objectives must be closely aligned with the task of the SDA Church and should take into account the specific needs and priorities of both pastors and their congregations.

Involving Stakeholders

Engaging key stakeholders in the planning process—including pastors, church administrators, church members, and denominational leaders—is essential for promoting a collaborative, inclusive, and representative planning environment within the SDA Church. To ensure that planning initiatives adequately address the diverse needs and perspectives of the community, it is crucial to solicit input and feedback from these relevant parties throughout the process.

⁷¹ White, *The Desire of Ages*, 825.

Developing Comprehensive Plans

It is also important to formulate comprehensive strategic plans that describe specific methodologies, activities, and timelines aimed at empowering pastors in active discipleship and facilitating church growth. It is advisable to integrate a diverse range of initiatives, including leadership development programs, discipleship training workshops, evangelistic campaigns, and community outreach endeavors. From a theological perspective, it is posited that God has established a plan of salvation, which was executed by the Son. In the context of discipling the unconverted community, it is essential to engage in collaborative planning with God, who will offer assistance in these efforts, provided that our strategies align with His intentions.

Many are unable to make definite plans for the future, their life is unsettled. They cannot discern the outcome of affairs, and this often fills them with anxiety and unrest. Let us remember that the life of God's children in this world is a pilgrim's life. We have no wisdom to plan our own lives. It is not for us to shape our future. ...Christ in His life on earth made no plans for Himself. He accepted God's plans for Him, and day by day the Father unfolded His plans. So should we depend upon God, that our lives may be the simple outworking of His will. As we commit our ways to Him, He will direct our steps.⁷²

Providing Training and Support

Facilitate the professional development of pastors by supplying comprehensive training, essential resources, and robust support mechanisms to enhance their capability in leading discipleship and fostering church growth initiatives. This can be achieved through the provision of continuous professional development opportunities, structured mentoring programs, individualized coaching services, and access to pertinent educational materials and tools.

⁷² White, *The Ministry of Healing*, 478-479.

Implementing Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms

Implement systematic mechanisms for the evaluation of the effectiveness of discipleship and church growth initiatives, as well as for the collection of feedback from both pastors and congregations. Utilize the findings from these evaluations to identify successful outcomes, discern challenges, and recognize areas requiring improvement. Subsequently, revise and adjust strategic plans based on the insights garnered from this evaluative process.

Promoting Innovation and Adaptability

Promote innovation and adaptability in discipleship and church growth initiatives within the SDA Church. This entails the integration of technologies, methodologies, and approaches designed to optimize effectiveness and relevance in engaging with diverse people groups.

Cultivating a Culture of Discipleship and Evangelism

The establishment of a dynamic culture of discipleship and evangelism within the Adventist Church calls for a concerted emphasis on spiritual growth, mission-oriented outreach, and community involvement. It is necessary to encourage both pastors and church members to prioritize discipleship and evangelistic endeavors within their ministries as well as in their personal lives.

By implementing these strategic initiatives and considerations, the planning efforts within the SDA Church can effectively call upon the engagement of pastors in active discipleship and church growth initiatives. Such an approach aims to promote lively, healthy, and expanding congregations that line up with overarching mission of the Adventist Church.

Seventh-day Adventists and Ellen White's Writing on Planning Discipleship

Biblical Foundation

The SDA Church regards discipleship as a fundamental element of its mission and identity. This emphasis is rooted in a biblical foundation, wherein the Church adheres to the teachings and example of Jesus Christ as mentioned in the Scriptures. Discipleship is central to Christian life, encompassing the process of following Christ, learning from His teachings, and extending His love to others. This perspective is reflected in the Church's mission statement, which underscores the paramount importance of discipleship ministry.

Educational Emphasis

The Adventist Church operates an extensive network of educational institutions across the globe, including elementary schools, high schools, colleges, and universities. These institutions prioritize holistic education, aiming to foster the spiritual, academic, biological, and societal growth of students. Discipleship is woven into the fabric of the curriculum and campus life, promoting both spiritual growth and character formation among students.

Local Church—The local church also has a major assignment in the lifelong educational enterprise. The congregation as a community of faith provides an atmosphere of acceptance and love in which it discipled those within its sphere of influence in a personal faith in Jesus Christ and in a growing understanding of the Word of God. This understanding includes both an intellectual aspect and a life in harmony with God's will.⁷³

⁷³ East Central Africa Division, *ECD Working Policy*, 2024 ed. (Nairobi, Kenya: ECD, 2024), 258.

Mission and Evangelism

The SDA Church is committed to global mission and evangelism, seeking to proclaim the gospel message to everyone. Discipleship plays a crucial role in this mission, as believers are empowered and equipped to share their faith and make disciples of others through various outreach initiatives and evangelistic efforts. “Our Method—Guided by the Bible and the Holy Spirit, Seventh-day Adventists pursue the mission of making disciples through Christ- like living, healing, serving, proclaiming, teaching, and training.”⁷⁴

Small Groups and Mentorship

Within local congregations, SDA Churches often emphasize small group ministry and mentorship as vehicles for discipleship. These small groups provide opportunities for believers to study the Bible together, pray, share experiences, and support one another in their spiritual journey. Mentorship relationships allow for more personalized discipleship and guidance from more experienced believers.

The formation of small companies as a basis of Christian effort is a plan that has been presented before me by One who cannot err. If there is a large number in the church, let the members be formed into small companies, to work not only for the church members but for unbelievers also.⁷⁵

Health and Wholeness

The SDA Church advocates for a comprehensive perspective on health and wellness, emphasizing the interconnectedness of physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of well-being. Within this framework, discipleship is understood as

⁷⁴ *ECD Working Policy* (2024), 258.

⁷⁵ White, *Evangelism*, 115.

encompassing not only spiritual development but also a dedication to healthy living and the stewardship of the temple of the God, the body.

This holistic approach to health is integral to the church's theological and practical applications of discipleship, profoundly influencing the life and mission of the congregation. Ultimately, the church aims to fulfill its divine mandate to proclaim the everlasting gospel and prepare individuals for the imminent return of Jesus Christ, thereby reinforcing the significance of discipleship within its broader religious mission.

Divine Guidance in Planning

Ellen G. White underscored the significance of seeking divine guidance in all planning endeavors, asserting that prayerful consideration and reliance on God's direction are fundamental to effective planning and decision-making within the church. Her emphasis on the necessity of engaging in prayer reflects a broader theological perspective that prioritizes spiritual discernment and alignment with divine will in organizational processes and initiatives. Through this lens, she advocates for a systematic approach to decision-making that integrates faith-based practices, thereby aiming to enhance the efficacy and integrity of church operations.

We need to follow more closely God's plan of life. To do our best in the work that lies nearest, to commit our ways to God, and to watch for the indications of His providence—these are rules that ensure safe guidance in the choice of an occupation.⁷⁶

Nurturing New Believers

Ellen G. White underscores the significance of nurturing new believers and facilitating their spiritual development. She asserts that effective support and guidance

⁷⁶ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), 267.

are essential for fostering a robust faith among individuals who have recently embraced religious beliefs. White emphasizes the necessity for established members of the faith community to engage actively in mentoring these newcomers, thereby promoting both personal growth and community cohesion. Through consistent instruction and encouragement, she argues that new believers can cultivate a deeper understanding of their faith and strengthen their commitment, ultimately contributing to the vitality of the congregation as a whole.

Those who have newly come to the faith should be patiently and tenderly dealt with, and it is the duty of the older members of the church to devise ways and means to provide help and sympathy and instruction for those who have conscientiously withdrawn from other churches for the truth's sake, and thus cut themselves off from the pastoral labor to which they have been accustomed.⁷⁷

She encouraged experienced church members to mentor and disciple new converts, providing them with guidance and support. “When souls are converted, set them to work at once. And as they labor according to their ability, they will grow stronger.”⁷⁸

After individuals have been converted to the truth, they need to be looked after... These newly converted ones need nursing—watchful attention, help, and encouragement. These should not be left alone, a prey to Satan's most powerful temptations; they need to be educated in regard to their duties, to be kindly dealt with, to be led along, and to be visited and prayed with.⁷⁹

Mission Outreach and Evangelism

White was a strong advocate for mission outreach and evangelism. She believed that every church member should be actively involved in sharing the gospel

⁷⁷ White, *Evangelism*, 351.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 355.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 351.

message with others and engaging in mission activities to bring the lost sheep to Jesus.

Tell My people that time is short. Every effort is now to be made to exalt the truth. In the cities, large and small, the message is to be proclaimed. The third angel's message is to be united with the second angel's message, and is to be proclaimed with great power in our large cities. Thus, will be given with a loud voice the message that is to prepare a people for the coming of the King.⁸⁰

Unity and Cooperation

White underscored the fundamental importance of unity and cooperation among believers in furthering the mission of the church. She argued that church members should engage in collaborative efforts, advocating for the prioritization of collective goals over individual differences and personal preferences in the pursuit of the gospel. Such cooperation is essential for the effectiveness and advancement of the church's objectives. "Present your plans to the church in such a manner as to win members' interest and cooperation."⁸¹This collective effort, she argued, is essential for effectively fulfilling the objectives of the church and fostering a robust community of faith.

Adaptation to Changing Contexts

White acknowledged the necessity for the church to adapt its methodologies and strategies in response to evolving cultural, social, and technological contexts. She advocated for a flexible and innovative approach to ministry, emphasizing the importance of remaining faithful to the foundational principles of God's Word. Generally, her writings offer significant insights and guidance for various aspects of

⁸⁰ Ellen G. White, *Ministry to the Cities* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2012), 61.

⁸¹ Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Ministerial Association, 1995), 122.

church planning, discipleship, and growth, particularly within the SDA Church but also extending beyond it.

White's focus on prayerful dependence on God, adherence to biblical principles, Christ-centeredness, mission outreach, unity, and adaptability continues to influence contemporary church efforts in these domains. Thus, her contributions remain relevant and provide a framework for addressing modern challenges in ecclesiastical contexts.

There is a need for Nehemiahs in the church today, not men who can pray and preach only, but men whose prayers and sermons are braced with firm and eager purpose. The course pursued by this Hebrew patriot in the accomplishment of his plans is one that should still be adopted by ministers and leading men. When they have laid their plans, they should present them to the church in such a manner as to win their interest and cooperation. Let the people understand the plans and share in the work, and they will have a personal interest in its prosperity.⁸²

Church Manual on Discipling and Church Growth

The *SDA Church Manual* provides guidance on various aspects of church life and organization. It notes that becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ, growing as His disciple, and making more disciples is the ongoing process of discipleship. Although it is a necessary step in the discipleship process, baptism is not the conclusion of it.⁸³

Although the *Church Manual* does not contain a designated section focused exclusively on discipleship and church growth, it encompasses various principles and practices that are relevant to these subjects. Several key points within the manual address the themes of discipleship and the expansion of the church, highlighting the interconnectedness of these concepts. The manual serves as a framework for fostering

⁸² Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry*, 122.

⁸³ Gorden Doss, *Introduction to Adventist Mission* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2018), 73.

an environment conducive to spiritual development and communal growth, thereby reinforcing the importance of intentional discipleship as a catalyst for the church's overall vitality and outreach. Here are some key points from the *Church Manual* that pertain to discipling and church growth:

Mission of the Church

The Church Manual affirms the assignment of the SDA Church, which is to proclaim the eternal gospel to the entire globe. "We are to make disciples of every nation, tribe, language, and people. The goal of witnessing and evangelism is disciple making (Matt 10:25, Matt 28:19, 20)."⁸⁴

The SDA Church enunciates a statement of mission that precisely delineates its purpose for existence within the earthly domain. This statement serves to define the church's foundational objectives and guiding principles, thereby clarifying its role and contributions to the community and society at large. The mission encapsulates the church's commitment to its spiritual, social, and moral responsibilities, providing a framework for its activities and interactions with both congregants and the broader public.

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ, who live as His loving witnesses and proclaim to all people the everlasting gospel of the Three Angels' Messages in preparation for His soon return (Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 1:8, Rev. 14:6-12). The purpose of the Church as the body of Christ is to intentionally make disciples so that they continue in an active and fruitful relationship with Christ and His Church.⁸⁵

The mission statement emphasizes the critical roles of evangelism, discipleship, and church growth within the ecclesiastical framework. Evangelism serves as a cornerstone for expanding the reach of the church, facilitating the

⁸⁴ *Church Manual* (2022), 44.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

identification and engagement of new members. Discipleship focuses on the spiritual development and maturity of individuals within the congregation, fostering a deeper understanding of faith and community. Moreover, church growth signifies both the quantitative and qualitative expansion of the church body, highlighting the necessity for a vibrant and active community that can effectively fulfill its mission. Together, these elements are integral to the vitality and sustainability of the church's presence and influence within the broader society.

Responsibility of Members

As followers of Christ, the process of becoming a disciple is fundamentally rooted in the concept of obedience rather than mere choice. This notion underscores the importance of adherence to Christ's teachings and directives, which serve as a guiding framework for one's spiritual journey. Discipleship entails a commitment to live in accordance with the principles espoused by Christ, reflecting a deep-seated dedication that transcends individual preference. Therefore, the call to discipleship is positioned as an imperative, emphasizing the responsibility of believers to faithfully respond to Christ's call and to embody His teachings in their daily lives. "And what is the objective? To make disciples. In the original language, 'make disciples' is the only imperative. All the other action words are participles describing how followers of Jesus are to fulfill this disciple-making command."⁸⁶

A disciple departs from worldly pursuits and commits themselves to a divine vocation, diligently following their spiritual mentor. Through this relationship, the disciple learns from their master and seeks to embody the master's attributes, thereby fostering personal growth and spiritual transformation. The act of discipleship

⁸⁶ C. Kent Julian, *101 Ideas for Making Disciples in Your Youth Group* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 45.

involves a deep engagement with the teachings and practices exemplified by the mentor, ultimately aiming to reflect the values and principles of the divine in their own life.

Disciples obey the Great Commandment (Matt 22:37) the New Commandment, (John 13:34), and the Great Commission (Matt 28:19) and, in so doing, become the hands, feet and voice for Jesus in their world. The disciples are developed as the body grows in maturity and as each part does its work (Eph 4:16).⁸⁷

The *Church Manual* delineates the responsibilities of church members, emphasizing their obligation to engage in evangelistic efforts and to uphold the church's mission through prayer, financial contributions, and active participation in various ministries. The integration of new believers with longstanding members is essential for fostering a culture of discipleship within the church. This approach underscores the collective responsibility of all members to contribute to church growth and the continual process of disciple-making. By engaging in mutual support and mentorship, both new and existing members can facilitate the expansion of the church community and the spiritual development of individuals. "Making disciples is a continuous process with its purpose being grown 'in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ' (2 Pet 3:18) into Christian maturity and multiplication of disciples."⁸⁸ All believers have this mandate to be and make disciples.

We believe that every Christian must be a disciple following the Master. Subsequently, one should obey His command to make other disciples. A disciple should become a leader, influencing another in the disciple making process. Jesus called us not only to be His disciples but also to make disciples.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 22.

⁸⁸ *Church Manual* (2022), 44.

⁸⁹ Santos, "Discipling, Nurturing and Reclaiming," 278.

Church Growth and Evangelism: While not explicitly addressed in a dedicated section, the Church Manual emphasizes the importance of evangelism and outreach as central aspects of church life. This includes strategies for conducting evangelistic meetings, engaging in community outreach, and fostering personal evangelism efforts.

‘Go therefore and make disciples’ is Jesus’ command to fulfill the mission. Thus, making disciples should be our way of life. We are to go and make disciples in our homes, our work, our schools, and in our everyday interactions with others. We are to make disciples of every nation, tribe, language, and people. The goal of witnessing and evangelism is disciple making (Matt 10:25, Matt 28:19, 20).⁹⁰

Spiritual Gifts and Ministry

The Church Manual acknowledges the diversity of spiritual gifts among believers and encourages the growth and utilization of these gifts for ministry and service. This underscores the importance of empowering individuals for active involvement in discipleship and church growth initiatives. And the affiliates of the congregation can practice their God-given talent and spiritual gifts that benefit the church. Serving the church by personal ministry, self-sacrificing witness and discipleship are some of the gifts that needs to be practiced.

God bestows upon all members of His church in every age a spiritual gift that each member is to employ in loving ministry for the common good of the church and of humanity. Given by the agency of the Holy Spirit, who apportions to each member as He wills, the gifts provide all abilities and ministries needed by the church to fulfill its divinely ordained functions. According to the Scriptures, these gifts include such ministries as faith, healing, prophecy, proclamation, teaching, administration, reconciliation, compassion, and self-sacrificing service and charity for the help and encouragement of people.⁹¹

When an individual accepts the Church’s doctrine and becomes a member, they commit to engaging in evangelism aimed at converting non-believers into

⁹⁰ *Church Manual* (2022), 44.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

disciples of Christ. This commitment implies that one cannot merely accept Christianity without also following Christ. The act of following Christ inherently involves the responsibility of actively bringing others to the faith.

When Andrew, Peter, James and John saw Jesus that day and heard His invitation to follow Him, they understood that this was a summons into a serious and significant apprenticeship of discipleship. To say Yes and follow Him was to enroll in what I call 'The Jesus Discipleship Academy.' This was a call to a much deeper relationship. No longer would they be spectators as Jesus taught and performed miracles. ... Jesus said 'follow me.' To be a disciple of a rabbi was an intensely personal relationship.⁹²

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive literature review on the theological and practical aspects of discipleship within the Christian faith, particularly as informed by both the Old and New Testaments. It began by exploring the general meaning of discipleship, emphasizing key elements such as adherence to instruction, continuous learning, and the cultivation of community and relationships that were crucial for spiritual growth. The chapter delineated characteristics and commitments essential to discipleship, highlighting the call for believers to actively engage in mentoring and equipping others in their faith journeys.

It examined biblical narratives featuring figures such as Moses and Joshua, and Elijah and Elisha, illustrating the dynamics of mentorship and succession within discipleship. The New Testament was also explored, focusing on Jesus' model of discipleship, which emphasized life-on-life relationships, prayer, accountability, and mission-oriented living, as well as Paul's strategies for spiritual development and equipping believers for ministry.

⁹² Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 45.

Additionally, the integration of OT wisdom with contemporary discipleship practices was discussed, with an emphasis on nurturing the future generations as well as nurturing the community through meaningful dialog, and applying biblical principles to modern contexts. This chapter concludes by emphasizing the importance of intentional and structured planning for effective discipleship and church growth. It also addresses the need for clarity of vision, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive strategies that ensure long-term sustainability. By synthesizing these insights, the chapter sets a theological and practical foundation for future discipleship endeavors. In the next chapter, a detailed description of the Nekemte District will be provided, describing context and background that will inform the reader of its unique challenges and opportunities for discipleship. Following this, Chapter 4 will focus on the development of a targeted discipleship program designed specifically for the Nekemte District, outlining strategies aimed at enhancing spiritual growth and community engagement while addressing the distinct needs and characteristics of this area.

CHAPTER 3

DESCRIPTION OF NEKEMTE DISTRICT

The Location and the Population Overview

The Nekemte District, located within the West Central Ethiopia Field of the Western Ethiopia Union Mission of the SDA Church, comprises a network of 11 churches, including 8 organized congregations and 3 affiliated companies. With a total membership of 1,860 individuals, this district has a distinct set of challenges and opportunities in its mission to promote and cultivate active discipleship within its local ecclesiastical communities.

Demographics

The churches within the Nekemte District exhibit a diverse demographic composition among their members. This diversity is substantially shaped by the presence of several other religious communities, including Islam, Tewahido Orthodox Christians, Roman Catholics, and various other Protestant Christian denominations. The evolution of the current SDA membership and the propagation of churches in the region have unfolded over an extended period of around 50 years.

A significant portion of church members reside in rural areas, where access to economic and educational opportunities is limited, particularly in comparison to their urban counterparts. Many individuals in the district face financial hardships, worsened by factors such as political instability, scarcity of resources, unemployment, and challenges within the agricultural sector. Furthermore, the overall level of formal

education among members is relatively low, posing obstacles to the implementation of progressive discipleship programs.

Within the church community, it is noteworthy that a considerable segment of the youth lacks financial resources and formal education. Nevertheless, their eagerness to contribute whatever they can for the sake of serving the LORD is commendable. With appropriate training, there are various avenues through which our youth and children can actively engage in church evangelism and discipleship.

Inclusive Discipleship Strategies for Empowering the Nekemte Community

Utilizing talents and skills. In the development of a discipleship program in Nekemte, it is essential to foster an environment that encourages youth to leverage their diverse talents and skills. This can be achieved by promoting opportunities for engagement in various expressive forms, including music, art, storytelling, and practical abilities such as event organization and discussion facilitation. Each individual possesses unique capabilities that can contribute meaningfully to the dissemination of the Adventist message. By recognizing and utilizing these talents, we can create a more vibrant and inclusive community, enriching the overall impact of the discipleship program and encouraging active participation among the youth.

Peer-to-peer outreach. To formulate an effective discipleship program in Nekemte, it is essential to empower the youth to actively engage in peer-to-peer outreach initiatives within their communities. This can be achieved by encouraging them to share their personal testimonies, which can serve as a powerful witness to faith and resilience. Additionally, facilitating opportunities for them to invite their friends to church events can significantly enhance community participation and foster a sense of belonging among young individuals.

Furthermore, organizing small group discussions will create a conducive environment for youth to explore their faith together, fostering a deeper understanding and connection between them and their peers. These gatherings not only provide a platform for discussing theological concepts and personal experiences but also promote mentorship and support among participants. By implementing these strategies, the discipleship program can cultivate a vibrant and active youth community that is rooted in faith and dedicated to mutual growth and outreach.

Prayer and support networks. To effectively formulate a discipleship program in Nekemte, it is essential to establish structured prayer networks among the youth and children. These networks will serve as platforms for intercessory prayer, enabling participants to pray for one another as well as for the overarching mission of the church. Furthermore, fostering a supportive environment is paramount. Such an environment should encourage open discussions about the various challenges faced by the youth in their faith journeys, facilitating mutual encouragement and spiritual growth. By emphasizing the significance of prayer and community support, the discipleship program can enhance the spiritual development and resilience of young individuals as they navigate their faith in a contemporary context.

Creative evangelism strategies. Encouraging the implementation of brainstorming sessions is essential for formulating an effective discipleship program in Nekemte. These sessions would provide a collaborative platform for youth to develop innovative evangelism strategies that resonate with their contemporaries. Such strategies may include leveraging social media platforms to disseminate messages of faith, organizing community service projects that address local needs, or hosting themed events designed to engage and attract interest from the broader community. By fostering an environment that values creativity and active

participation, the program can empower youth to become proactive agents of change and effectively communicate their beliefs within their social spheres.

Training and mentorship. In the context of establishing a discipleship program in Nekemte, it is essential to create structured opportunities for training and mentorship, particularly in light of the limitations that may exist within the formal educational system. Experienced members of the congregation play a pivotal role in this initiative, as they can actively contribute to the spiritual growth and leadership development of the youth. By promoting an environment of guidance and support, these senior mentors can equip young individuals with the essential skills and resources needed to articulate and disseminate their faith effectively. This approach will not only enhance their personal growth but also empower them to take on active roles within their communities, thus strengthening the overall spiritual life of the congregation.

Encouraging generosity. To formulate an effective discipleship program in Nekemte, it is essential to cultivate a culture of generosity among the youth. This culture should emphasize that giving extends beyond mere financial contributions; it encompasses a variety of resources, including time, skills, and hospitality. Each form of contribution is crucial in enhancing the mission of the church, fostering a sense of community, and promoting collective spiritual growth.

By implementing these strategies, we can empower our young people to actively participate in evangelism and discipleship initiatives within the church. They can leverage their unique talents and resources to make a meaningful impact, both within the local church community and in the broader context of Nekemte.

Furthermore, it is vital to ensure that the discipleship program is inclusive. Mothers and adult men should also have the opportunity to engage in the program in

various capacities. Such inclusivity not only enriches the program but also strengthens intergenerational relationships, allowing for a collaborative approach to discipleship. By fostering an environment where all members of the church can contribute their gifts, we can enhance our collective mission and create a more profound influence throughout the district.

Mentoring relationships. When developing a discipleship program in Nekemte, it's important to acknowledge the crucial role of mothers and adult men in building mentorship connections. These individuals can engage in a reciprocal mentoring framework, wherein they may take on the roles of either mentors or mentees. Through this dynamic, participants can exchange wisdom, provide guidance, and offer spiritual support, thereby nurturing both personal growth and mutual accountability in their respective faith journeys. Such relationships not only enhance the spiritual development of individuals but also promote a communal ethos of discipleship within the broader community. By fostering these connections, the discipleship program can deepen faith engagement and create a supportive environment that encourages ongoing spiritual maturity.

Bible study groups. It is crucial to encourage the active participation of both fathers and mothers in Bible study groups that are specifically designed to address their unique needs and interests. Such gatherings serve as a vital platform for engaging in discussions on pertinent topics, cultivating relationships with fellow believers, and enhancing one's comprehension of biblical texts. Moreover, since these groups are inclusive in nature, they will invite non-Adventists to partake in the discussions, thereby enriching the dialogue and promoting an exchange of perspectives.

Prayer partnerships. Parents may establish prayer partnerships in which they commit to regularly praying for one another. This practice can enhance their spiritual life and provide encouragement as they navigate the challenges of this world.

Furthermore, it is beneficial to involve mothers and fathers in a variety of service opportunities within the church and the broader community. This engagement may include participation in outreach programs, contributions to hospitality ministries, or involvement in mission trips. Such activities allow individuals to leverage their skills and talents to create a positive impact.

Discipleship training. Implementing discipleship training programs specifically designed for mothers and adults can effectively address their unique needs and interests. These programs should encompass a comprehensive curriculum that includes theological education, leadership development, and practical skills aimed at enhancing spiritual growth. By focusing on these areas, participants will be better equipped for ministry and capable of navigating the complexities of their respective roles within the community. Such targeted training initiatives not only foster personal development but also strengthen the collective ability of these groups to contribute meaningfully to their congregations and broader society.

Family devotions. Encouraging mothers and fathers to lead family devotions at home serves as a mechanism for promoting spiritual growth within the family. By actively engaging spouses and children in studying the Bible, participating in collective prayer, and discussing matters of faith, parents can create an environment that promotes deeper understanding and commitment to discipleship. Such practices not only enhance the spiritual lives of the parents themselves but also cultivate a nurturing atmosphere for the faith development of their families. This holistic

approach to family worship reinforces the significance of shared spiritual experiences, ultimately contributing to the formation of a resilient and faith-oriented household.

Support groups. The establishment of support groups for mothers and adults to face specific challenges or life transitions, provides a safe environment for sharing experiences, seeking advice, and obtaining encouragement from peers. Additionally, participation in discipleship programs enables these individuals to deepen their faith, enhance their relationships with God and others, and fulfill their roles as disciples of Jesus within both the church and the broader community.

Leadership

The district is governed by a committed leadership team comprising two ordained pastors and four evangelists, who provide essential spiritual guidance and pastoral care to its members. Additionally, the elders of each church play a vital role, contributing their wisdom and experience to support the leadership efforts within their respective congregations.

Geographical Distribution

The Nekemte District churches exhibit a mix of urban and rural settings, with the majority consisting of small-scale churches. Three churches are situated in the town, while eight are located in rural areas surrounding the town. This geographical diversity poses both challenges and opportunities for implementing discipleship plans, as the needs and dynamics of urban and rural communities may differ significantly.

Educational and Economic Context

Given the economic challenges faced by many district members, there is a pressing need for discipleship plans that are both accessible and relevant to individuals from diverse backgrounds. The prevalent low levels of formal education

highlight the necessity for straightforward, effective discipleship methods that can be easily understood and applied by all members, irrespective of their educational status. Notably, the majority of church members are students and youth lacking independent income; nevertheless, this does not impede their ability to mentor peers and colleagues. Many local church leaders are employed in governmental positions or within denominational organizations, while those from rural areas typically engage in farming or local governance. The demands of these roles often present significant obstacles to participating in extensive training sessions.

Inclusion and Collaboration

The development of discipleship plans for the Nekemte District necessitates the active participation and collaboration of all stakeholders, including ordained pastors, evangelists, church elders, and members from diverse backgrounds. By promoting inclusivity and collaboration, the district can leverage the collective wisdom and resources of its constituents to create effective discipleship initiatives tailored to the community's unique needs.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the Nekemte District, emphasizing its demographic diversity, socioeconomic challenges, and the ecclesiastical structure within the context of the SDA Church. The district comprises 11 churches, serving a membership of 1,860 individuals who navigate challenges such as limited access to educational and economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas. The presence of various religious communities influences the congregational landscape, making inclusivity essential for discipleship initiatives.

The chapter outlines several inclusive strategies for effective discipleship that leverage the talents and skills of youth, promote peer-to-peer outreach, and emphasize prayer and support networks. It calls for creative evangelism strategies, structured training and mentorship opportunities. In addition to that, it mentioned the importance of cultivating a generous spirit within the community as well as the need for collaborative engagement of all church members, including mothers and fathers, is highlighted as a means to enhance discipleship efforts and create supportive mentoring relationships.

Additionally, the chapter underscores the need for relevant discipleship strategies that are accessible to individuals with varying levels of formal education, highlighting the importance of community collaboration and the role of church leaders in guiding these initiatives while also accommodating the varying dynamics of urban and rural settings.

In summary, the Nekemte District's diverse population and complex socioeconomic landscape present both challenges and opportunities in the pursuit of effective discipleship. Fostering a culture of inclusivity and collaboration among all church members is essential for the development of meaningful discipleship programs. By leveraging the unique talents of its youth, establishing robust support networks, and promoting ongoing training and mentorship, the district can empower its members to actively participate in evangelism and spiritual growth. The strategic incorporation of these elements into discipleship plans will not only enrich individual faith journeys but also strengthen community bonds, ultimately enhancing the church's mission to serve and uplift the broader Nekemte community.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROGRAM

Preparation, Presentation, and Evaluation

After due preparation of the research materials, like the literature reviews, questionnaires, and sermons related to the project, the presentation was conducted on 16th of September 2024 at the Western Ethiopia Union Mission meeting hall starting from 8:00 AM and lasting the entire day.

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter aims to present the development of the discipleship program designed to address low church growth in the Nekemte District. It outlines the methodology employed in the study, detailing the quantitative research design, data collection processes, and analysis strategies. By examining both pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, the chapter will illustrate how the program was implemented, the target population involved, and the research tools utilized to gather and analyze data.

Brief Restatement of the Project Goals and Objectives

The focus is on the objectives of the program, emphasizing its role in enhancing awareness, engagement, and effectiveness of discipleship practices among church leaders and members. In this chapter, readers will gain insight into the structured approach taken to promote spiritual growth and discipleship, laying the groundwork for subsequent discussions on the findings and implications of the research.

Quantitative Research Design

Explanation of the Quantitative Approach

The quantitative approach adopted in this study was designed to measure the efficacy of the newly implemented discipleship program in the Nekemte District. This method emphasizes the gathering of data that can be statistically analyzed to identify patterns, trends, and relationships among variables.

By employing pre- and post-intervention questionnaires, the study establishes a starting point for current discipleship practices and allows for the assessment of changes over time. This approach enables the researchers to quantify participants' awareness, engagement, and practices related to discipleship, facilitating a clear comparison of the system of measurement before and after the intervention.

Description of Pre- and Post-intervention Questionnaires

As mentioned before, the study employs both pre- and post-intervention questionnaires to appraise the efficacy of the discipleship program presentation. The pre-intervention questionnaire was designed to establish a baseline measurement of participants' current understanding and engagement in discipleship activities. This questionnaire aimed to capture key insights into existing practices and perceptions prior to the program implementation.

Following the implementation of the discipleship program, the post-intervention questionnaire was administered to evaluate any changes in the metrics previously established. By comparing responses from both questionnaires, the study aims to identify significant shifts in awareness, engagement, and practices, providing a clear measure of the program's effectiveness. This is elaborated further below.

Pre-Intervention Questionnaire

Objectives of the pre-intervention survey. The pre-intervention survey aimed to establish a starting point for current discipleship practices and church growth metrics while assessing engagement levels among participants. It evaluated leaders' and members' perceptions of their roles and effectiveness in enhancing discipleship, identifying specific areas for improvement. These insights inform the development of the discipleship program, ensuring it aligns with the community's needs and expectations. Ultimately, the survey sets the groundwork for evaluating the program's impact and understanding the community's starting point in their discipleship journey.

Establishing a baseline system of measurement. The pre-intervention survey establishes baseline metrics by measuring current discipleship practices, church attendance, and participants' perceptions of effectiveness. This data provides a foundation for evaluating changes post-intervention and informs the development of the discipleship program tailored to the community's needs.

Key system of measurement to be assessed. The key metrics to be assessed include the frequency of discipleship activities, measuring participation regularity; role and experience in the church and the current position, focusing on member attendance consistency; and self-reported effectiveness, which captures perceptions of impact on discipleship. Additionally, awareness of resources will evaluate familiarity with training materials, while community engagement will assess involvement in outreach efforts.

Self-reported effectiveness of leaders and members. The self-reported effectiveness of leaders and members reflects their confidence in implementing discipleship practices, highlighting areas for growth and the need for ongoing support and training.

Post-Intervention Questionnaire

Purpose of the post-intervention survey. The post-intervention survey aimed to assess the efficacy of the implemented discipleship program by measuring changes in participants' engagement, understanding, and practices. It evaluated the impact on church growth metrics and identified areas for further improvement. By comparing the post-intervention data with pre-intervention results, the results provide insights to the program's success and inform future discipleship strategies.

Evaluating changes post-implementation. Evaluating changes post-implementation involved analyzing data from the post-intervention survey to identify shifts in discipleship practices and engagement levels among participants. This assessment focuses on key metrics such as the frequency of discipleship activities, self-reported effectiveness of leaders and members, and overall church growth indicators. By comparing these findings with pre-implementation data, the evaluation highlights areas of improvement, measures the program's impact, and uncover insights into participants' experiences. This comprehensive analysis informs future enhancements to the discipleship program, ensuring it continues to meet the evolving needs of the church community.

Analysis of improvements in discipleship practices in the churches. The analysis of improvements in discipleship practices and church growth will focus on enhanced engagement levels, increased participation in activities, and positive feedback from both leaders and members. Metrics will indicate a rise in the frequency of discipleship initiatives and improved effectiveness in mentoring relationships. Additionally, growth in church attendance and active involvement in community outreach will reflect the overall impact of the program, demonstrating a strengthened culture of discipleship and a revitalized church community.

Data Collection and Analysis

Methodology for Data Collection

The data was gathered from the structured pre- and post-intervention questionnaires to assess discipleship practices and engagement. Both surveys featured Likert scales and multiple-choice questions. The data was analyzed using SPSS to identify trends and measure the program's effectiveness in enhancing discipleship and church growth.

Administration of questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered to participants in paper formats to ensure accessibility. Pre-intervention surveys were distributed before the discipleship program began, while post-intervention surveys followed its completion. Participants were given clear instructions to facilitate accurate and thoughtful responses, ensuring reliable data collection.

Statistical analysis techniques. Statistical analysis utilized descriptive statistics to summarize data tests to assess pre- and post-intervention differences. Correlation analysis identified relationships between variables, enhancing insights into the program's effectiveness. The SPSS software was utilized for data analysis, enabling efficient computation of descriptive and inferential statistics to evaluate changes in discipleship practices and church growth effectively.

Demographic Profiles

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the demographic characteristics of the 16 respondents involved in the study conducted in Nekemte District. The table summarizes key variables including age, gender, roles, years of service, church size, and educational background, offering insight into the diverse profiles of the participants.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents of Nekemte District.

Demographic variables (N=16)		Frequency	Percent
Age	25-34	6	37.5
	35-44	6	37.5
	45-54	3	18.8
	55 or older	1	6.3
	Total	16	100
Gender	Female	0	0
	Male	16	100
	pastors	8	50
	Church Leaders	7	43.8
	elders	1	6.3
	Total	16	100
Years of service in current role	less than 1 year	3	18.8
	1-3 years	4	25
	4-6 years	5	31.3
	7-10 years	2	12.5
	more than 10 years	2	12.5
	Total	16	100
Church Size (average attendance):	Less than 50	6	37.5
	50-100	4	25
	101-200	2	12.5
	More than 300	4	25
	Total	16	100
Educational Background	High School	8	50
	Associate Degree	4	25
	Bachelor's Degree	2	12.5
	Master's Degree	1	6.3
	Other	1	6.3
	Total	16	100

The results presented in Table 1 indicate that a significant proportion of pastors and church leaders fall within the 35 to 54 age range, suggesting that this demographic possesses a considerable level of experience in their roles. Additionally, the presence of a notable number of younger pastors, particularly those aged 25 to 34, points to an emerging leadership pipeline within the ecclesiastical community. It is important to note the absence of female respondents, which underscores a predominance of male leadership within these positions. The majority of participants in this study identified themselves as pastors and church leaders, with elders being the

next most frequently represented group. This indicates that pastors and church leaders significantly influence discipleship development initiatives. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of respondents reported serving in their current roles for a duration of one to three years, followed closely by those with four to six years of tenure, suggesting a relatively stable leadership structure within this cohort.

The study investigates a diverse spectrum of church sizes, revealing that a significant portion of congregations reported an average attendance of fewer than fifty individuals. Additionally, a smaller percentage of respondents possess bachelor's or master's degrees, while the majority have attained only a high school diploma or an associate's degree. These findings imply that a college education may not be a prerequisite for leadership roles within church organizations.

The demographic findings underscore the importance of addressing the diversity of church sizes, promoting the inclusion of women in discipleship roles, and fostering gender diversity in various service capacities beyond those of elder positions. Additionally, the results illuminate the significance of mature spirituality and effective leadership in the context of discipleship initiatives. A comprehensive understanding of these demographic factors is essential for the development and implementation of discipleship programs that are tailored to the specific needs and contexts of the target audience.

The study finds that while most churches (62.5%) lack a systematic plan, the majority of respondents (87.5%) are familiar with discipleship planning, suggesting that greater attention needs to be placed on discipleship growth. The main obstacle to growth is found to be a lack of discipleship, underscoring the importance of this practice for the expansion of churches. The majority of respondents, who expressed a need for resources and training, had somewhat high expectations for the presentation

on discipleship planning. There appears to be a need for more accessibility since a sizable majority of respondents are only vaguely aware of the training programs and resources that are available for discipleship.

Discipleship Strategies in Frequency and Percentages

Table 2 provides a detailed summary of the responses from participants in the Nekemte District regarding discipleship strategies within the local church. It includes the frequency and percentage distribution of responses to key questions designed to assess familiarity, implementation, and perceptions of discipleship planning, as well as associated factors influencing church growth.

Table 2. The Frequency and Percentage of the Response of Respondents of Discipleship Strategies in Nekemte District.

Questions towards discipleship strategies	Responses	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
How familiar are you with the concept of discipleship planning within the local church context?	Not Familiar	1	6.3	6.3	6.3
	Somewhat Familiar	14	87.5	87.5	93.8
	Familiar	1	6.3	6.3	100
	Total	16	100	100	
Does your church currently have a structured discipleship plan in place?	Yes	5	31.3	31.3	31.3
	No	10	62.5	62.5	93.8
	Not sure	1	6.3	6.3	100
	Total	16	100	100	
Please rate the following factors as primary reasons for the slow growth of the church in the Nekemte District (Choose all that apply):	Lack of Discipleship	14	87.5	87.5	87.5
	Insufficient Resources	1	6.3	6.3	93.8
	Other	1	6.3	6.3	100
	Total	16	100	100	
Please rate your expectations from the upcoming presentation on discipleship planning:	2	4	25	25	25
	3	4	25	25	50
	4	8	50	50	100
	Total	16	100	100	
Are you aware of any resources or training programs available for discipleship in your area?	Somewhat Aware	12	75	75	75
	Aware	4	25	25	100
	Total	16	100	100	
How well does your church's vision and mission statement incorporate discipleship?	Somewhat	10	62.5	62.5	62.5
	3	4	25	25	87.5
	4	2	12.5	12.5	100
	Total	16	100	100	
How involved is your church in community outreach and evangelism activities?	1	3	18.8	18.8	18.8
	2	8	50	50	68.8
	3	2	12.5	12.5	81.3
	4	3	18.8	18.8	100
	Total	16	100	100	

The study shows that a majority of respondents (87.5%) are aware of the concept of discipleship planning, yet most churches (62.5%) lack an organized plan. For 87.5% of the responders, the main obstacle to progress is this lack of discipleship. The majority (75%) are looking forward to the forthcoming presentation on discipleship planning, showing that they are open to learning and using new

techniques. Only 25% of respondents, nonetheless, are aware of local training programs or resources for discipleship (Table 2).

Although most churches have included some mention of discipleship in their vision and mission statements, there is still opportunity for development. Additionally, the majority of churches are modestly active in community outreach and evangelistic activities, indicating a need for increased participation.

The investigation reveals that while there is a widespread knowledge of the value of discipleship, many churches in Nekemte District lack formal plans and resources to properly apply these tactics. The creation of organized discipleship programs, raising resource awareness, improving the integration of vision and mission, bolstering community involvement, and offering pastors and church leaders' assistance and training are some suggestions made to solve these issues.

Discipleship Strategies in Mean and Standard Deviation in Nekemte District

Table 3 provides the mean and standard deviation of respondents' perceptions of discipleship strategies in the Nekemte District. It evaluates aspects such as current practices, clarity of presentations, confidence in implementation, and challenges in church growth. The results highlight areas of strength and opportunities for improvement in discipleship planning and support.

Table 3 Mean and Standard Deviation of Response of the Respondents on Discipleship Strategies in Nekemte District

Discipleship strategies	Descriptive Statistics				
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perception of Current Practices	16	1	2	1.125	0.342
Clarity of the Presentation	16	3	4	3.750	0.447
Confidence in Implementing a Discipleship Plan	16	3	4	3.813	0.403
Challenges in Church Growth:	16	4	5	4.688	0.479
Key Takeaways 1	16	3	5	4.625	0.619
Key Takeaways 2	16	4	5	4.625	0.500
Future Participation	16	1	1	1.000	0.000
Training and Support Needs	16	1	4	1.563	1.031
Impact on Church Leadership	16	4	4	4.000	0.000
Interest in Follow-Up Activities	16	1	1	1.000	0.000
Overall Satisfaction	16	3	4	3.750	0.447

The results of the study given in Table 3 showed participants ‘favorable reactions to modern discipleship methods, finding a generally positive view. On a scale of 1-2, participants rated these activities an average of 1.125, indicating a generally good opinion. This is consistent with findings from earlier research, including the transformational groups’ interview with Ed Stetzer.¹ The training program’s ability to relate and apply modern discipleship approaches to participants, as well as their eagerness to enhance their church’s discipleship tactics, may be contributing factors to this favorable response.

Following the presentation, the participants showed a high degree of confidence in carrying out their discipleship plans. These results are consistent with findings from previous leadership development initiatives. The accomplishment of these programs in enhancing self-assurance implies that organized training can enable church leaders to execute discipleship tactics with efficiency.

¹ Eric Geiger, “Groups Matter: An Interview with Ed Stetzer on Transformational Groups,” July 1, 2014, accessed 6 October 2024, <https://ericgeiger.com/2014/07/01/groups-matter-interview-ed-stetzer-transformational-groups/>.

With a mean score of 4.688, participants identified a variety of growth-related concerns for churches. This understanding is consistent with other research findings and is essential for good leadership. The training program's easy-to-understand presentation and the useful resources it offers are two potential causes.

Key takeaways 1 and 2 were highly scored by participants, suggesting that they thought the session was helpful. This encouraging response is in line with other effective leadership development initiatives, such the ones covered in the Lifeway Leadership article on smart group content strategies (2014).² The training may have successfully matched academic knowledge with practical applications, and the main takeaways were probably pertinent and instantly applicable to the participants' settings.

The participants thought the program would help church leadership and showed interest in additional follow-up activities. This result is in line with the expanding understanding of the necessity of ongoing assistance and resources when putting discipleship programs into practice. Potential explanations include the participants' excitement and desire for continued education spurred by the course, as well as the training's possible long-term advantages for their church's development and discipleship initiatives.

In summary, the study's findings support a number of other studies' conclusions about the efficacy of church leadership development programs and discipleship techniques. Positive results in areas like self-awareness, identifying growth problems, and enthusiasm in lifelong learning align with training programs that have been shown to be effective in previous research.

² Eric Geiger, "Two Wise Approaches for Group Content," last modified July 7, 2014, accessed 6 October 2024, <https://leadership.lifeway.com/2014/07/07/two-wise-approaches-for-group-content/>.

Conclusions

The present study explains several significant findings regarding the demographic profile and operational challenges faced by pastors and church leaders within the Nekemte District. The data indicates that the majority of respondents are aged between 35 and 54 years, with a notable presence of younger pastors in the 25 to 34 age range. Male leaders predominantly occupy these positions, underscoring a critical need to encourage gender diversity within church leadership roles. Additionally, there is a noteworthy trend of tenure among church leaders, with many serving in their current positions for periods ranging from one to three years and subsequently extending to four to six years.

The research encompasses a diverse range of church sizes and offers insights into the educational qualifications of church leaders, suggesting that possessing a college degree may not be a prerequisite for leadership roles. Nevertheless, the findings stress the importance of addressing various aspects of church management, including strategies to encourage the participation of women and enhance gender diversity in leadership. Furthermore, the study highlights the necessity for growth in discipleship practices and adequate resources, reflecting a robust expectation for the establishment of comprehensive training programs.

In terms of discipleship, the study reveals that while a substantial 87.5% of respondents are cognizant of discipleship planning, a majority of churches lack a well-organized approach, which poses a significant barrier to progress. In a positive light, 75% of the participants expressed a willingness to acquire new skills and techniques to enhance their discipleship initiatives. However, only 25% reported awareness of local training programs or available resources related to discipleship.

To mitigate these challenges, the study recommends the development of structured discipleship programs, initiatives to raise awareness within congregations, improved integration of vision and mission statements, increased community involvement, and the provision of targeted training for pastors and church leaders.

The participants generally expressed favorable opinions regarding contemporary discipleship methods, indicated by an average rating of 1.125. This positive reception may be attributed to the training program's relevance and applicability of modern discipleship approaches, as well as the participants' enthusiasm to bolster their respective church's discipleship practices. Moreover, participants demonstrated a high level of confidence in executing their discipleship strategies, suggesting that organized training can empower church leaders to implement these methods effectively.

Identifying growth-related concerns within their churches emerged as a pivotal theme, indicating the importance of effective leadership. The clarity of the training program's presentation and the utility of provided resources were highlighted as critical factors contributing to participants' experiences. High ratings for Key Takeaways 1 and 2 further reinforce the program's perceived value. Additionally, participants expressed interest in further follow-up activities, underlining the necessity for ongoing support and resources to facilitate the successful implementation of discipleship initiatives.

In summary, the findings of this study reaffirm prior research regarding the effectiveness of church leadership development programs and discipleship strategies.

Based on the principal conclusions drawn from this investigation, the following insights are presented:

- Although formal college degrees are not obligatory for church disciple roles, they may confer certain advantages.
- The predominance of male leaders suggests an imperative to enhance gender diversity within leadership positions.
- The majority of pastors and church leaders in the Nekemte District fall within the 35-54 age demographic, with a lesser representation of younger local church leaders.
- Despite a general awareness of discipleship planning, many churches lack a formalized approach, hindering advancement.
- The limited availability of resources and training programs remains a significant barrier.
- Efforts to integrate discipleship into the overarching vision and mission of churches require further attention.
- Participants rated contemporary discipleship methodologies positively, reflecting their perceived applicability.
- The training program bolstered participants' confidence in executing discipleship initiatives.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study observed the possibilities and problems in Nekemte district, where local pastors and church leaders are dedicated, but church growth has stagnated. Inadequate training, ineffective discipleship, and the lack of education, technology and financial resources are the main reasons for the low church growth. The congregation, which had 11 churches and 1,860 members, faced social and economic challenges, especially for young people and those living in rural areas. The study highlighted the need for intentional discipleship training that is tailored to the unique demographics and needs of the congregation.

Through the implementation of a structured discipleship program, this study aimed to empower pastors and leaders by equipping them with the knowledge and capabilities important to promote religious growth and network involvement. The quantitative studies design including the pre- and post-intervention questionnaires assessed individuals' awareness, engagement, and practices concerning discipleship. Data evaluation found that there was a gap between respondents' consciousness of discipleship making plans and the real implementation within their churches. Despite an excessive stage of familiarity with the idea, 62.5% of respondents indicated that their churches lacked organized discipleship plans, which posed boundaries to growth.

The findings indicated a predominantly male leadership demographic, with maximum respondents aged from 35 to 54 years of age. While educational

qualifications differed, the research showed that leadership roles did not strictly require formal education. Participants expressed a strong choice for training and resources, with 75% who were eager to learn more to enhance their discipleship initiatives. Positive comments concerning new discipleship techniques indicated a willingness to include structured programs aimed toward enhancing church engagement. The study identified significant opportunities for development, such as structured training initiatives and community involvement strategies, highlighting the importance of integrating discipleship into the overarching vision of churches. Recommendations included promoting gender diversity in leadership and enhancing resource availability for discipleship planning. Participants showed an increased confidence in executing their strategies post-training, reflecting the program's effectiveness in addressing leadership concerns and fostering an active discipleship culture.

Recommendations for Intended Discipleship

1. **Make Discipleship Central to the Church Mission**
Prioritize discipleship as vital for spiritual growth, leadership development, and outreach, ensuring the church remains purpose-driven.
2. **Create Structured Programs**
Develop organized discipleship plans with clear goals, training, and mentorship to empower members and support church growth.
3. **Adopt a Multiplication Model**
Train disciples to disciple others, fostering exponential spiritual and numerical growth.
4. **Integrate Discipleship into Leadership**
Ensure leaders model Christlike behavior, mentoring others and enhancing leadership capacity for church growth.

5. Leverage Small Groups

Use small groups for personalized mentorship, fostering accountability, relationships, and spiritual maturity.

6. Embrace Modern Tools

Utilize technology and innovative techniques to expand discipleship efforts and reach diverse audiences.

7. Promote Lifelong Learning

Encourage continuous spiritual development through Bible studies, workshops, and discipleship seminars.

8. Evaluate Effectiveness

Regularly assess discipleship programs using feedback and metrics to improve strategies and align with growth goals.

This condensed approach highlights the key strategies for integrating intensive discipleship into church growth efforts.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

PRE-PRESENTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

A PROGRAM FOR EMPOWERING PASTORS AND LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS IN NEKEMTE DISTRICT TO DEVELOP EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP STRATEGIES FOR THEIR CHURCHES:

For each point, please select the option that best reflects your position or that of your church and tick (✓) In Front of your choice.

Demographics:

1. Age:
 - a. Under 25
 - b. 25-34
 - c. 35-44
 - d. 45-54
 - e. 55 or older

2. Gender: tick that indicates your gender
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Prefer not to say

3. Role within the Church: tick one
 - a. Pastor
 - b. Church Leader
 - c. Elder
 - d. Lay Member
 - e. Other (Please Specify) _____

4. Years of Service in Current Role:
 - a. Less than 1 year
 - b. 1-3 years
 - c. 4-6 years
 - d. 7-10 years
 - e. More than 10 years
5. Church Size (average attendance):
 - a. Less than 50.
 - b. 50-100
 - c. 101-200
 - d. 201-300
 - e. More than 300
6. Educational Background:
 - a. High School
 - b. Associate Degree
 - c. Bachelor's Degree
 - d. Master's Degree
 - e. Other (Please Specify) _____

Awareness of Discipleship Planning:

7. How familiar are you with the concept of discipleship planning within the local church context?
 - a. Not Familiar
 - b. Somewhat Familiar
 - c. Familiar
 - d. Very Familiar

Current Discipleship Activities:

8. Does your church currently have a structured discipleship plan in place?
- a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not Sure

Challenges in Church Growth:

9. Please rate the following factors as primary reasons for the slow growth of the church in the Nekemte District (Choose all that apply):
- a. Lack of Discipleship
 - b. Insufficient Resources
 - c. Low Engagement from Members
 - d. Other (Please Specify) _____

Role of Pastors and Church Leaders:

10. How well do you believe pastors and church leaders are equipped to guide discipleship efforts in your church?
- a. Not Equipped
 - b. Somewhat Equipped
 - c. Well Equipped
 - d. Very Well Equipped

Importance of Discipleship:

11. How important do you consider discipleship in fostering spiritual growth and church expansion?
- a. Not Important
 - b. Important
 - c. Very Important

Participation in Discipleship:

12. Have you ever participated in or led any intended discipleship activities in your church?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Understanding of Discipleship Concepts:

13. Please rate your understanding of key discipleship concepts (e.g., mentoring, evangelism, spiritual growth):

- a. Poor
- b. Fair
- c. Good
- d. Excellent

Expectations from the Presentation:

14. Please rate your expectations from the upcoming presentation on discipleship planning:

- a. Not Expecting Much
- b. Somewhat Expecting
- c. Generally Expecting
- d. Highly Expecting

Awareness of Local Resources:

15. Are you aware of any resources or training programs available for discipleship in your area?

- a. Not Aware
- b. Somewhat Aware
- c. Aware

Church's Vision and Mission:

16. How well does your church's vision and mission statement incorporate discipleship?

- a. Not at All
- b. Somewhat
- c. Well
- d. Very Well

Involvement in Community:

17. How involved is your church in community outreach and evangelism activities?

- a. Not Involved
- b. Somewhat Involved
- c. Involved
- d. Very Involved

APPENDIX B

POST-PRESENTATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Understanding of Discipleship Planning:

1. How has your understanding of discipleship planning changed after the presentation?

- a. Significantly Improved
- b. Somewhat Improved
- c. No Change
- d. Somewhat Worsened
- e. Significantly Worsened

Perception of Current Practices:

2. Do you now believe that your church needs a structured discipleship plan?

- a. Yes, Absolutely
- b. Yes, to Some Extent
- c. No

Clarity of the Presentation:

3. How clear was the presentation in explaining the importance and process of discipleship planning?

- a. Not Clear
- b. Somewhat Clear
- c. Clear
- d. Very Clear

Confidence in Implementing a Discipleship Plan:

4. After the presentation, how confident do you feel about contributing to or implementing a discipleship plan in your church?
- a. Not Confident
 - b. Somewhat Confident
 - c. Confident
 - d. Very Confident

Key Takeaways:

5. Please rate the importance of the following key takeaways you gained from the presentation (Rate each from 1 to 5, where 1 is Not Important and 5 is Very Important):
- a. Takeaway 1: _____ (1-5)
 - b. Takeaway 2: _____ (1-5)
 - c. Takeaway 3: _____ (1-5)

Future Participation:

6. Are you more likely to participate in or lead discipleship initiatives among your congregations after attending this presentation?
- a. Yes
 - b. Maybe
 - c. No

Training and Support Needs:

7. What additional training or resources do you believe would help you and your church better implement a discipleship plan?
- a. More Workshops

- b. Online Training
- c. Printed Resources
- d. Mentorship Programs
- e. Other (Please Specify): _____

Impact on Church Leadership:

8. How do you think the presentation will impact the leadership dynamics in your church related to discipleship?
- a. No Impact
 - b. Minimal Impact
 - c. Moderate Impact
 - d. Significant Impact

Interest in Follow-Up Activities:

9. Would you be interested in participating in follow-up activities or workshops focused on discipleship planning?
- a. Yes
 - b. Maybe
 - c. No

Overall Satisfaction:

10. Overall, how satisfied are you with the presentation you attended?
- a. Not Satisfied
 - b. Somewhat Satisfied
 - c. Satisfied
 - d. Very Satisfied

Suggestions for Improvement:

11. Do you have any specific suggestions for improving future presentations or discipleship planning efforts?

1. _____.

2. _____.

APPENDIX C

SERMON

The Call to Discipleship

Brothers and sisters, today we gather to reflect on a critical aspect of our faith journey—discipleship. In a world filled with distractions, the call to discipleship has never been more urgent. As pastors and church leaders in Nekemte District, we must ask ourselves: Are we truly committed to the mission of God, or have we become too busy to hear His voice? Our focus today is to empower you to develop effective discipleship programs that move the hearts of men toward God’s mission, ensuring that our work is rooted in intimate fellowship with Him.

The relationship between Transformation and Discipleship

Before effective discipleship can take place there must be a transformation of our character. Oswald Chambers reminds us that this transformation is closely connected to the depth of our fellowship with God. To be a disciple is to walk with Jesus, learn from Him, and live in submission to Him. Discipleship is not merely a program; it’s a lifestyle that shapes our hearts, minds, and lives in alignment with Christ.

We must recognize that being transformed by the renewal of the mind (Romans 12: 2) is not a theoretical concept but a practical journey. The journey involves three vital phases: shaping the heart, shaping the mind, and shaping the life. These phases provide a framework for understanding how we can move beyond

theory into practice, allowing God's transformative power to integrate into every area of our lives.

Shaping the Heart: Cultivating Intimacy with God

Matthew 22:37-38: "Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment." To shape the heart is to cultivate a deep intimacy with God. This intimacy is the foundation of our relationship with Christ, enabling us to experience His lordship in our daily lives. It begins with an assurance of salvation through the acceptance of the Gospel, which invites us into a loving relationship with our Savior.

A disciple, as we define it, is one who keenly loves Jesus Christ and maintains intimacy through a daily devotional life. This intimacy fuels our passion for Him, driving us to integrate His presence into every aspect of our existence. It compels us to make Christ the priority in all decisions and actively share Him with others.

Yet, many struggles in discipleship arise from a failure to integrate the Gospel into our lives and to submit to His lordship. We must address the underlying issues of vision and presence. When we lose sight of God's vision for our lives, we distort the Gospel's message. Likewise, when we neglect His presence, we fail to fully embrace His lordship. Thus, our starting point must be a commitment to cultivate a vibrant vision of God's mission, rooted in His presence.

Shaping the Mind: Understanding and Embracing Truth

Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." As we continue to move toward effective discipleship, we must also focus on shaping the mind. The mental dimension of discipleship involves understanding truth and challenging cultural norms through a biblical lens. Our minds serve as pathways for spiritual

growth, allowing us to store and apply knowledge of God and His Word. 2 Timothy 2:15: “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

To shape our minds, we must engage in activities such as prayer, fasting, Bible study, meditating on the Word of God, and witnessing to others. Discipleship is multi-dimensional; it encompasses not only spiritual practices but also the development of a biblical philosophy of life that challenges worldly perspectives.

We need to embrace a biblical approach that values growth and transformation. As we cultivate our understanding, we position ourselves to share that knowledge effectively with others, fostering a community that seeks to live out God’s mission together.

Shaping the Life: Living out Our Faith

1 Corinthians 10:31: “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” The final phase of discipleship is shaping the life. This involves integrating the spiritual, mental, physical, emotional, and social dimensions of our existence into a coherent witness for Christ. Each aspect of our lives is interwoven, and our faith should permeate every relationship and action.

We must prioritize the physical dimension by managing our bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit. This means conditioning ourselves for service and being mindful of how we allocate our time and resources. Our emotional health also plays a crucial role; recognizing and healing emotional scars through the Gospel is vital for our growth and the growth of those we disciple.

Relationships are the context in which spiritual growth occurs. Hebrews 10:24-25: “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but

encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” The family serves as the first context for growth, providing a support base for discipleship. The church, as the body of Christ, offers a community for celebration and ministry. Furthermore, the world serves as our mission field, where we engage in redemptive relationships and demonstrate God’s love.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

1 Thessalonians 5:24: “The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.” As we empower you the pastors and church leaders in Nekemte district to develop effective discipleship programs, let us remember the essence of our calling. We are disciples of Christ, entrusted with the mission to shape hearts for His glory.

Let us lead from our experiences, sharing personal testimonies that resonate with those we disciple. Discipling is a process, and we are all pilgrims on a journey, discovering our mission in partnership with God. Together, let us commit to shaping our hearts, minds, and lives, fostering a culture of discipleship that moves our community closer to God’s mission.

May we embrace this calling, allowing the depth of our intimacy with God to fuel our efforts in reaching others for His Kingdom. Amen.

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Professional Summary

I am a dedicated and experienced pastor currently leading the Western Ethiopia Union Mission of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church (SDA), with a diverse background in theology, medical laboratory work, and church administration.

Education

Bachelor of Arts in Theology

Ethiopia Adventist College, Ethiopia | 2007–2010

Medical Laboratory Technician Training

Gimbie Adventist General Hospital, Ethiopia 1993-1995 while serving.

High School

Gimbie Comprehensive High School, Ethiopia | 1985–1988

Professional Experience

Pastor & Church Leader

Western Ethiopia Union Mission of SDA | 2020–Present

Leading and providing spiritual guidance to the Western Ethiopia Union

Mission

Overseeing the mission's various ministries and supporting pastors and church leaders across the region.

Executive Secretary

West Ethiopia Conference of SDA | 2016–2019

Coordinated administrative functions and supported the executive leadership of the conference.

Played a key role in organizing meetings, conferences, and church programs.

Departmental Director

Western Ethiopia Conference of SDA | 2011–2015

Led various church departments, including spiritual and educational initiatives.

Worked closely with church leaders to develop and implement programs that supported local congregations.

District Leader

Western Ethiopia Conference of SDA | August 2007–January 2011

Oversaw the spiritual and administrative needs of several congregations.

Coordinated local evangelism efforts and church growth initiatives.

Laboratory Technician

Gimbie Adventist General Hospital, Ethiopia | 1991–2006

Languages

Afan Oromo: Native Speaker

Amharic: Fluent speaker

English: Frequent Speaker

Greek and Hebrews: I can write and read

Reference

Available upon request