

TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

A CALL TO SERVE



ALEJANDRO BULLÓN

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“MAKE DISCIPLES”

When we read Matthew 28:18–20, how do we interpret the command given by the Lord? For some, the evangelical commission is a challenging task; to them, it may even seem impossible to accomplish. For others, it is nothing more than a motivational message of the risen Christ, and there are those who assume that it is a goal to be achieved. But for the true church of the Lord, these words contain the most solemn and special work ever to be entrusted to human beings: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

As Christians who are committed to the preaching of the gospel, Adventists know that this command was not given to a small church group. Jesus spoke to the “eleven;” that is, to “all” the disciples who remained after the death of Judas. These “eleven” disciples represented “all” the church. The responsibility and privilege of taking an active part in the proclamation of the divine message involves us all. It is from this passage that the Total Member Involvement program is inspired. The aim of this program is to encourage every church member to accept, under the guidance of the Spirit, the challenge of bringing the message of salvation “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8), and to experience the joy that making disciples for Christ brings. Heaven is ready to give us all its power, but *every* member must be willing to go *everywhere*. Total Member Involvement also finds a reason for being in this statement by Ellen G. White: “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” (*Gospel Workers*, “Enlarging our Forces,” p. 351).

Total member involvement: a call to serve will help us understand how the Holy Spirit, through the work of every member, can turn a person into a disciple of the Master. Of course, in order to make disciples we must first be true disciples.

With regard to the work of preaching the gospel, we can also say the words we utter during Communion: “Let us all partake . . .”

Maranatha.

Israel Leito, President
Inter-American Division

FOREWORD

Our evangelistic and missionary work for others is to increase as we come closer to Christ's soon second coming. Comprehensive evangelism outreach can take many forms, but usually culminates with some type of small group or public meeting in which the Bible becomes the central focus so that people's hearts can be touched with eternal truth. The Holy Spirit can work in marvelous ways when the Word of God is presented in a clear, concise, and winsome manner. The timeliness and power of God's salvation story is profound—it is heaven-blessed. The unfolding of biblical truth is to occupy more and more of our time, and we must do that in any manner possible. Where public meetings can be held, by all means hold them. Where small groups are better positioned to touch a life, hold them. Let us lift up Christ, His righteousness, and His sanctuary service. Let us be faithful to God, His Word, and the Spirit of Prophecy. Let us be involved in *Total Member Involvement*.

The secret of Total Member Involvement includes door-to-door visitation, Bible studies in homes, intense prayer initiatives, comprehensive health ministry outreach, distribution of Adventist literature, youth involvement, Community Services, ADRA activities, media outreach, social media contacts, choirs singing for the Lord, personal evangelism, public evangelism, and many more forms of evangelistic outreach. These activities involve everyone who is willing, since the Lord has asked all to participate in the proclamation of the gospel and the three angels' messages, as we see in Matthew 28:19, 20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (NKJV).

What a privilege for each of us to do something for Jesus. You do not have to be a pastor to speak to others either personally or publicly about God's great plan of redemption. All church members are asked to proclaim God's final message to the world that Jesus is coming soon—you can do that personally and publicly! Total Member Involvement includes men, women, youth, and children in proclaiming God's truth. Laypersons are to unite with pastors and church leaders, as we are told

by Ellen G. White in *Testimonies for the Church*: “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” (vol. 9, p. 117). This is what Total Member Involvement is all about: everyone doing something for Jesus, including speaking for Him whether you are a layperson, a pastor, a man, a woman, a young person, or a child. May God bless, in every form possible, the evangelistic outreach to the world through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is coming soon.

Ted N. C. Wilson, *President*
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to have the opportunity to provide an introduction to this book on Total Member Involvement. I believe it provides the principles and practical applications of reaching out to people and helping them become disciples of Jesus. I also believe that you hold in your hands a book that will inspire you to share your best friend, Jesus, with others in a simple, nonthreatening way.

The proclamation of the gospel to the whole world was Jesus' first priority from the beginning of His ministry to the end. From His baptism to His ascension to heaven, Jesus' chief preoccupation was twofold: first, to seek and to save the lost, and second, to teach others how to seek and save the lost. His main goal was to evangelize and to teach people how to evangelize (Luke 19:10). That is what this book is all about.

In 2015 the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists launched a new visionary initiative called Total Member Involvement. *Total Member Involvement* is about every church member doing something for Jesus. Every pastor, every teacher, every church administrator involved in the mission of the church.

At the very beginning of His ministry Jesus told His disciples: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19, KJV). At the very end of His earthly ministry He said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18, 19).

Jesus told them to go and make disciples. That was their mission, to make disciples. And what was to happen with the disciples they made? Those disciples were to make other disciples, and those other disciples were to make other disciples, and so on, until the gospel reached every nation on earth.

What Jesus was doing was creating a self-perpetuating organism that would continue to reproduce itself. The intent of Jesus was that one disciple would make another disciple. He was establishing the principle of multiplication, in which one disciple could give birth and develop other disciples who in turn would do the same thing. It has been proven, as is shown in this book, that there is no better way to make this happen than by helping people become involved in the mission of the church and through small group settings.

Pastor Alejandro Bullón has been instrumental in bringing thousands of people to the Lord by using some of the simple yet powerful biblical principles for soul winning that he shares in this book. It is my prayer that this valuable resource will find not just a place in your bookshelf, but a special place in your heart as you seek to follow the Master's command to make disciples by getting personally involved in His mission.

Ramon J. Canals, D.Min., *Director
Sabbath School and Personal Ministries
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*

1

CHAPTER 1

TOTAL MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

THE DISCIPLES WERE ALL ABOUT CARING for their Master. They wanted Him to eat in order to be ready for the harsh journey ahead. But Jesus responded to their concern in an unusual manner. “‘My food,’ said Jesus, ‘is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don’t you have a saying, “It’s still four months until harvest”? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest’” (John 4:34, 35).

There are two concepts arising from Jesus’ answer. First, it points to the importance of carrying out the Father’s work (the harvest), but only in fulfillment of His will. Second, it says that the fields are already ripe for the harvest. There’s no time to waste. The world is ripe for the taking. People are suffering and seeking desperately for solutions to their problems in myriads of deceitful ways, only to end up frustrated and hopeless. Sin has done enough damage. It’s time for Jesus to return!

But the work of proclaiming the good news of salvation in Jesus must be finished. Total Member Involvement is God’s way of preparing His people and the world for the second coming of Jesus.

In seeing the pain of a world in pieces, we can no longer stand idly by and do nothing. The fields are ripe for the harvest, but there can't be a harvest where no seeds were sown or cultivated. Evangelistic events are wonderful harvest projects, but how will we harvest if we never sowed? However, the planting is to be done according to the will of the Father; no other way will suffice. That is the subject of this book.

One of life's most unpleasant experiences is realizing you've been wrong when you were convinced you were right. To believe you have arrived in Moscow when you've actually arrived in Lima. And despite all the explanations and warnings, to resist evaluating the road traveled. There is no one blinder than someone who refuses to see. The worst kind of deaf is someone who refuses to hear.

Paradoxical as it may seem, we risk falling into the same pattern when trying to accomplish the mission. It is easy to conclude that we are on the right track because every year thousands of new believers are baptized and statistics show growth. But if we study the purpose Jesus had in mind when He entrusted us with the mission, perhaps we'll discover the sad reality that we are doing what we think is humanly better, but not what the Master taught.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warned, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evil-doers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23).

This is the sad description of the condition of sincere people who did what they considered correct, and yet will be lost on the final day. For one simple reason: They did not do the will of the Father.

IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO RUN

It is not enough to run. You need to know why you run. It is not enough to work. You have to know why you do what you do. In the Bible we find the story of someone who just ran, without knowing why.

Absalom had died, and someone had to take the news to the king. Two warriors received the mission and ran to the palace. One of them was Ahimaaz. He ran, sweated, strained, and reached his destination. But he did not know why he had run. He thought the mission was simply running. And he ran. But it did not fulfill the mission (2 Samuel 18:19-33). By now we should ask the following questions: What is the mission Jesus gave us? Are we doing the Father's will? What is His will when we refer to the mission?

IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO PREACH THE GOSPEL

We need to understand that God did not give us the mission because He needs our help. He is God. He knows no limits. If He wanted, the world would be reached with the gospel in a second. He could part the sea of difficulties so that every nation, tribe, tongue, and people would know the gospel message in an instant, just as He opened the Red Sea for the Israelites to cross.

On one occasion He told Zerubbabel: "I do not act through an army, 'nor by power, but by my Spirit'" (Zechariah 4:6).

You deceive yourself if you believe that God needs humans to preach the gospel. The Spirit of Prophecy is adamant in affirming that “God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ’s, we must share in His work. In order to enter into His joy—the joy of seeing souls redeemed by His sacrifice—we must participate in His labors for their redemption.”¹

If it were only to preach the gospel, God could do it without our help. But He gave us the mission because we the believers need to share the gospel in order to grow in the Christian life.

“The only way to grow in grace is to be disinterestedly doing the very work which Christ has enjoined upon us.”²

WITH THE ANGELS

On the other hand, the gospel could be done through the ministry of angels. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews asks this about angels: “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14). Angels are always ready to serve, and could preach the gospel with dizzying speed.

If it were about seeking the easiest and fastest way to evangelize the world, God would call on the angels. Ellen White declares: “God could have proclaimed His truth through sinless angels, but this is not His plan.”³

This concept is repeated several times.

“The angel sent to Philip could himself have done the work for the Ethiopian, but this is not God’s way of working. It is His plan that men are to work for their fellow men.”⁴

Notice the part “but this is not God’s way of working.” God has a definite plan for the preaching of the gospel, and in that plan the angels are in a supporting role. The church must fulfill the mission involving each believer because human beings need to be involved. It is a matter of spiritual survival.

“God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ’s, we must share in His work.”⁵

Any method that leaves the believer as an observer, seeing how others fulfill the mission, deviates from God’s plan.

WITH ANIMALS OR WITH STONES

But not only could the angels preach the gospel. On a certain occasion God had a message for Balaam. There was no pastor, evangelist, or Bible instructor nearby. Only a donkey. And the Bible says, “The Lord opened the donkey’s mouth” (Numbers 22:28). Can God use the animals to preach the gospel in our days? He could if He wanted. But not only the animals: even inanimate objects can preach. When Jesus was on earth, He said: “If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out” (Luke 19:40).

But the divine plan for evangelism is different. We cannot forget the divine plan and create our own designs, believing that in this way we are helping God. If we do, we risk reaching the final day and discovering that although we did many good things with the best of intentions, we did not do the Father’s will.

AN ILLUSTRATION

Imagine that I am the owner of a bicycle factory and want to test the endurance of my latest production. I gather a group of

employees and entrust them with the mission of taking my bike from Los Angeles to Miami, by land, to test its performance. I tell them to write down all the details: the resistance of the brake pedal, tire life, etc. I then tell them that I'll wait for them in Miami and leave.

As soon as I leave, employees gather and begin to organize committees to study the quickest, cheapest, and easiest way to get the bike to Miami. They spend hours and hours analyzing what would be the best method to accomplish the mission. They write proposals and produce books on the subject.

Finally, they conclude that it is best to take the bike by plane. It is the fastest way, and they find a good deal on airfare.

When we meet in Miami, there they are, all happy. They think they did an excellent job, and expect me to recognize them as loyal employees. But when I ask for a report on the long-term performance of the bicycle, they look at each other and perceive sadly that they did not fulfill the mission. They feel frustrated. They spent many hours studying and analyzing. They worked hard to get the resources. They did what they thought best. Unfortunately, they did not fulfill the mission. Not because they didn't want to, but because they didn't understand it.

THE DIVINE PLAN

What then is the divine plan in relation to the mission? Let's go back and read the inspired statement: "God could have proclaimed His truth through sinless angels, but this is not His plan."⁶

It is evident that God has a plan for fulfilling His mission. He would be unfair if He gave us the mission but did not teach us

how to fulfill it. This is not about inventing a method to do what He has already taught us. He taught us that “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

To be a witness is an attribute of human beings. Animals or things can't testify. A witness is someone who tells what he or she has seen or experienced. John says: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us” (1 John 1:1, 2).

So when Jesus gave His disciples the mission moments before ascending to heaven, He was reminding them of something He had already taught them before His crucifixion: “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come” (Matthew 24:14).

The key phrase is “as a testimony.” It is a matter for every believer. A personal testimony. Not a corporate one. And Jesus reminded them of this after His resurrection, before ascending to His Father.

The Spirit of Prophecy explains: “Christ was standing only a few steps from the heavenly throne when He gave His commission to His disciples. Including as missionaries all who should believe on His name, He said, ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.’ God’s power was to go with them.”⁷

Note the expression “including as missionaries all who should believe on His name.” The mission, in the mind of Christ, was not only to preach the gospel, but to “include as missionaries all who should believe on His name.”

RESPONSIBILITY OF THE BELIEVER

Let’s turn to a previous quote: “The angel sent to Philip could himself have done the work for the Ethiopian, but this is not God’s way of working. It is His plan that men are to work for their fellow men.”⁸

One of the first concepts that God taught us regarding the fulfillment of the mission is that the plan is for human beings to work for the benefit of their fellow humans. There is no true fulfillment of the mission without human participation. This participation can be collective, but it’s much more individual.

“During His ministry, Jesus had kept constantly before the disciples the fact that they were to be one with Him in His work for the recovery of the world from the slavery of sin. When He sent forth the Twelve and afterward the Seventy, to proclaim the kingdom of God, He was teaching them their duty to impart to others what He had made known to them. In all His work He was training them for individual labor, to be extended as their numbers increased, and eventually to reach to the uttermost parts of the earth. The last lesson He gave His followers was that they held in trust for the world the glad tidings of salvation.”⁹

There are three thoughts that stand out in this statement. The first is that “in all His work He was training them for individual labor.” The second is that this work was “to be extended as their numbers increased”; and the third is that this work would

“eventually . . . reach to the uttermost parts of the earth.” Let’s consider these three points.

AN INDIVIDUAL WORK

From the biblical point of view, the mission that God entrusted to His church is not just a corporate mission, but includes the participation of each and every one of the believers. Jesus never imagined His church fulfilling the mission with the participation of only a few members. Any evangelistic plan that leaves the believer just watching “is not His plan.” “This is not God’s way of working.” The Master taught it clearly: “It’s like a man going away: He leaves his house and puts his servants in charge, each with their assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch” (Mark 13:34).

The concept is simple. The Lord leaves “each with their assigned task.” This work cannot be done by proxy or representation. There is not the slightest chance that I can pay someone to do the work that was entrusted to me.

“To every one work has been allotted, and no one else can be a substitute for another. Each one has a mission of wonderful importance, which he cannot neglect or ignore, as the fulfillment of it involves the weal of some soul, and the neglect of it the woe of one for whom Christ died.”¹⁰

This is a beautiful concept. We write many books and countless sermons about it. But when we spring into action, we forget the teachings of the Master. We prefer to look around for the easiest, most economical and productive methods. And we’re never satisfied with anything. We run around in search of the “latest method,” and we ignore the divine counsel: “To

everyone who becomes a partaker of His grace the Lord appoints a work for others. Individually we are to stand in our lot and place, saying, 'Here am I; send me.' Isaiah 6:8, KJV. Upon the minister of the word, the missionary nurse, the Christian physician, the individual Christian, whether he be merchant or farmer, professional man or mechanic—the responsibility rests upon all. It is our work to reveal to men the gospel of their salvation. Every enterprise in which we engage should be a means to this end.”¹¹

Look at the expressions “everyone,” “each one,” “upon all.” This concept is not presented once, or just a few times. The Spirit of Prophecy repeats the same concept over and over. The mission is not only corporate but individual.

“God expects personal service from everyone to whom He has entrusted a knowledge of the truth for this time. Not all can go as missionaries to foreign lands, but all can be home missionaries in their families and neighborhoods.”¹²

No one can be omitted, or believe that because they collaborate financially, someone else can fulfill the mission that was assigned to them.

“A distinct work is assigned to every Christian.”¹³

CHURCH GROWTH WOULD BE FASTER

The result of fulfilling the mission with the individual participation of every believer, as Jesus taught, would be that the work would be “extended as their numbers increased.” The key words here are “extended” and “increased.” Both denote expansion, multiplication, and numbers. The inspired writer was not afraid to mention numbers as a growth rate. She said: “If every

Seventh-day Adventist had done the work laid upon him, the number of believers would now be much larger than it is.”¹⁴

But she notes that the numbers are the result of following divine counsel, and involving each member in accomplishing the mission. “If every Seventh-day Adventist had done the work laid upon him,” she says.

Numbers cannot be the motivating factor in accomplishing the mission, but simply the result of something wonderful that happens in the life of every believer. Numbers are not alien to biblical teachings. The Bible is full of numbers. From the Old Testament, when Israel left Egypt, “the Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Sukkoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children” (Exodus 12:37).

Going through the experience of Pentecost: “Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day” (Acts 2:41). Even in heaven we see numbers: “Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads” (Revelation 14:1). “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands” (Revelation 7:9).

Yes, numbers are needed. Not as a source of inspiration and motivation, but as measurements that allow evaluation. They may not be the best indicators, but no one has yet discovered

better indicators. If you tell me you're losing weight, the logical question is How many pounds? If you claim that you are growing, you have to answer how many inches.

The Spirit of Prophecy says: "The Thessalonian believers were true missionaries. . . . Hearts were won by the truths presented, and souls were added to the number of believers."¹⁵ How do we know that the Thessalonians were true missionaries? Because new people were added to the number of believers. Declaring that they were true missionaries without an increase in numbers would be inconsistent with the evidence.

At the beginning of our history the servant of God said: "Seventh-day Adventists are making progress, doubling their numbers, establishing missions, and unfurling the banner of truth in the dark places of the earth; and yet the work moves far more slowly than God would have it."¹⁶

How did they know that Adventists were making progress? By the fact that they had doubled their numbers. But numbers should never be used as a source of inspiration or pressure. They are not to be used in comparisons to "prove" who is better. If we follow the way Jesus worked, what matters are not the numbers, but the fact that we are preparing a people to be ready to meet Jesus.

THE MISSION WOULD BE ACCOMPLISHED

This would be the second result of following the divine method of evangelism, in which the participation of every believer is indispensable. "Eventually [it would] reach to the uttermost parts of the earth."¹⁷ Ellen White was clear on this concept. She affirmed this at the end of the nineteenth century and then

repeated the concept: “Were every one of you a living missionary, the message for this time would speedily be proclaimed in all countries, to every people and nation and tongue.”¹⁸

Notice that the secret to the completion of the work is “were every one.” In other words: each believer needs to be “a living missionary.”

The other day someone asked me what plans the church has to complete the mission, because according to him we are “wandering in the wilderness like Israel.”

This person believes that we should take advantage of social networks and technology. And I think this is true. We must seize all means available, but we can never forget the individual action of each believer, seeking out people and leading them to Jesus. Personal witnessing has a capacity for a rate of speed much more extraordinary than we imagine.

“He who becomes a child of God should henceforth look upon himself as a link in the chain let down to save the world, one with Christ in His plan of mercy, going forth with Him to seek and save the lost.”¹⁹

This concept of the chain is extraordinary. In the mind of Christ each one should seek out one, and then those two should do the same. This means that the increase would not be by addition, but by multiplication or geometric progression.

If we take just 2 million of the 20 million Seventh-day Adventist believers in the world and challenge every one of them to bring a person to Christ, and every new believer did the same, in just 12 years we would reach the 7 billion people who now populate the planet. We err when we underestimate the possibility, the potential, and effectiveness

of personal testimony. It is no less explosive than cell multiplication or atomic fission energy.

“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.”²⁰

Note that if every church member were involved in the mission and if every church had plans in place to involve every believer, the circle would widen clear around the world.

CORPORATE WORK INSTEAD OF INDIVIDUAL EFFORT

I think church leaders live constantly concerned about fulfilling the mission. In ministerial meetings you often hear, “Such and such conference baptized this many” or “This union added this many new members this year.” And the encouraged members exclaim, “Amen!”

One leader told me: “I think we’re doing well, because when the quinquennium began, we were baptizing 900 souls per year, and this last year we reached 5,000.” Then he asked: “Doesn’t this mean we’re fulfilling the mission?”

From the human perspective, maybe so. Surely his conference will look good in the statistical report.

What had that particular conference done to grow so fast?

“We invested in evangelism” was the reply.

And certainly a leader who has the vision to invest in evangelism has the right understanding as to why the church even exists. Except that the investment that conference had made had

been to hire 300 Bible instructors. Each had baptized an average of 12, and the results were impressive.

But here's the question: Is this the best way of fulfilling the mission that Jesus gave us?

Perhaps Ellen White answers this question best:

“Everywhere there is a tendency to substitute the work of organizations for individual effort. Human wisdom tends to consolidation, to centralization, to the building up of great churches and institutions. Multitudes leave to institutions and organizations the work of benevolence; they excuse themselves from contact with the world, and their hearts grow cold. They become self-absorbed and unimpressible. Love for God and man dies out of the soul. Christ commits to His followers an individual work—a work that cannot be done by proxy. Ministry to the sick and the poor, the giving of the gospel to the lost, is not to be left to committees or organized charities. Individual responsibility, individual effort, personal sacrifice, is the requirement of the gospel.”²¹

According to this statement, a group of Bible instructors cannot replace the individual work of every believer. Everyone can do something, which is the basis of Total Member Involvement.

In the same conference, I met at least three people who gave plenty of financial resources to pay the Bible instructors, but were not personally involved in the mission to seek souls for Christ. What they are doing is certainly extraordinary. These are people who love God and His church, because where your treasure is, there is your heart also. But in the mind of God, it is the “individual responsibility” that is “the requirement of the gospel.”

This raises the logical question: Why should the mission be individual? This is the question that we will answer in the next chapter.



Total Member Involvement is about personal commitment. It is about finding a need in the community and supplying that need. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved:

1. Cook a meal for a neighbor/coworker who has been sick.
2. Give food to a homeless person.
3. Donate clothing in the condition that you would want donated to you.

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898), p. 142.

² Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 80.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 330.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *God's Amazing Grace* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1973), p. 335.

⁶ E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 330.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1925), p. 9.

⁸ E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 109.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹⁰ E. G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 10.

¹¹ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 148.

¹² Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 9, p. 30.

¹³ E. G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 9.

¹⁴ E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 25.

¹⁵ E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 256.

¹⁶ E. G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 97.

¹⁷ E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 32.

¹⁸ E. G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 9.

¹⁹ E. G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 105.

²⁰ Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 19.

²¹ E. G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 147.

CHAPTER 2

A SPIRITUAL NEED

WHY DO BOTH THE BIBLE AND THE SPIRIT OF Prophecy emphasize the participation of all believers? This is vital in order to understand the mission from God's perspective. The reason is not that God needs us to finish His work. It is we who need to participate in the mission in order to grow spiritually and prepare for meeting Jesus Christ when He returns.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians: "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand" (Ephesians 6:13). The apostle mentions two important events: the "day of evil" and the completion of "everything." It obviously refers to the second coming of Jesus.

TWO GROUPS

When Christ returns, there will be only two groups. The redeemed will raise their hands to heaven and exclaim: "Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us. This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation" (Isaiah 25:9).

In contrast to this moment of joy, John describes the experience of the second group dramatically: “I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?’” (Revelation 6:12-17).

GOD’S DREAM

God’s dream is that all will become part of the first group. God does not desire that any should perish. “For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone” (Ezekiel 18:32), declares the Lord. Jesus wants to find His people ready to meet Him. For this reason He left everything in heaven and came to die on this earth. Paul states that “Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27, NASB).

God’s dream is that when Jesus returns He will find a church that is glorious, holy, and blameless, “without spot or wrinkle

or any such thing.” In the Bible we find God’s dream described many times. Imagine Him closing His eyes and asking Himself: “Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?” (Song of Solomon 6:10). This is the church that reflects His character.

God’s dream! A people prepared, a glorious church without spot, beautiful as the moon, bright as the sun, reflecting its character; human beings able to hear the sweet voice of the Father: “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (Isaiah 60:1-3).

God’s ideal for His church is a glorious church, without wrinkle and without blemish, like a bride dressed in white waiting for her groom; an authentic church, without formalities, not merely concerned with appearances. “Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people” (Ephesians 6:6, 7).

But what does Paul mean when he refers to a glorious church? Obviously it is glorious because it reflects the glory of God. And what is the glory of God? Ellen White answers this question as follows: “And then ask still more; pray with Moses, ‘Show me thy glory.’ What is this glory? The character of God.”¹

Sin defaced the character of God in humanity. Today we are just a caricature of God, but the Lord expects His church to reflect His character again. Jesus came to this world to restore the lost glory and reproduce in humans the character of the Father. He left

everything in heaven and came to this world of misery and pain, to pay the price of our restoration. This is why: “Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”²

So Jesus is patiently waiting for the church to reflect His character, in order to come back and claim it as His own.

However, before the glorious appearing of Jesus, the evil day will come, and according to Paul, many will not resist its winds when it does. So he advises: “Put on the full armor of God” (Ephesians 6:13). Then, from verse 14 on, he describes the divine armor. “Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people” (verses 14-18).

There are seven components in God’s armor—three of which require participation by the believer: Bible study, prayer, and willingness to preach the gospel of peace.

COMPONENTS OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

We will leave the first two for later chapters. Let’s concentrate on the third: the mission of looking for other people and leading them to Jesus. Thus, we will come to understand why God places so much emphasis on the individual mission of each believer.

God's dream is not just that the gospel be preached to every tribe and nation, tongue and people, but for the redeemed to become part of the glorious church that reflects His character. The mission is just one of the tools to build such a church.

"God could have reached His object in saving sinners without our aid; but in order for us to develop a character like Christ's, we must share in His work."³

It is necessary to highlight the importance of this concept. "In order for us to develop a character like Christ's, we must share in His work." The believer needs to participate in the mission because witnessing is part of a healthy Christian life. The messenger of the Lord says:

"It is as we give ourselves to God for the service of humanity that He gives Himself to us."⁴

There is no other way to do it. To limit the Christian life to prayer and Bible study, without participating in the mission, is a deceptive and empty experience. It is not much more than cheap mysticism. Speaking of the danger of turning the Christian life into a mystical experience, Ellen White wrote: "We are in the waiting time. But this period is not to be spent in abstract devotion. Waiting, watching, and vigilant working are to be combined."⁵

THE EXAMPLE OF THE EARLY CHURCH

The early church correctly understood the mission and emphasized the individual participation of every believer. The mission for the early Christians was not dependent on only the work of leaders, but that of each and every person. Every Christian lived determined to lead someone to Christ, for the sake of Jesus, and to grow in their Christian experience. They knew that there

is no growth without witness. Personal witness does not depend on having a gift. God distributed gifts to His children “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11, 12, NASB), says Paul, but personal witness is not a gift but a spiritual need, such as prayer or daily Bible study.

This concept was clear in the early church. “And on that day a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. . . . Those who had been scattered went about preaching the word” (Acts 8:1-4).

Those who announced the gospel were not only the apostles, but those who had been scattered. Who were these? All believers. From the divine point of view, the mission of bringing people to Christ is for every Christian. That’s what the Spirit of Prophecy says:

“The humble, consecrated believer upon whom the Master of the vineyard places a burden for souls is to be given encouragement by the men upon whom the Lord has laid larger responsibilities.”⁶

Who is the “humble, consecrated believer”? The church member! The Lord has placed concern for the souls in the heart of the faithful. Why? Because they need to grow spiritually. They will ultimately belong to the glorious church that Jesus will come to claim. And they will not grow without participating in the mission.

“The only way to grow in grace is to be interestedly doing the very work Christ has enjoined upon us to do.”⁷

If I, as a minister, don’t allow the church to participate in fulfilling the mission, I am ignoring the Lord’s will. If I, in my eagerness

to reach my goals and targets, employ any method that leaves the believer simply as an observer, I am condemning my sheep to destruction, and God may one day blame me for their loss. I could have been sincere in what I did, but I did not do what God asked. I forgot to help prepare the glorious, holy, pure, and spotless church.

THE WORK OF THE MINISTERS

The “humble, consecrated believer,” says the text, should be encouraged by “the men upon whom the Lord has laid larger responsibilities.” Who are these men? Ministers. The primary work of the minister is not to bring people to Christ. That work, in God’s plan, must be performed by every believer.

“In laboring where there are already some in the faith, the minister should at first seek not so much to convert unbelievers, as to train the church members for acceptable cooperation. Let him labor for them individually, endeavoring to arouse them to seek for a deeper experience themselves, and to work for others. When they are prepared to sustain the minister by their prayers and labors, greater success will attend his efforts.”⁸

The pastor should never do the job that belongs to the church. Their mission is another.

“Preaching is a small part of the work to be done for the salvation of souls. God’s Spirit convicts sinners of the truth, and He places them in the arms of the church. The ministers may do their part, but they can never perform the work that the church should do.”⁹

This message is addressed to pastors and refers to preaching from the pulpit. He mentions preaching as “a small part of the work to be done for the salvation of souls.” But it is God who

does the work. How? By putting people into the arms of the church. “The ministers may do their part, but they can never perform the work that the church should do.” There’s no need to explain that church does not refer to a corporate institution, but to each and every believer.

The work of the minister is to prepare, educate, teach, raise awareness, organize, inspire, and equip believers to fulfill their duty. They need to do this. That is God’s way of reproducing in them the character of Jesus Christ and making them reflect His glory. Any Christian who is not involved in the mission is doomed to spiritual death. As a child who does not move, that person will, before long, atrophy and die.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE THESSALONIANS

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians regarding the following: “The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it” (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

The missionary awareness of the Thessalonians is impressive. Paul had brought them the Word of God, and had taught them that in order to grow in their Christian experience, they had to lead people to Christ. And the Thessalonians took this so seriously that Paul says, “We already have no need to say anything, because you are fulfilling the mission.” Is this not wonderful? Certainly Paul was an excellent shepherd. He taught the church to witness, and it became an excellent church. He assumed his missionary responsibility.

Ellen White reaffirms this concept: “The apostle felt that he was to a large extent responsible for the spiritual welfare of those converted under his labors. His desire for them was that they might increase in a knowledge of the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He had sent. Often in his ministry he would meet with little companies of men and women who loved Jesus, and bow with them in prayer, asking God to teach them how to maintain a living connection with Him. Often he took counsel with them as to the best methods of giving to others the light of gospel truth. And often, when separated from those for whom he had thus labored, he pleaded with God to keep them from evil and help them to be earnest, active missionaries.”¹⁰

Note that Paul was aware that the only way that new believers would remain true was by sharing their faith. See what he did. First, he “felt that he was to a large extent responsible for the spiritual welfare of those converted under his labors.” And second, he wanted them to “increase in a knowledge of the only true God.”

These two concerns had to do with the preparation of the glorious church of Jesus, and led him to bow down in prayer with them to ask God to teach them how to maintain a vital relationship with Him. And how was this vital relationship to be maintained? First, “he took counsel with them as to the best methods of giving to others the light of gospel truth.” And second, “when separated from those for whom he had thus labored, he pleaded with God to keep them from evil and help them to be earnest, active missionaries.” Paul knew that a Christian who does not pray, does not study the Bible, and does not bring people to Christ grows and walks dangerously close to self-destruction.

STRENGTHENED FAITH

In God's mind the mission is not merely an instrument of growth but also a source of spiritual strength for the believer. Ellen White wrote: "Well-organized work must be done in the church, that its members may understand how to impart the light to others, and thus strengthen their own faith and increase their knowledge. As they impart that which they have received from God, they will be confirmed in the faith. A working church is a living church."¹¹

Notice the relationship between imparting the light to others and the strengthening of their faith. A working church will always be a living church.

Isn't that God's dream?



Total Member Involvement is about sharing the good news of salvation in Jesus. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved:

1. Give someone a Bible study.
2. Volunteer for a health expo.
3. Organize free health screening for the community.

¹ Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1923), p. 499.

² Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900), p. 69.

³ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 142.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), p. 301.

⁵ E. G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 85.

⁶ E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 110.

⁷ E. G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 101.

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915), p. 196.

⁹ Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1991), p. 58.

¹⁰ E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 262.

¹¹ E. G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 73.

3

CHAPTER 3

DISCIPLESHIP

WE CANNOT SPEAK OF DISCIPLESHIP WITHOUT talking about Jesus. He made disciples and commanded us to do the same. Before performing miracles and preaching, He made disciples. The first day of His ministry He called John, James, Andrew, and Peter. The next day he invited Philip and Nathanael. And the third day, at the wedding in Cana, Jesus and His disciples were present.

Jesus began His ministry making disciples. He did not seek merely believers or church members. He sought out followers who would leave everything and commit to Him.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A DISCIPLE?

It is not the same as being a believer. The believer generally reads the Bible, attends church, sings hymns, returns tithe, and nothing else. The disciple, besides believing, also follows Jesus, commits to Him, and makes new disciples.

In Jesus' time the teacher and students spent most of their time together. The training of a disciple involved more than presenting a series of Bible lectures to a group of students. It required the daily sharing of the teacher with the disciples.

It included walking, working, eating; in other words, living together.

“In the training of His disciples the Savior followed the system of education established at the beginning. The Twelve first chosen, with a few others who through ministry to their needs were from time to time connected with them, formed the family of Jesus. They were with Him in the house, at the table, in the closet, in the field. They accompanied Him on His journeys, shared His trials and hardships, and, as much as in them was, entered into His work.

“Sometimes He taught them as they sat together on the mountainside, sometimes beside the sea, or from the fisherman’s boat, sometimes as they walked by the way. Whenever He spoke to the multitude, the disciples formed the inner circle. They pressed close beside Him, that they might lose nothing of His instruction. They were attentive listeners, eager to understand the truths they were to teach in all lands and to all ages.”¹

DISCIPLES AND LEADERS OF DISCIPLES

However, in speaking of the disciples, the New Testament refers to two kinds of followers: the disciples and the disciples who were also leaders. Jesus, for example, chose 12 disciples whom He trained to establish his church. It was a select group of people who were personally instructed and trained by Him. The process took three years, but when He died, they were ready to fulfill the mission of establishing His church.

But “disciple” also refers generally to all followers of Jesus, not just the leaders. It applies to students of a teacher in a relationship of instructor-trainee, as the one Jesus had with the

Twelve, and also to all who accept the gospel and follow Jesus. In the times of Christ, in addition to the Twelve, there were other followers of Jesus, including, for example, the disciples who met Jesus after the resurrection, on the road to Emmaus, and the group of women followers.

TO FOLLOW THE LAMB

The apostle John describes the scene of the redeemed in heaven: “These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb” (Revelation 14:4). According to this verse, the main characteristic of the redeemed is the fact that they follow the Lamb. They are disciples of the Lamb. But how will they follow the Lamb in heaven if they did not learn to follow Him on earth?

The word “disciple,” then, refers to the person who accepts Jesus and is ready to follow Him to the end, making other disciples along the way. And this is not an easy task, because most believers seem satisfied to belong to a religious club that meets on Saturday to enjoy a good spiritual program, and nothing else. But this matter may be owing to more than unwillingness. Instead, it may come from a misunderstanding of God’s commands.

THE ORDER

The Master’s command is not limited to preaching the gospel and baptizing new believers; it is primarily to make disciples. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in

the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20, NASB).

Most scholars think that the central action word in this passage is “make.” The other verbs in the text revolve around the divine command to “make disciples.” Going, baptizing, and teaching serve to indicate how the command to “make disciples” is to be fulfilled.

No disciple is made in an evangelistic campaign, or with the simple exposition of Bible truth. Disciples aren’t made in a week or a month. It takes time and life experience. The disciple is a person in constant growth, and growth is not an event but a process.

THE MASTER’S SEAL

One of the main characteristics of disciples is that they bear the stamp of their Master, or Disciple maker. Jesus said it: “It is enough for students to be like their teachers, and servants like their masters” (Matthew 10:25).

When Jesus called His disciples, He wanted them to be like Him. True disciples are like their Master and do what their Master does. Paul became a disciple of Christ and then wrote to the Corinthians: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). And to the Philippians: “Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do” (Philippians 3:17).

Paul dared to make such a statement because he had a conviction: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). And how did

Paul reach such experience? Through daily fellowship with Jesus. It was not a physical fellowship, as the one enjoyed by the first 12 disciples, but a spiritual fellowship, one we can cultivate daily with Jesus, whom we can't perceive with physical eyes. "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The disciple lives a daily experience of transformation. An experience that is not limited to emotion but is also practical. It involves daily Bible study, constant prayer, and witnessing. Witnessing helps train other disciples. When the experience of daily communion with Christ becomes a reality, several things happen:

"When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life."² "When self is submerged in Christ, true love springs forth spontaneously. It is not an emotion or an impulse but a decision of a sanctified will."³

Then and only then will God's dream of seeing His church illuminating the world with His glory be fulfilled:

"The world needs evidences of sincere Christianity. Professed Christianity may be seen everywhere; but when the power of God's grace is seen in our churches, the members will work the works of Christ. Natural and hereditary traits of character will be transformed. The indwelling of His Spirit will enable them to reveal Christ's likeness, and in proportion to the purity of their piety will be the success of their work"⁴

BEING WITH CHRIST

For this reason, when Jesus called His first disciples, “he appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14). Note the two challenges posed to the disciples. First, to be with their Master, and then to preach. First be, then do. In their being with the Master, the character of Jesus would be reproduced in the disciples, and people would see the glory and the virtues of Jesus in the life of His disciples. Thus, the fulfillment of the mission does not consist of mere exposure to a body of doctrine, but in the revelation of the character of Jesus to the world.

“The last message of mercy to be given to the world is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them.”⁵

This is the true mission.

“We are to go forth to proclaim the goodness of God and to make plain His real character before the people. We are to reflect His glory. Have we done this in the past? Have we revealed the character of our Lord by precept and example?”⁶

Naturally, revealing the character of Jesus is more than merely proposing a theory. People need to see Jesus in the life of His disciples. They are the salt of the earth. Salt does not need to put forth special effort to add flavor to food. It’s just salt. They are the light of the world. Light does not need to do anything special to illuminate—it is what it is. Thus, as disciples, “we are to reflect the character of Jesus. Everywhere, whether in the church, at our homes, or in social intercourse with our neighbors, we should let the lovely image of Jesus appear.”⁷

HOW WERE THE FIRST DISCIPLES MADE?

The question we must answer at this point is: How is a follower of Christ made? How are disciples made? Here are the instructions Jesus gave. “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19, 20, NASB).

This scripture presents three essential actions in the formation of a disciple: seek, baptize, and teach. All this takes time. It’s not accomplished in an instant. Seeking requires patience. The same goes for teaching. Teaching is a process. It has a beginning, but it has no end. Disciples are never finished with their growth. They live in permanent development. Paul did not boast to have attained an end state.

When Jesus trained His early disciples, He taught us something we should not forget. The new disciples, after meeting with the Master, went out to “seek.” Each went looking for someone to bring to Jesus. Observe the dynamics of witnessing as presented by John. “Again the next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as He walked, and said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God!’” (John 1:35, 36, NASB).

NO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP WITHOUT CHRIST

Notice that John the Baptist exalts Jesus. There is no Christian discipleship without Christ. Jesus said, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). When Jesus is lifted up, following Him is a natural result. When Jesus is exalted before humanity, no one can resist.

In the Master from Galilee there is a wonderful attraction that melts hearts. Nobody disputes or argues its power. People fall at His feet and accept Him as their Savior. That's what the disciples of John did; they followed Jesus and stayed with Him. They were born into the kingdom of God. They found the love of their life and could not remain silent; they needed to share their discovery by making other disciples.

Why? The reason is simple:

"Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary. He who drinks of the living water becomes a fountain of life. The receiver becomes a giver. The grace of Christ in the soul is like a spring in the desert, welling up to refresh all, and making those who are ready to perish eager to drink of the water of life."⁸

Missionaries are those who fulfill the mission. They are the "true disciples." They cannot remain silent; they need to share Jesus.

The biblical text says next that "one of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which translated means Christ). He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas' (which is translated Peter)" (John 1:40-42, NASB). Andrew first found Peter. The key word is "found." You cannot find what you are not looking for. Andrew sought Peter.

The wonder of his discovery was so great that he could not remain silent. He went to find another person to make into a disciple of Jesus. Whom would you look for? Andrew

sought Peter, who, aside from being his brother, was also his colleague. They were both fishermen. It is a fact that the testimony of an acquaintance is more effective than that of a stranger. In the mind of Christ, that was the plan for discipleship.

THE MISSION IS NOT PROSELYTISM

We are not trying to get people to leave their churches and come to ours. It's not about a change of church, but a change of life. We are not leading people to change their religion; they need to change their lives. Joining the church should be the natural result of a changed life.

People who one day had ruined lives and homes; who did not know what to do or where to go; who spent sleepless nights torn by feelings of emptiness. One day they meet Jesus, and now they can't remain silent. They go out and tell others what happened to them. It is a compulsion born of love, a motivation that springs from a new perspective on life.

The biblical account tells us how God wanted to evangelize the world. If we had followed the biblical example, the world would already be full of the gospel. Every tribe and tongue and nation would know the plan of salvation, and Jesus would have returned. We would not be journeying anymore through this world of pain and death.

“Had the purpose of God been carried out by His people in giving to the world the message of mercy, Christ would, ere this, have come to the earth, and the saints would have received their welcome into the city of God.”⁹

BRING THEM TO JESUS

The Christians' mission is to bring potential disciples to Jesus. The Lord of salvation touches hearts and converts people. But there must be an Andrew, aware of his mission, seeking to bring Peter and Jesus together.

"In His wisdom the Lord brings those who are seeking for truth into touch with fellow beings who know the truth. It is the plan of Heaven that those who have received light shall impart it to those in darkness."¹⁰

The biblical text then tells what happened when Andrew led Peter to Jesus. "And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter)" (John 1:42). In two sentences the Lord describes the past, present, and future of Peter. I know your roots, He says. "You are the son of John." But I also know your present: "You are Simon." However, what really matters is what you will become, transformed by My grace. "You will be called Cephas, which means Peter."

That encounter with Jesus changed Peter's life. Andrew's brother left there with a heart exploding with happiness—with a new vision of life and eager to tell others what Jesus had done in his life. And what did he do? Did he look for a stranger to tell him about his wonderful encounter with Jesus? No. Strangers are hardly interested in what happens in the lives of strangers. Everyone is busy with their own problems.

Peter did not look for a stranger. The text does not say so explicitly, but the context does. "The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter"

(verses 43, 44, ESV). This last sentence explains everything. “Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.” Why do you think that sentence is there? What did John mean?

Bethsaida was a small region. And close to Bethsaida was Capernaum, which was also a small town. In small towns everybody knows everybody. Peter and Philip were neighbors. What do people who accept Jesus as their Savior generally do?

“In the home circle, at your neighbor’s fireside, at the bedside of the sick, in a quiet way you may read the Scriptures and speak a word for Jesus and the truth.”¹¹

Most likely Peter sought his neighbor Philip and told him of his great discovery. The result was the conversion of Philip, and he also reacted in the way that all converted people react.

“The very first impulse of the renewed heart is to bring others also to the Savior.”¹²

But notice what Philip did in order to witness. “Philip found Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph’” (verse 45).

“Philip knew that his friend was searching the prophecies, and while Nathanael was praying under a fig tree, Philip discovered his retreat. They had often prayed together in this secluded spot hidden by the foliage.”¹³

Notice the expressions “his friend” and “prayed together.” This is key. Here we find the concept behind discipleship: friendship. A friend telling another friend what Jesus did in his or her life.

Thus the gospel began to spread, along with the establishment of the Christian church. And if we want to finish the

mission, we also need to teach every believer to seek a relative, an acquaintance, a coworker, or a friend and to disciple him or her.

Ellen White writes: “With the calling of John and Andrew and Simon, of Philip and Nathanael, began the foundation of the Christian church. John directed two of his disciples to Christ. Then one of these, Andrew, found his brother, and called him to the Savior. Philip was then called, and he went in search of Nathanael. These examples should teach us the importance of personal effort, of making direct appeals to our kindred, friends, and neighbors. . . . In the very family, the neighborhood, the town, where we live, there is work for us to do as missionaries for Christ.”¹⁴

In 1886 she would write: “It is very hard to get any hold of the people. The only way that we find to be successful is in holding Bible readings, and in this way the interest is started with one or two or three; then these visit others and try to interest others, and thus the work moves slowly as it has done in Lausanne.”¹⁵

The expression “then these visit others and try to interest others” is especially relevant. Ellen White followed the method of witnessing instituted by Jesus. A Christian seeking another and bringing them to Jesus. And she often emphasized this way of accomplishing the mission.

“There are many who need the ministration of loving Christian hearts. Many have gone down to ruin who might have been saved if their neighbors, common men and women, had put forth personal effort for them. Many are waiting to be personally addressed. In the very family, the neighborhood, the town, where we live, there is work for us to do as missionaries for Christ.”¹⁶

MAKING DISCIPLES

The central idea of Christian discipleship is the personal relationship of every believer with the person they want to disciple. An evangelistic campaign can produce new believers but no new disciples. Our challenge is to prepare disciples to meet Jesus. The disciples are part of the glorious church that Jesus is coming to take with Him. To make a disciple requires person-to-person work. Every Christian making another Christian, teaching not just doctrinal concepts but a lifestyle.

DISCIPLE MAKERS

Let's talk now about the need for disciple makers. Matthew says: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field'" (Matthew 9:36-38).

These are poignant words. There is a great spiritual need in the world around us. People enter this world and leave it without ever having heard the good news of the gospel. Our church has currently some 20 million members around the world. If only 2 million were to become disciples who make disciples, soon the 7 billion inhabitants of this planet would be reached with the gospel. The problem is that most of the church is contented with being believers only. They are not disciple makers. They are mere spectators of a Sabbath program. They judge and evaluate the program. Approve or disapprove. They contribute their tithes and offerings, but unfortunately are not committed to the mission.

This problem is not new. Christ Himself said the harvest was plentiful but the workers were few. We have many members but few disciples. Don't you think it's time we made a change?



Total Member Involvement is about introducing our best friend, Jesus, to our friends. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved:

- 1.** Organize a branch Sabbath school in your house.
- 2.** Invite your neighbors to your home to eat and fellowship.
- 3.** Organize a small group to impact the community.

¹ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), pp. 84, 85.

² E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312.

³ Ellen G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1977), vol. 1, p. 206.

⁴ E. G. White, *God's Amazing Grace*, p. 263.

⁵ E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1979), p. 61.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *Lift Him Up* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1988), p. 266.

⁸ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 195.

⁹ E. G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 86.

¹⁰ E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 134.

¹¹ E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 129.

¹² E. G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 101.

¹³ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 140.

¹⁴ E. G. White, *Conflict and Courage* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1970), p. 280.

¹⁵ E. G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 410.

¹⁶ E. G. White, *Conflict and Courage*, p. 280.

4

CHAPTER 4

HOW TO MAKE A DISCIPLE, PART 1

A D I S C I P L E I S N O T B O R N , B U T M A D E .
And the making of a disciple is not mission impossible. Nor is it a mystery. If we pay attention to the divine teachings, it is actually simple. The Lord not only entrusted us with the mission of making disciples but also taught us how to accomplish it.

Difficulties arise when we forget God's instructions and try to create "revolutionary" human methods to baptize everyone, believing that "making disciples" means to increase the number of members.

"The divine commission needs no reform. Christ's way of presenting truth cannot be improved upon."¹

WHAT DID THE MASTER TEACH?

Let's go back to the days of Jesus. After the crucifixion the disciples were hiding in fear of accomplishing the mission. They wondered how they could make disciples of all nations while they were being persecuted. Then Jesus appeared to them.

John says: “So when it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and when the doors were shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ And when He had said this, He showed them both His hands and His side. The disciples then rejoiced when they saw the Lord. So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you’” (John 20:19-21, NASB).

AS THE FATHER HAS SENT ME

This last statement holds the secret to making new disciples: “As the Father has sent me, I also send you.” How did the Father send Jesus Christ? John explains: “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Jesus was the Word turned flesh. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (verse 1). But in order for humans to see the glory of the Father, it was necessary for the Word to become flesh.

Ellen White confirms this concept: “Christ took upon Himself humanity, that He might reach humanity. Divinity needed humanity; for it required both the divine and the human to bring salvation to the world. Divinity needed humanity, that humanity might afford a channel of communication between God and man.”²

We need to think repeatedly about how Jesus fulfilled the mission. “Christ took upon Himself humanity, that He might reach humanity.” Why? Words devoid of humanity remain

ineffective in the world of ideas. The wonderful ideas of the gospel have to go from mere words to real life. Just as the Son, the Word, became flesh in Jesus, also the Word (the message) needs to become flesh and reality in the life of Jesus' disciples.

HE DWELLED AMONG SINNERS

Jesus fulfilled the mission by coming to this world and dwelling among fallen human beings. He did not preach His gospel from heaven. He came into this world without fear of being contaminated with sin. He descended from pristine heights, lived in this evil world, but without sin. And He told us that just as the Father had sent Him, He sends us.

He sent us into the world, but warned us that His kingdom wasn't of this world: "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them" (1 John 2:15). And yet He asked us to go into the world and make disciples of all nations, tribes, languages, and people.

How do we understand this apparent contradiction? The Master Himself explains in His intercessory prayer: "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one" (John 17:15). Our mission must be accomplished in this world, just as Jesus fulfilled His. He became flesh and dwelt among men. He was not isolated. He was not a hermit who lived in the mountains.

He searched the mountains to pray alone, but immediately returned to the valley, where the people were. There was His mission. There is no way to fulfill the mission locked in the church. We have to go out and seek the lost where they are, and they are in the world of sin.

“When invited, as His work commenced, to a dinner or feast by Pharisee or publican He accepted the invitation. He was accused by the religious leaders of eating with publicans, and they cast the imputation upon Him that He was like them. But on such occasions Christ controlled the table talk, and gave many precious lessons. Those present listened to Him; for had He not healed their sick, comforted their sorrowing, taken their children in His arms and blessed them? Publicans and sinners were drawn to Him, and when He opened His lips to speak, their attention was riveted on Him.”³

To seek sinners “where they are” is part of the mission. You have to relate to them in the day-to-day so they can see in us the glory of God and be attracted to Jesus.

“The society of unbelievers will do us no harm if we mingle with them for the purpose of connecting them with God and are strong enough spiritually to withstand their influence.”⁴

BE AWARE OF YOUR PERSONAL MISSION

Before going to the world to seek new disciples, every church member, every believer, must become a disciple who makes disciples. The mission that Christ entrusted to us is personal.

“Men are instruments in the hand of God, employed by Him to accomplish His purposes of grace and mercy. Each has his part to act; to each is granted a measure of light, adapted to the necessities of his time, and sufficient to enable him to perform the work which God has given him to do.”⁵

The divine instruction is clear. “Each has his part to act; to each is granted a measure of light.” The word “each” expresses the divine idea that no believer should be satisfied with just

being a believer—that indeed, every believer should accept their personal mission to lead people to Jesus.

KNOW PEOPLE

If the mission Jesus entrusted to us must be fulfilled among human beings, we need to know the men and women of our times. What are their thoughts? What motivates them to make decisions? What worries them? If we can't answer these questions, how will we approach them?

“To deal with minds is the greatest work ever committed to men.”⁶

It is necessary to know the culture in which we work. We should be walking the streets, using mass transportation, entering markets, talking to people, seeing what they see and hearing what they hear. But that is not enough: we must also love people and feel compassion for them.

LOVE PEOPLE

“God is love,” says John. Love is the essence of God's own being. There is no love without God, nor God without love. For us these are two separate concepts. For John they are one. Love is the motivation of all divine actions, from Creation to redemption. “The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness’” (Jeremiah 31:3).

Christ established His church through love. “As Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the

church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27, NASB).

If God is love, which is God’s church on earth? It is evidently made up of His disciples. But any person may say they are a disciple of Jesus. How will the world know who are His true disciples? Jesus Himself answers: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35).

God’s church is the church of love. Love is its main feature. Because of its love for God, it follows His instructions and advice, and because of its love for human beings it enters into a loveless world to bring people to Jesus.

A MISSION OF LOVE

There is a suffering world outside the circle of love. People live in an atmosphere of violence, injustice, deceit, abuse, and exploitation. People desperately want to be happy but become increasingly unhappy and desperate, wandering souls thirsting for the pursuit of pleasure, deceiving themselves and walking painfully toward death.

But God loves them all. “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23). What does God do to rescue those people from death and bring them into the circle of His love? He sends agents of love, His disciples, those who one day were found by Jesus and transformed by love. They are to enter the circle of heartbreak equipped with love as their grappling hook, and rescue those

people by bringing them to the church of love. That is the mission. “Go into the world of heartbreak and bring My children to the church of love.”

“When Christ said to the disciples, Go forth in My name to gather into the church all who believe, He plainly set before them the necessity of maintaining simplicity. The less ostentation and show, the greater would be their influence for good. The disciples were to speak with the same simplicity with which Christ had spoken.”⁷

However, what do we do? We go out carrying with us dry doctrine, devoid of love, believing that our mission is to convince people that they are wrong. “This is the truth,” we say, and are often cruel in the name of truth. We hurt feelings. We don’t respect other people’s convictions. We plow on like a tractor destroying everything in its path. And we often find huge stones: insurmountable obstacles that discourage us and get us into thinking that accomplishing the mission is just too difficult nowadays.

Ellen White advises in this regard: “When you are laboring in a place where souls are just beginning to get the scales from their eyes, . . . be very careful not to present the truth in such a way as to arouse prejudice, and to close the door of the heart to the truth. Agree with the people on every point where you can consistently do so. Let them see that you love their souls, and want to be in harmony with them so far as possible.”⁸

If we want to fulfill the mission of love that Jesus entrusted to us, we must follow the inspired instructions: “Oh that I could impress upon all the necessity of laboring in the spirit of Jesus; for I have been shown that souls here in Europe have been

turned away from the truth because of a lack of tact and skill in presenting it.”⁹

FIND FIVE

It is not possible to make new disciples not knowing who it is you want to lead to Jesus. No work done without intentionality achieves results. The best way to get nowhere is to not know where you are going. Therefore, choose—among your neighbors, relatives, coworkers, etc.—five persons whom you would want to bring to Jesus. They don’t need to be friends at first. But they are people with whom it is easier to relate to and whom you will approach with the purpose of transforming them into disciples of Christ.

Why five? Because as time progresses, one or more will become discouraged, or will simply reject what you have to offer, no matter how hard you try to conquer their trust. But at least one of the five will reach the end of the journey. If you start with one and that person becomes discouraged, you may lose heart. Therefore, choose five. As they become disciples of Jesus, you may add new ones. But you should always keep a greenhouse full of prospective disciples.

PRAY, PRAY, PRAY

Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, pray, pray, and pray. Do not grow weary from praying. Although progress may seem to elude you, the Spirit of God is working invisibly, and when you least expect it, you’ll have a surprise.

I knew a woman who worked for the conversion of her husband for 30 years. The man seemed to have a heart of stone. She

did everything she could to reach his heart with the gospel, but nothing seemed to work.

One day she approached me with an exuberant smile and said, “Pastor, my husband has finally become a believer.”

“How did this miracle happen?” I asked.

Her answer was simple.

“For 30 years I spoke to my husband about Jesus and nothing happened, but last year I started talking to Jesus about my husband, and he was converted.”

There is no point in going out running after people if you do not start with prayer. Pray every day for the people you want to lead to Jesus. Intercessory prayer, in addition to helping the person for whom you pray, is good for you.

The adverse circumstances that Job was facing changed when he began to pray for his friends. “After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before” (Job 42:10).

“The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed, not only for himself, but for those who were opposing him. When he felt earnestly desirous that the souls that had trespassed against him might be helped, he himself received help. Let us pray, not only for ourselves, but for those who have hurt us, and are continuing to hurt us. Pray, pray, especially in your mind. Give not the Lord rest; for His ears are open to hear sincere, importunate prayers, when the soul is humbled before Him.”¹⁰

ROSARIO'S STORY

Jacinto Riquelme's widow lived with her son in an adobe house. Villagers commented that her husband had been killed

by his drug trafficking enemies. But Rosario, the pretty young widow, didn't care for those comments. Her only certainty was that her husband had died and that now she had to struggle to raise their 5-year-old son.

After much searching, she got a job as a seamstress in a sewing factory owned by Don Gilberto. That was the name preferred by his employees for the middle-aged gray-haired bachelor who lived with his mother in a house located in one of the uppity districts of the city. The gossip was that Don Gilberto wanted more than anything to start a family, but his mother would not allow it.

"Why does my child need to be cared for by another woman if I, his mother, am still alive?" Doña (Lady) Ramona told her friends when they met weekly in the parish to plan social welfare events.

Ramona was a stereotypical pious church woman who thrived on channeling the charity efforts of her church. She did not understand the Bible, had never read it, but carried one everywhere she went, with airs of being an accomplished student of divine mysteries. She was heavysset, had long hair tied in a bun, and had inherited a sewing factory for pants from her late husband. She was a force to be reckoned with, domineering, truth-telling, and authoritarian. Someone no one wanted to cross.

When she learned that her "child" was falling for the pretty widow, she immediately came to his defense, as a lion protecting her cub.

"Get out of my way! Leave my son alone!" She shouted one afternoon at the factory entrance, in front of several machine operators.

But she did not know Rosario. For behind the fragile facade, a stubborn and brave woman was hiding. So stubborn that she had married her first husband against the will of her parents, and so brave that she was now willing to push away any obstacle from her path, even if it answered to the name Ramona.

The gallant bachelor son of Doña Ramona was ostensibly a good catch. He had acceptably good looks, but a 40-year-old mama's boy did not make an ideal husband; and he seemed to be dominated by greed.

He wore cheap clothes chosen by his mother. His one pair of brown shoes were more than 4 years old. His stinginess was not a secret; he counted pennies and looked sick every time he had to pay his employees' wages. These things aside, Don Gilberto was a decent person and, because of his money, a suitor that any woman would be quick to accept—or better said, any woman as determined as Rosario, because you had to have guts to face the dreaded mother. But Rosario was Rosario, who, besides being brave, considered herself protected by the virgin Mary, Our Lady of the Rosary, in whose honor she bore her name.

At first the alleged romance between the employer and the employee was merely gossip. Perhaps because Don Gilberto was a sought-after bachelor, and Rosario was a young and beautiful widow. But over time the banter turned into reality. The day came when Don Gilberto spoke to Rosario.

"You and I could make a happy family, and I could help you raise Jacinto, Jr."

"But Don Gilberto," she answered, "with all due respect, you seem overly attached to your mother. Maybe she is the one who should choose a wife for you."

"I know, but she does not want you; rather, she does not want anyone, and I need to start a family. I like you."

That day the flame of greed lit up in Rosario's heart. She decided to completely conquer his affections, to the point of driving the poor man madly in love with her. After a while he began to skip meals, and spent two days in bed.

Doña Ramona, concerned with the situation of her son, sought the doctor, the parish priest, and the city's psychic healer. When she heard from her son's own lips that the problem was lovesickness, she exclaimed:

"Over my dead body."

That was the sentence declared upon a love that was not yet born, at least not in Rosario's heart. She was interested only in money and dreamed of the comfortable life that her suitor could provide for her child. So one day, upon Don Gilberto's insistence, she presented a possible solution.

"If you really love me, Don Gilberto, flee with me to the United States."

"But how?"

"Sell the factory, and let's go to some place where your mother will never find us."

This went on day after day after day, relentlessly, until Don Gilberto finally gave in to Rosario's suggestions, and did the unimaginable. He sold the factory, cut ties with his mother, and left with Rosario and Jacinto, Jr., to the United States.

Three years went by, and to Rosario they seemed like three decades. Don Gilberto turned out worse than she had expected. His flaws grew, and despite Rosario's courage and obstinacy, he began to wither like a sunflower at nightfall.

She spoke no English and was dependent on her husband for everything. He took advantage of the situation to completely control the life of his unhappy spouse. Regret was killing her. But what could she do? She was far from home, close to the Canadian border, had no resources, and, to top it all off, was expecting a child.

It was in those circumstances that the sad Mexican woman met Margarita, a Salvadoran nurse. Margarita told her about Jesus. She gave her recorded sermons and brought her to the church, where, after studying the Bible, she became a disciple of Jesus.

But life, which was already hell next to Don Gilberto, was made even worse when he began to mistreat her physically and to forbid her to go to church. To add insult to injury, on a cold morning in January Ramona appeared at the door and threatened to call the police and take them back as prisoners to Mexico for stealing.

It was terrible. Rosario had to submit to the mother's blackmail and wondered why God was allowing all this to happen now that she had come to know Jesus.

"Maybe that is precisely the reason," the pastor told her. "If this had happened to you before you met Jesus, where would you have gotten the strength to resist?"

"And what do I do now? You have no idea how terrible this woman is."

"Sister, I think your first mission field is your home, and the first people for whom you need to work are your husband and your mother-in-law."

"My greedy husband and my grumpy mother-in-law?"

“Yes, but the first step is to love them.”

“And how do I get rid of this resentment?”

“Pray to the Lord and study His Word every day. That is the secret of the victorious Christian life. In addition to praying, you want to conquer them for Jesus.

“You don’t know them, Pastor. They want nothing to do with the gospel and have now joined against me. I live in a prison. I’ve thought about running away and returning to my land, but I have no money and now have a new baby. How could I leave him without a father?”

From a human perspective, anyone would think that Rosario had gone into a jackals’ den, never to return to the light of day. But not Rosario. Because after the conversation with the pastor, she began to pray as never before. Her first request was for God to give her a new heart.

Every day, while her husband and mother-in-law were still asleep, she spent time reading the Word of God and praying. Week after week, month after month, until the miracle began to happen. The first change occurred in her, because she began to see previously unseen virtues in her mother-in-law and her husband. She served them with humility, and did not answer their insults in the same manner. She uttered no more scathing words, nor did she show contempt or sulkiness.

One day the husband, intrigued, asked:

“Are you sick?”

“Why?”

“Lately you seem quiet. This isn’t you.”

“What do you mean?”

“You have changed.”

“The gospel changes people. I’m happy.”

Don Gilberto was concerned and talked to his mother.

“Have you noticed a change in Rosario?”

“I didn’t want to say anything, son, but since I arrived I have noticed that Rosario is not the same. What have you done to her?”

“Nothing; that’s what worries me.”

“Careful, son, maybe this mad woman is betraying you. Are you sure the small boy is your son? Be careful.”

Every day the same innuendo.

Don Gilberto’s imagination began to create imaginary lovers for his poor wife. He went on to treat her even worse, and the worse he treated her, the more she responded with affection and sweetness. She prepared the dishes he liked, and cared about details that she knew mattered to him.

She treated her mother-in-law the same way.

On the birthday of Doña Ramona, Rosario got up early, prepared a delicious cake, and when her mother-in-law entered the room, she was pleasantly surprised. Rosario noticed the reaction and asked quietly:

“May I say a prayer for you?”

The mother-in-law nodded, eyes watery, and Rosario prayed:

“Dear Father, I thank you for the life of Doña Ramona; she’s a wonderful daughter of Yours. I thank You because she gave birth to my husband. Thank You for caring for her throughout her life and for giving her one more year of life.”

After the prayer the mother ran to her room. Rosario thought she was angry, but then she came out wearing a white dress and said:

“This occasion deserves a special dress.”

That day things began to change. Doña Ramona was less grumpy and more understanding. At least she didn't make Rosario's life as difficult as before.

One time the mother accidentally tripped and broke an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe that she had brought from Mexico. She wept, lamented the loss, apologized to the virgin, and spent almost all day praying regretfully. While the mother paid her self-imposed penance, Rosario picked up the pieces of plaster and reconstructed the image so lovingly and carefully that few would have been able to tell it had ever been broken. When leaving the room, the mother came across the image and shouted:

"Miracle, miracle!"

But it was no miracle, just a carefully glued figure of the virgin.

The loving attitude of the young woman had finally melted the rock-hard heart of Doña Ramona, and she immediately looked for her daughter-in-law. Rosario was in the garage arranging boxes when her mother-in-law entered:

"Daughter, please forgive me for everything I've done to you."

"What do you mean?"

"You're different; you're no longer the bratty girl I met."

"No, Mother. That Rosario died. I am now a new person who has been transformed by Jesus."

"What are you talking about?"

"The Bible says that if we are in Christ, we are new creatures."

"Where does it say that?"

Soon after, Doña Ramona and Don Gilberto began to study the Bible and to listen to recorded sermons. They also began attending church.

Today they are a happy family.



Total Member Involvement is going where the people are and mingling with them. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved:

- 1.** Choose five persons you would like to bring to Jesus.
- 2.** Conversion is the work of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, pray, pray, and pray. Do not grow weary from praying.
- 3.** Go where people gather. Learn to love people and feel compassion for them.

¹ E. G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 525.

² E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 296.

³ E. G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 287.

⁴ E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 113.

⁵ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), p. 343.

⁶ E. G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 4.

⁷ E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 28.

⁸ E. G. White, *Evangelism*, pp. 140, 141.

⁹ E. G. White, in *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of Seventh-day Adventists* (Basel, Switz.: Imprimerie Polyglotte, 1886), p. 122.

¹⁰ E. G. White, *Prayer* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 2002), p. 244.

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CHAPTER 5

HOW TO MAKE A DISCIPLE, PART 2

THE STORY YOU JUST READ SHOWS IN A PRACTICAL manner the power of prayer and the strength of a life transformed and full of love as an instrument in the making of new disciples. No one can resist the attraction of love. The world will not perish for lack of religion, but it will for lack of love. The first evidence that Jesus has made a change in the experience of new disciples is not how much doctrine they know, but their capacity to love.

“We deny Jesus Christ as the One who taketh away the sins of the world if we do not, after accepting the truth, reveal to the world the sanctifying effects of the truth on our own characters. If we are not better men and women, if we are not more kind-hearted, more pitiful, more courteous, more full of tenderness and love, if we do not manifest to others the love that led Jesus to the world on His mission of mercy, we are not witnesses to the world of the power of Jesus Christ.”¹

But love is only one link in the chain. If you want to succeed in making new disciples, you need to go looking for candidates.

FIND A PRAYER PARTNER

The Bible contains this promise of Jesus: “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:19).

“Again, truly I tell you” shows that this is an issue that human beings have difficulty understanding. Jesus has to repeat it again and again. But the promise is concrete and certain. It does not fail. God answers the prayers of two or more of His children when they agree to ask about anything. Therefore, find a prayer partner and together pray for your friends. God will answer from heaven, and they will become new disciples.

Jesus taught His disciples to work this way. No one fulfilled the mission alone.

“Calling the twelve about Him, Jesus bade them go out two and two through the towns and villages. None were sent forth alone, but brother was associated with brother, friend with friend. Thus they could help and encourage each other, counseling and praying together, each one’s strength supplementing the other’s weakness. In the same manner He afterward sent forth the seventy. It was the Savior’s purpose that the messengers of the gospel should be associated in this way. In our own time evangelistic work would be far more successful if this example were more closely followed.”²

NOBODY WANTS TO CHANGE THEIR RELIGION

Another thing you should consider when looking for people to make them disciples for Christ is that no one, with very rare exceptions, wants to change their religion. Do not start

your approach to people by talking about religious subjects. Remember this mantra: “If you want to be my friend, do not tell me about your football team or your political party or your religion, because in these three areas, each has their own team.”

As you approach others, talk to them about what interests them, not about what’s important and true for you. People who are ignorant of the gospel are not interested in knowing anything about the Sabbath, the law, or Revelation’s beasts. They do not want to stop drinking coffee or eating pork. They have their lifestyle and will become upset if someone—especially a stranger—wants to meddle in their private lives. Therefore, if you want to make new disciples, follow the Master’s example.

“Jesus saw in every soul one to whom must be given the call to His kingdom. He reached the hearts of the people by going among them as one who desired their good. He sought them in the public streets, in private houses, on the boats, in the synagogue, by the shores of the lake, and at the marriage feast. He met them at their daily vocations, and manifested an interest in their secular affairs. He carried His instruction into the household, bringing families in their own homes under the influence of His divine presence. His strong personal sympathy helped to win hearts.”³

Notice that Jesus approached people with the purpose of bringing them to His kingdom, but He spoke to them of “secular affairs.”

FISHERS

Jesus said to His first disciples: “Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people” (Matthew 4:19). How do you catch fish? It requires patience. You’ll probably wait a long

time for the fish to take the bait. And what do you use as bait? Generally night crawlers, crickets, shrimp, squid, or the like. You would never place a piece of chocolate on your hook, although you may personally love chocolate. Nor would you bait your hook with a piece of lettuce or tomato, no matter how healthy they may be. This is for one basic reason: fish do not like chocolate, lettuce, or tomato. They like worms and similar things, as disgusting and filthy as they may be.

In the blessed work of looking for people to make into disciples, you need to approach them with their interests in mind. These may be sports, cars, food, money, or whatever. But this is key in becoming their friends.

BECOME A FRIEND

People need to first be attracted to you, whom they can see, so that later they will be attracted to Jesus, whom they cannot see. You will fail in your attempt to bring people to Christ if you want to indoctrinate people before you have won their friendship. People do not follow strangers. They follow friends.

Do you want to succeed in leading a person to Jesus? Remember the principle that people follow only their friends. Who leads a young person to drugs? Their friends. Most young persons who start using drugs know that they are falling into an abyss of destruction, with no exit in sight. But the power of friendship is so great that they agree to follow their friends despite the risk. Why would a person reject the invitation to come to church after having been conquered by friendship?

But building friendships takes time. Nobody becomes friends with someone in a week or a month. Friendship is a

plant that takes time to grow and requires cultivation, but it is the only method that Jesus gave us to accomplish the mission. Take every opportunity to cultivate friendships with others.

“When invited to a feast, Christ accepted the invitation, that He might, while sitting at the table, sow the seeds of truth in the hearts of those present. He knew that the seed thus sown would spring up and bring forth fruit. He knew that some of those sitting at meat with Him would afterward respond to His call, ‘Follow Me.’ Ours is the privilege of studying Christ’s manner of teaching as He went from place to place, everywhere sowing the seeds of truth.”⁴

FOLLOW JESUS’ METHOD

The best way to befriend someone in order to make a disciple is to follow the method that the Master Himself taught us.

“If you would approach the people acceptably, humble your hearts before God, and learn His ways. We shall gain much instruction for our work from a study of Christ’s methods of labor and His manner of meeting the people.”⁵

Why should we humble ourselves? Because the natural man does not easily subject to God’s teachings. And Ellen White says that we must humble our hearts “and learn His ways.”

Which ways and methods are we to learn? She responds:

“Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me.’”⁶

DO GOOD TO PEOPLE

What is the first thing Jesus did? He “mingled with men as one who desired their good.” Do the same. Approach people as one who wants to do well. Do not hurry. If in the physical realm it takes at least nine months for a child to be born, in the spiritual realm it also takes time for a person to be born into the kingdom of God. Thus invest time in becoming a friend of the person without giving the impression that you want to “convert” him or her, or that you want to change their religion. Find out what they like and talk to them about these issues.

“The divine commission needs no reform. Christ’s way of presenting truth cannot be improved upon. The Savior gave the disciples practical lessons, teaching them how to work in such a way as to make souls glad in the truth. He sympathized with the weary, the heavy laden, the oppressed. He fed the hungry and healed the sick. Constantly He went about doing good. By the good He accomplished, by His loving words and kindly deeds, He interpreted the gospel to men.”⁷

SHOW THEM SYMPATHY

Sympathy attracts. If Christ lives in you and you reflect His character, your life will be like a magnet that will attract people. A greeting, a gesture of courtesy or kindness, a compliment, a word of appreciation, are shows of sympathy that conquer the hearts of neighbors, relatives, and coworkers or fellow students.

“If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”⁸

Here are some ways of approaching someone (for instance, your neighbor) to “do good”:

1. Help them carry their purchases.
2. Bring them a plate of food when you prepare something special.
3. Offer to take care of their house while they travel.
4. Offer to shovel snow from their driveway.
5. Offer to mow their lawn.
6. Offer to help in picking up leaves in the fall.
7. Give them a ride if needed.
8. Invite them to your house.
9. Offer to pick up their mail when they travel.
10. Find out their birthday and bring them a present.
11. Help with paperwork if needed.
12. Help with some home repairs if you have the skills.
13. Offer to wash their car.

FULFILLING PEOPLE'S NEEDS

All human beings, regardless of race, social status, nationality, religion, or philosophy, face difficulties at some point. They can involve family, finances, relationships, profession, health, or existential questions. Everyone, without exception, at some point feels lonely, sad, sorry, and unable to find a solution to their problem. In such moments the human tendency is to seek help, and in the process to open their hearts to others. They usually do this with a friend. That's the opportunity to tell them about Jesus. It is true that most people do not want to change their religion or

their church. But it is also true that in the hour of need, everyone looks for a friend. And Christ's disciples will be present to point to Him as the only true solution to the human drama.

Notice what the Spirit of Prophecy says:

"Christ's work in behalf of man is not finished. It continues today. In like manner His ambassadors are to preach the gospel and to reveal His pitying love for lost and perishing souls. By an unselfish interest in those who need help they are to give a practical demonstration of the truth of the gospel. Much more than mere sermonizing is included in this work. The evangelization of the world is the work God has given to those who go forth in His name. They are to be colaborers with Christ, revealing to those ready to perish His tender, pitying love."⁹

Twice this quote says that God's love is to be manifested to the lost. "His ambassadors are to preach the gospel and to reveal His pitying love," and His followers are "to be colaborers with Christ, revealing to those ready to perish His tender, pitying love."

When the person is going through difficult times, they are willing to do what it takes to find a way out. Who could have imagined, for instance, that the proud Syrian captain Naaman would cross the desert in search of the prophet and submerge himself seven times in the Jordan, which he considered inferior to any river in his homeland? But that's how human beings react in the time of need. And God wants His disciples to be the instruments of His love in helping people.

GAIN THEIR TRUST

Let's go back to the time factor. Gaining a person's trust is not something that happens instantaneously. Trust is the result

of time and shared experiences. Learn to hear. Everyone needs to be heard. Pay attention to what people are saying. Do not show impatience even when you think that what they are saying seems irrelevant. A loyal friend laughs at your jokes, even if they are not good, and sympathizes with your problems no matter if they are serious or not. If you do not want to hear others, how do you expect them to hear you?

SHARE MATERIALS

At some point the people with whom you are working will show interest in spiritual matters. It will happen. In sharing with you, they will notice that there is something different about you. They may not be conscious of it, but they are seeing the character of Jesus Christ reflected in your life. It is God's glory manifested in the way you live.

When you perceive your friend's interest in spiritual matters, it's time to introduce Bible truth. Now is the time for Bible studies. If you know how to give them, go ahead. But what if you don't know how to give Bible studies? Not all disciples become experts at giving Bible studies. Teaching is a gift that God has not granted to all believers.

Paul says: "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching" (Romans 12:4-7, NASB).

So what if you did not receive the gift of teaching, and you feel unable to give Bible studies?

Do not worry. There are many resources today. There are Bible studies on CD, DVD, and other electronic resources. Find these tools and share them with your friend; or better yet, watch them together if feasible. This is also an opportunity to offer reading materials that will help them understand the message of salvation and begin to grow in their Christian experience.

TEACH THEM HOW TO MAKE DISCIPLES AS WELL

The process of discipleship does not end with baptism. If you follow all the steps outlined in Christ's method and lead a person to Jesus, but believe that your mission ends the moment the person is baptized, you are deceived. You may have brought a new member into the church, but not a disciple.

As a disciple of Christ responsible for these new disciples, you will need to make sure that they are constantly praying, studying the Bible every day, and making new disciples themselves. The job description of disciple maker includes making sure that your friend has a copy of the Sabbath school quarterly and reading material for daily devotions.

At the same time, you need to stress to the new believer that a disciple is one who decides to follow Jesus and makes disciples, just as He did. Ellen White wrote: "Christians who are constantly growing in earnestness, in zeal, in fervor, in love—such Christians never backslide."¹⁰ "It is those who are not engaged in this unselfish labor who have a sickly experience, and become worn out with struggling, doubting, murmuring,

sinning, and repenting, until they lose all sense as to what constitutes genuine religion.”¹¹

SAD CONSEQUENCES

The new believer that becomes a disciple will rarely falter in their faith. They are concerned about growing in Christ, and looking for other people to make them into disciples. They have no time for discouragement or despondency. “It is those who are not engaged in this unselfish labor who have a sickly experience, and become worn out with struggling, doubting, murmuring, sinning, and repenting, until they lose all sense as to what constitutes genuine religion.”

This is the reason our mission is to make disciples of Christ. We cannot afford to have a church full of mere believers or members. If we neglect the work of making disciples, we run the risk of filling the church with troublemakers that will hinder the fulfillment of the mission.

“There are many who profess the name of Christ whose hearts are not engaged in His service. They have simply arrayed themselves in a profession of godliness, and by this very act they have made greater their condemnation, and have become more deceptive and more successful agents of Satan in the ruin of souls.”¹²

And remember that a disciple never ceases to grow. Growth is the evidence of a healthy Christianity. Therefore, you and your new disciple, and the disciples that person makes, will continue to grow for eternity. “Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).



Total Member Involvement is about making disciples.

Here are some practical ways to become personally involved:

- 1.** Find a prayer partner and pray together for your friends.
- 2.** Take every opportunity to cultivate friendships with others.
- 3.** Talk to people about what they want, not about what you want.

¹ Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1964), p. 306.

² E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 350.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁴ E. G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 58.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁶ E. G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

⁷ E. G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, p. 56.

⁸ E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 189.

⁹ E. G. White, *Counsels for the Church*, p. 308.

¹⁰ E. G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 107.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

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CHAPTER 6

BENEFITS OF BEING A RECEPTIVE CHURCH

THE YEAR WAS 1979. DISCO MUSIC WAS THE hot thing in Brazil. Those were the days of *Grease*—men in tight jeans and slicked-back hair. Women wore short skirts and colorful socks.

One September night a young man with a John Travolta hairdo walked in through the front door of our church. The boy smelled of marijuana and showed muscular arms full of tattoos. As he approached the church he saw the three young receptionists at the door of the church, nicely dressed, with a bright smile on their faces.

The “bad wolf” began to drool at the sight of innocent “sheep” from the Lord’s flock. He approached the door full of gallantries, but before he could say anything, one of them spoke to him: “Hello; welcome to the house of God. This is your family; we appreciate your visit; please come in.”

The young man realized that he was being invited to church, and reacted, “No . . . no, I was just passing . . .”

“Please come. We’ve been waiting for you. Come in; you are important to God and to us.”

The young women did not give him time to think. Before he knew it, he was sitting in a pew, listening to a pastor’s sermon.

Almost 40 years have passed since that incident. That young man has been an Adventist pastor for several decades.

We must ask the question. What would have happened if instead of those friendly and presentable young women, the people at the door had been well-intentioned sourpusses, lacking the sympathy and affection needed to properly welcome a first-time visitor to the church?

The personal efforts of members to lead people to Jesus and transform them into new disciples will fail if the church is not receptive, captivating, and attractive. That work begins at the door. Receptionists should be the nicest people in the church, dressed nicely and modestly. They are the face of the church.

CHANGING THE FACE OF YOUR CHURCH

Ultimately, what should attract people to the church is neither the building nor the demeanor of believers; it should be Jesus. But the first impression counts a lot for the person who comes to church for the first time. He or she is living an early experience with Christ and is still influenced by the things they see or don’t see.

God’s house should showcase cleanliness, simplicity, and austerity. Luxury is not necessary, but no one should perceive signs of carelessness and negligence. Seating should be comfortable, lights should work, decor should be tasteful, and the sound system should produce clear sound. These are important details

that people perceive the moment they enter. There are churches that care about everything but the sound. They forget that people go to church to hear the Word of God and if they can't hear it well, they will not return.

And it's not enough to worry about the interior of the church. The outside matters also. The building should have strong curb appeal. Walls should be nicely painted, landscaping should be attractive, and a sign should identify the church. When the temple is tastefully arranged on the outside, some people may come in if only out of curiosity. The building must give the impression that it is a place where God meets with human beings and walks with them, sharing their hopes and dreams.

LOVE AND SMILE

In the outside world few people care about others. Millions of people pass each other on the street and even in the same building without greeting each other. In the church it should be different. Each member must learn to greet people without knowing them. Just looking at a stranger should inspire us to smile kindly and to offer help if necessary.

People should leave the church so impacted by the courtesy and kindness of the church members that they feel encouraged to return. The Spirit of Prophecy says: "The last message of mercy to be given to the world is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them."¹

Our message to the world at the time in which we live is not just a conglomeration of theoretical concepts, but the revelation of God's loving character, reproduced in the lives of the believers.

The church must be aware of their missionary responsibility. People who come for the first time need to see the “revelation of God’s loving character” in the life of every believer. And this will happen in a simple and natural manner when every believer constantly prays, studies the Bible daily, and seeks someone to make them a disciple of Jesus. Remember: “Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim His own.”²

BE PATIENT WITH NEW CONVERTS

The life of the new disciple is a long journey toward growth. “But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day” (Proverbs 4:18, ESV). Accept people as they are and not as you would like them to be. Love them and show them what that love looks like in practice.

Ellen White counsels: “If you would approach the people acceptably, humble your hearts before God, and learn His ways. We shall gain much instruction for our work from a study of Christ’s methods of labor and His manner of meeting the people.”³

If Jesus were on earth today, how would He treat people who come to church for the first time? How did He treat the sinner who wiped His feet with nard ointment? While some religious leaders criticized her, Jesus accepted the expression of gratitude of this woman.

“There has been among us as a people a lack of deep, earnest, soul-touching sympathy and love for the tempted and the erring. Many have manifested great coldness and sinful neglect. . . . The newly converted soul often has fierce conflicts

with established habits or with some special form of temptation, and, being overcome by some master passion or tendency, he is guilty of indiscretion or actual wrong. It is then that energy, tact, and wisdom are required of his brethren, that he may be restored to spiritual health.”⁴

I once visited a church where one of the leaders was at the door “monitoring” the clothing worn by worshippers. He wore thick glasses and looked like a male version of Miss Manners. He seemed unaware, but with his attitude he was scaring away many sincere people who came for the first time and were being mentored by the disciple makers of the church. I don’t think this church member exhibited “hostility” on purpose. Surely he thought he was defending the standards of the church. But if the servant of the Lord were alive, she would say:

“It is not yet too late to redeem the neglects of the past. Let there be a revival of the first love, the first ardor. Search out the ones you have driven away, bind up by confession the wounds you have made. Come close to the great Heart of pitying love, and let the current of that divine compassion flow into your heart and from you to the hearts of others. Let the tenderness and mercy that Jesus has revealed in His own precious life be an example to us of the manner in which we should treat our fellow beings, especially those who are our brethren in Christ.”⁵

Throughout time there have been zealous saints who—instead of transforming the church into a honeycomb that attracts with its sweet product—have made it into a private club of close-minded people. I’m impressed by Ellen White’s words when she wrote: “Let the current of that divine compassion flow into your heart.” This harkens back to the need of daily

communion with Jesus enabled by daily Bible study, constant prayer, and the action of leading another person to Jesus. That is the only way that the flow of divine compassion is channeled into our hearts.

It's never too late to rethink our attitudes. Nobody ever loses by surrendering to Jesus and seeing things through the divine prism and not from the perspective of our habits and traditions.

Inspired counsel was always: "We are to go forth to proclaim the goodness of God and to make plain His real character before the people. We are to reflect His glory."⁶

However, even in her times she asked: "Have we done this in the past? Have we revealed the character of our Lord by precept and example?"⁷

I believe that we should ask ourselves the same question today, and request of Him help to follow His teachings.

The other day someone asked me if we should allow worldly practices to enter freely into the church. My answer is no. God has eternal principles that transcend times, culture, and generational changes. These principles are encapsulated in God's holy law. But I think that healthy cultural practices can be borrowed and supported, in the same loving spirit with which Jesus taught the lessons of His kingdom within the culture of His times. Love is the basis of the Christian experience. Discipleship devoid of love is no discipleship.

Many years ago I had in my church a young woman who liked to wear her hair extra-short. When seen from the back, she was sometimes mistaken for a man. The elders made it their job to convince her to let her hair grow longer, but to no avail.

So they took away her office as Sabbath school superintendent, then told her she couldn't be the pianist. No disciplinary action solved the problem. She said she liked short hair and brooked no discussion.

Years later I found her at a lay ministries convention, and the first thing I noticed was her beautiful long hair.

"Didn't you say you did not like long hair?" I asked, remembering the difficult times she had gone through.

She smiled and answered.

"Hey, Pastor, in all truth, I didn't like it, but I'm dating a young man I love very much, and he loves long hair, and you know what? I've started to like it too."

The change had been made. The inspiration was love. If the church in those days had led her to a love relationship with Christ instead of taking away her functions, she might have made the changes they were seeking.

DON'T TELL PEOPLE THEY ARE "VISITORS"

If someone invites you to their house for dinner and reminds you on arrival and repeatedly that you are a guest, he may be telling you that you are not part of the family, that you are only welcome that one time and shouldn't necessarily expect to be invited back. This is the inadvertent message we are giving people when we call them "visitors."

People who come for the first time are already part of the family; do not make them feel like strangers. Call them sisters or brothers without fear. Tell them that they are part of the family, and that we've been waiting a long time for them. In a survey we did in South America several years ago, we asked first-time

visitors if there was anything they disliked about their experience, and many of them said they didn't like having been called "visitor."

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Many churches have nice potluck lunches after the Sabbath service. Each family brings their food to share with other families. People who come for the first time are invited to stay and partake of the lunch.

The members should be aware that this is an opportunity for new believers to feel the love of the church. The goal is not to sit down to lunch next to the same friends every Saturday, but to look for new people and sit with them and make them feel part of the family. In this context of fellowship, the new convert is integrated into the life of the church almost without noticing it.

I recall a man whose life was in ruins. He had been unfaithful to his wife, and she wanted to put an end to their marriage. The man did not know what to do, and in the midst of despair accepted an invitation to go to church. At the end of the service he was invited to stay for lunch, and because he had asked the church to pray for their problem, a member who before accepting Christ had gone through a similar situation sat at a table with this man and shared his own story while eating lunch. He told him that God had done for him what he could not do alone, and that now he and his wife and children were a happy family.

That powerful testimony, taken from real life and shared during lunch, inspired in this man the desire to continue studying the Bible, and today he is also a disciple maker.

THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

Making new disciples is simple if every current disciple is aware of his or her mission, follows the methods of Christ, and goes in search of people to lead them to the Master. On the other hand, the church is truly God's church if their members are loving, merciful, and ready to heal the wounds of those who come.



Total Member Involvement is about fulfilling the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20). Here are some practical ways to become personally involved:

1. Accept people as they are and not as you would like them to be.
2. Share your testimony with your friends. Tell them how you found Jesus, and what He means to your life.
3. Smile and be enthusiastic about your faith in the Lord as you share.

¹ E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 415, 416.

² E. G. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 274.

³ E. G. White, *Evangelism*, p. 53.

⁴ E. G. White, *Counsels for the Church*, p. 254.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁶ E. G. White, *Faith and Works*, p. 61.

⁷ *Ibid.*

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CHAPTER 7

THE DISCIPLE AND THE BIBLE

A DISCIPLE FOLLOWS THE MASTER AND DOES what his or her Teacher teaches. Jesus is the Master, and one of His first lessons is the importance of the Bible in the life of the disciple. He said: “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me” (John 5:39).

It is in searching the Scriptures that the disciple finds eternal life. The verse talks about diligent study (the King James Version uses the word “search”), and it means to study with dedication. It is more than a simple reading. It is a meditative, reflective, and patient reading. It takes time. It cannot be accomplished in 10 minutes. The Master taught us the importance of studying His Word by example. Discipleship is not a matter of theory, but a life of practice.

“In childhood, youth, and manhood, Jesus studied the Scriptures. As a little child He was daily at His mother’s knee taught from the scrolls of the prophets. In His youth the early morning and the evening twilight often found Him alone on the

mountainside or among the trees of the forest, spending a quiet hour in prayer and the study of God's Word. During His ministry His intimate acquaintance with the Scriptures testifies to His diligence in their study. And since He gained knowledge as we may gain it, His wonderful power, both mental and spiritual, is a testimony to the value of the Bible as a means of education."¹

In the wilderness of temptation Jesus taught that it is not possible to live a victorious life without knowledge of the Word. The way He used Scripture was extraordinary. The enemy came to Him with an open Bible, but using it out of context, distorting it, trying to bring Jesus to distrust the Word of God. Anyone who did not know the Scriptures well would be easy prey to his wiles. This was not the case with Jesus. And the Master defeated the enemy with Scripture itself.

"The Word of God was Christ's assurance of His divine mission. He had come to live as a man among men, and it was the Word that declared His connection with heaven. It was Satan's purpose to cause Him to doubt that Word. If Christ's confidence in God could be shaken, Satan knew that the victory in the whole controversy would be his. He could overcome Jesus. He hoped that under the force of despondency and extreme hunger, Christ would lose faith in His Father, and work a miracle in His own behalf. Had He done this, the plan of salvation would have been broken."²

The guarantee of spiritual strength for Christ's disciples today is also found in God's Word.

"A familiar acquaintance with the Scriptures sharpens the discerning powers, and fortifies the soul against the attacks of Satan. The Bible is the sword of the Spirit, which will never fail

to vanquish the adversary. It is the only true guide in all matters of faith and practice. The reason why Satan has so great control over the minds and hearts of men is that they have not made the Word of God the man of their counsel, and all their ways have not been tried by the true test. The Bible will show us what course we must pursue to become heirs of glory.”³

KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORD

A disciple needs to know and trust the Word of God to make other disciples. It is not a simple theoretical knowledge. If I have a doctoral degree and spend most of my time studying the divine mysteries and writing about them but do not live out biblical truths nor influence others to become disciples, I am not a disciple. I may be a scholar, but not a disciple. A disciple is one who knows the Bible and applies it to daily living, and to making disciples out of other persons.

Through daily Bible study we develop fellowship with Jesus. The result is the transformation of the disciple into the likeness of his or her Master. Paul says, “And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

To contemplate the “Lord’s glory” is not a mystical experience. It’s not an act of Transcendental Meditation. It is a practical experience of fellowshiping with Christ through His Word.

“The great motive powers of the soul are faith, hope, and love; and it is to these that Bible study, rightly pursued, appeals. The outward beauty of the Bible, the beauty of imagery and expression, is but the setting, as it were, for its real treasure—the

beauty of holiness. In its record of the men who walked with God, we may catch glimpses of His glory. In the One “altogether lovely” we behold Him, of whom all beauty of earth and heaven is but a dim reflection. ‘I, if I be lifted up,’ He said, ‘will draw all men unto me’ (John 12:32, KJV). As the student of the Bible beholds the Redeemer, there is awakened in the soul the mysterious power of faith, adoration, and love. Upon the vision of Christ the gaze is fixed, and the beholder grows into the likeness of that which he adores.”⁴

No disciple can grow and be transformed into the likeness of his Master without daily study of God’s Word.

THE PURPOSE OF SCRIPTURE

The purpose of Scripture is to bring us to Jesus. The whole Bible points to Jesus. The Master Himself demonstrated this when, after quoting from the Bible in the desert, “he went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing’” (Luke 4:16-21).

Do you get the sense that Jesus knew that the Scriptures pointed to Him? He connected the diligent study of the Scriptures

to having eternal life. Eternal life is the result of knowing Him. “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

“It was thus that the early disciples gained their likeness to the dear Savior. When those disciples heard the words of Jesus, they felt their need of Him. They sought, they found, they followed Him. They were with Him in the house, at the table, in the closet, in the field. They were with Him as pupils with a teacher, daily receiving from His lips lessons of holy truth. They looked to Him, as servants to their master, to learn their duty. Those disciples were men ‘subject to like passions as we are.’ James 5:17, KJV. They had the same battle with sin to fight. They needed the same grace, in order to live a holy life.”⁵

We can enjoy that same experience today.

DIFFICULTIES ALONG THE WAY

The power of the Christian resides in God’s Word. The disciple who tries to follow Jesus without meditating on the Bible every day is doomed to spiritual death. Just as a person needs physical nourishment every day to stay healthy, the believer needs to seek spiritual food. Paul says, “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (Ephesians 6:13).

Daily study of the Bible is part of God’s armor. But the problem is that sinful nature does not like fellowship with God. It would do anything rather than stay at the feet of Christ. But disciples will never reach the end of their journey unless they learn to obtain spiritual nourishment. And the pursuit of this

nourishment is not automatic or random; it obeys a conscious decision and intentionality.

RESPECT FOR SCRIPTURE

Another fact that merits mentioning is that Jesus highly respected the Scriptures. Notice what He said: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:17-19).

In these verses Jesus refers to “the Law” and “the Prophets.” That was the name of the Bible in the Old Testament. The Law referred to the five books of the Pentateuch, and the Prophets were the books written by Old Testament prophets. Jesus said, “I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.”

Jesus was God, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. If anyone had the authority to change any of what was written, it was He. But He did not. He respected Scripture at all times.

When someone asked Him something, He often did not respond in His own words, but used Bible statements to answer. He could have given His own answers, but He did not. He quoted Scripture to show their value and authority. In the four Gospels we find that Jesus quoted Scripture numerous times. As His follower, a true disciple needs to respect the Scriptures.

A disciple respects the context, and does not violate the true meaning of God's words, as Satan did in the wilderness.

Disciples do what the Master teaches them, and if Jesus respected the Scriptures, true disciples will do the same.

THE EXPOSITION OF HIS WORD

But Jesus did not only use the Scriptures in His daily devotions and in dialogue with people; He also used them in preaching. In the Sermon on the Mount, for example, He repeated many times the expression "You have heard that it was said, . . . but I say." Jesus directed the minds of His hearers to the Scriptures. "You have heard that it was said." He did not change anything, and yet He gave it new meaning: "But I say."

Legalism had turned eternal principles into lifeless regulations. People lived concerned only with the appearance of things. They condemned adultery. Woe to the person who was caught in adultery! They were stoned to death in the public square. But nobody bothered with the principles of faithfulness and purity. Everyone was careful not to be seen, but no one watched heart and mind. Both were full of filth and immorality.

The same Pharisees who were watching the adulterous woman to condemn her were looking at her with lustful eyes. Until Jesus came. He did not come to change what was written. "You have heard that it was said," He repeated many times. "But I say." In other words: "I give a new meaning to what has already been written." He brought out the life that the rules had extinguished.

Jesus came into the world to conquer hearts and create new life. The Jews looked to the commandments as rules or prohibitions: "Thou shalt not kill" (because if you kill, you die). But

Jesus taught: (If you love Me,) “thou shalt not kill.” It was the same, but different. Love made the difference.

PREACHING DISCIPLES

Here we also find a warning for disciples who preach. Our mission is to preach using the Bible, but using it to give life, with meaning and relevance. Why would a book as old as the Bible hold any significance for people living today? That is the mission of the preacher. Start with Scripture, but don't stay with the past, the history, the geography, and the archaeology of the times. Seek to draw life lessons for the dramas and problems people face nowadays. This is what we are called to do as disciples.

MAKING DISCIPLES WITH THE WORD

Jesus didn't limit His use of Scripture to public preaching. He also used it in personal ministry, when speaking to one or two people. He did so repeatedly. His authority lay not only in His personal charisma, but in the fact that He used the Word of God as the basis of everything He said.

One of the most striking examples of this is perhaps His encounter with two disciples on the road to Emmaus after the resurrection. The sad disciples were returning to Jerusalem. They believed that Jesus had died and that all the hopes they had placed in the Messiah had gone downhill. “He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27).

Jesus took them to the Scriptures and showed them that there was no reason for despair. He said that what seemed like defeat, was actually the beginning of victory. They later said: “Did not our hearts burn . . . [when] He opened to us the Scriptures?” (verse 32, ESV). This is what happens when a disciple uses Scripture.

LESSON LEARNED

The disciples also learned to use the Scriptures as the basis of their teaching. True disciples use Scripture to support their statements. Look at Peter’s example when the time came to replace Judas.

Jesus was gone, and they were facing a problem. How did they solve it? “In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty), and said, ‘Brothers and sisters, the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. He was one of our number and shared in our ministry’” (Acts 1:15-17).

But it was not just Peter. All the apostles used the Scriptures with balance and wisdom. There are hundreds of references to the Old Testament in the writings of the apostles. They respected and used the Scriptures. And with that attitude they taught us that true disciples know the Bible, study it daily, apply it to their personal experience, use it in preaching and when the time comes to make decisions.

God’s Word has an extraordinary power. When there was nothing, the heavens and the earth were created by the power of His Word. “He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it

stood fast,” says the psalmist (Psalm 33:9). When Jesus was on earth, by the power of His Word He also made paralytics walk, raised the dead, healed lepers, and much more. Today we have the Written Word with us. And with it we can do wonders in the lives of people. So Paul advises, “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. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly” (2 Timothy 2:15, 16).

Would you like to be an approved disciple today?



Total Member Involvement is about a beggar telling other beggars where to find bread. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved:

1. Spend time with the Word of God. Meditate in the Word and learn as much as you can from the fountain of truth.
2. Teach the Word to your friends. Teach a Bible seminar or lead an evangelistic meeting.
3. Bake bread and share a loaf with your neighbors.

¹ E. G. White, *Education*, p. 185.

² E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 119.

³ Ellen G. White, *Our High Calling* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1961), p. 31.

⁴ E. G. White, *Education*, p. 192.

⁵ E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 72, 73.

8

CHAPTER 8

THE DISCIPLE AND PRAYER

BEING A DISCIPLE OF JESUS MEANS TO FOLLOW Him and walk with Him. It is not a mystical or romantic ideal, but a real and practical experience. It is about studying the Bible every day, training other disciples, and conversing with Jesus through prayer.

Prayer is to spiritual life what breathing is to physical life. Ellen White wrote the following about prayer: “Daily prayer is as essential to growth in grace, and even to spiritual life itself, as is temporal food to physical well-being. We should accustom ourselves to often lift the thoughts to God in prayer. If the mind wanders, we must bring it back; by persevering effort, habit will finally make it easy. We cannot for one moment separate ourselves from Christ with safety. We may have His presence to attend us at every step, but only by observing the conditions which He has Himself laid down.”¹

Jesus taught that there is no Christian life without prayer. We, as disciples, need to learn to pray much more than we usually pray. The conundrum we face is that because of our selfish

nature, even our prayers are tainted with self-centeredness. We pray most of the time asking God to solve our problems: to heal us, to help us, to take care of us, and on and on.

This is not bad in itself, but when prayer is limited to endless asking, something does not bode well for our Christian experience. True disciples must pray a lot, but not just for themselves. One example is Daniel.

DANIEL'S EXAMPLE

In Daniel 9 we find an intercessory prayer. If you read the whole prayer, you will notice that at no time does Daniel ask for himself. His prayer is for the people of Israel. "Now, our God, hear the prayers and petitions of your servant. For your sake, Lord, look with favor on your desolate sanctuary. Give ear, our God, and hear; open your eyes and see the desolation of the city that bears your Name. We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy" (Daniel 9:17, 18).

When Daniel prayed this prayer, the people of Israel lived under the authority of the Babylonian Empire. The city of Jerusalem was in ruins; the Temple, which symbolized the presence of God, was half destroyed, and Daniel was praying for his people and the restoration of the city.

Undoubtedly, like any other human being, the prophet faced personal difficulties, but his concern for the city and the Israelites was much greater than his concern for his own problems.

THE EXAMPLE OF JOB

The patriarch also faced terrible difficulties. He had lost everything. He was destitute and sick, and didn't know what

to do. Do you think that in these circumstances it would have been wrong to pray to God for help? Of course not, and Job certainly asked God many times to help solve these problems, but apparently nothing happened. Then he changed the focus of his prayers and began to intercede for his friends. Notice the result: "After Job had prayed for his friends, the Lord restored his fortunes and gave him twice as much as he had before" (Job 42:10).

Note: "The Lord restored his fortunes." This means that God answered the prayer of the prophet on behalf of his friends, but He also attended to Job. That's the beauty of intercessory prayer.

"Let us strive to walk in the light as Christ is in the light. The Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed, not only for himself, but for those who were opposing him. When he felt earnestly desirous that the souls that had trespassed against him might be helped, he himself received help. Let us pray, not only for ourselves, but for those who have hurt us, and are continuing to hurt us. Pray, pray, especially in your mind. Give not the Lord rest; for His ears are open to hear sincere, importunate prayers, when the soul is humbled before Him."²

The true disciple must be a man or a woman of prayer. You may ask for God's favor, but you must also pray for others, especially for those you want to bring to the feet of Jesus.

"As we seek to win others to Christ, bearing the burden of souls in our prayers, our own hearts will throb with the quickening influence of God's grace; our own affections will glow with more divine fervor; our whole Christian life will be more of a reality, more earnest, more prayerful."³

INTERCESSORS IN PRAYER

Jesus knew that the disciples, however well intentioned, were doomed to defeat if they attempted to walk the Christian journey by themselves. So He prayed for us. “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31, 32).

There are two components to this text. First, Jesus felt compassion for Peter and His other disciples and prayed for them. To Peter He said: “I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail.” Then He gives him an order. “And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” Peter the disciple must confirm his brothers, the other disciples. He must show concern for the spiritual life of his brothers. He is to be an intercessor in prayer on behalf of his fellow disciples.

Intercessory prayer helps the disciple to grow spiritually as much as practice. If you’re not busy making disciples, there’s a good chance you won’t be concerned with praying for them. But when you start to pray for someone, you forget your own problems and may end up thinking that you are not spending much time with God, when in fact you have spent a quite a bit of time engaged in prayer for the other person.

I DO NOT FEEL LIKE PRAYING

The problem with most Christians is that we all know we need to pray, but do not feel like it. Why? Because of our sinful nature. Despite being converted and following Jesus, we remain sinful beings, and sinful nature does not care for fellowship with

God. Therefore, if we are to pray, it will not be because we feel like it, but because we know we must do so.

The Master taught us this lesson. He, being God, could have lived a victorious life without the help of His Father, but He did not. Jesus came to teach us not only that we must overcome temptation, but also how to accomplish this. The backbone of the how is prayer. So He got up early in the morning, or went away from the crowds late at night and retired to a secluded place to talk to His Father.

Sometimes He spent the entire night in prayer, but the next morning He returned from the mount of prayer full of power. The power that Jesus used to overcome temptation and to perform the mighty works He did was the result of His prayer life. He did not use His divine power. When He came to earth, He made a covenant with His Father. He would not use His divine power without the consent of He who had sent Him.

“If those who sound the solemn notes of warning for this time could realize their accountability to God, they would see the necessity for fervent prayer. When the cities were hushed in midnight slumber, when every man had gone to his own house, Christ, our example, would repair to the Mount of Olives, and there, amid the overshadowing trees, would spend the entire night in prayer. He who was Himself without the taint of sin—a treasure-house of blessing; whose voice was heard in the fourth watch of the night by the terrified disciples upon the stormy sea, in heavenly benediction; and whose word could summon the dead from their graves—He it was who made supplication with strong crying and tears. He prayed not for Himself, but for those whom He came to save. As He became a suppliant,

seeking at the hand of His Father fresh supplies of strength, and coming forth refreshed and invigorated as man's substitute, He identified Himself with suffering humanity, and gave them an example of the necessity of prayer."⁴

The servant of the Lord says that to pray is to open our heart to God as to a friend. Therefore, true disciples converse with Jesus as if they were talking to a friend. What do friends talk about? About everything. Prayer is not intended to inform God of our needs. He knows what we need before we ask. The purpose of prayer is to maintain communion with the Father and receive His power to live a life of victory.

"In secret prayer the soul is free from surrounding influences, free from excitement. Calmly, yet fervently, will it reach out after God. . . . Sweet and abiding will be the influence emanating from Him who seeth in secret, whose ear is open to answer the prayer arising from the heart. By calm, simple faith the soul holds communion with God and gathers to itself divine rays of light to strengthen and sustain it to endure the conflicts of Satan. God is our tower of strength."⁵

The other day a man told me he lacked the willpower to pray. There are many people like this man, who do not pray because they think they lack willpower. But those same people get up at 4:00 a.m. to go to work. This means that they do have willpower, but they employ it toward earthly things. Not for things that are truly precious.

"When we feel the least inclined to commune with Jesus, let us pray the most. By so doing we shall break Satan's snare, the clouds of darkness will disappear, and we shall realize the sweet presence of Jesus."⁶

ALL THAT YOU ASK?

On one occasion Jesus said: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:7-11).

These verses confuse many people. Here Jesus promises to give His children everything they ask for. On another occasion He said something even stronger. “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven” (Matthew 18:19).

So why does God not answer all prayers? Maybe we should ask differently. What is the purpose of prayer? The purpose is to cultivate fellowship with God. It is through prayer that our selfishness is lost in divine devotion, our human passions fall like dry leaves, and the character of Jesus blooms in us.

Prayer is an attitude that manifests itself in walking hand in hand with Jesus, making Him the center of our daily experience, and living each day with Him. The result of all this is that we learn to see life differently and come to perceive that there are more important things than even our basic human needs. This does not mean we will mystify life to the point of thinking that we no longer need to work or eat. God is concerned with the material things we need, but He wants to bring us to an experience of faith. But beware. Faith is not self-centered presumption. Faith is trusting God even when things do not go as planned.

“Those who will put on the whole armor of God and devote some time every day to meditation and prayer and to the study of the Scriptures will be connected with heaven and will have a saving, transforming influence upon those around them. Great thoughts, noble aspirations, clear perceptions of truth and duty to God, will be theirs. They will be yearning for purity, for light, for love, for all the graces of heavenly birth. Their earnest prayers will enter into that within the veil. This class will have a sanctified boldness to come into the presence of the Infinite One. They will feel that heaven’s light and glories are for them, and they will become refined, elevated, ennobled by this intimate acquaintance with God. Such is the privilege of true Christians.”⁷

PRAYING DISCIPLES

If we look at the life of the church and the apostles in the first and second centuries, we notice that they had learned from the Master. Of course they prayed for their own material and spiritual needs, but we find them more often than not praying for others, even for their despised rulers. The life of the early church was a life of constant prayer for other people. And what was the result? The church grew in an amazing way; the powers of evil trembled. The faithfulness of the church was such that the first Christians were not afraid to die in the Roman circuses, and despite all their difficulties, they continued to fulfill the mission.

We need to learn from the Master. We are His disciples, and true disciples live the way their teacher lived. We need to be very careful in thinking that because statistics suggest we are doing well, we are also spiritually well.

“As activity increases and men become successful in doing any work for God, there is danger of trusting to human plans and methods. There is a tendency to pray less, and to have less faith. Like the disciples, we are in danger of losing sight of our dependence on God, and seeking to make a savior of our activity. We need to look constantly to Jesus, realizing that it is His power which does the work. While we are to labor earnestly for the salvation of the lost, we must also take time for meditation, for prayer, and for the study of the Word of God. Only the work accomplished with much prayer, and sanctified by the merit of Christ, will in the end prove to have been efficient for good.”⁸



Total Member Involvement is about intercessory prayer. Here are some practical ways you can become personally involved:

1. Begin your day with prayer. Memorize a Bible promise.
2. Pray for five people you want to see in heaven.
3. Ask God to help you find a need in the community and meet that need.

¹ E. G. White, *Prayer*, p. 155.

² *Ibid.*, p. 244.

³ E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 354.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry* (Silver Spring, Md.: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1995), p. 19.

⁵ E. G. White, *Prayer*, pp. 178, 179.

⁶ E. G. White, *Lift Him Up*, p. 372.

⁷ E. G. White, *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 112, 113.

⁸ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 362.

9

CHAPTER 9

THE WAITING AND THE MISSION

WAITING FOR SOMEONE IDLY IS A DEPRESSING experience. Anxiety and expectation partner together, as well as doubt and uncertainty. Fatigue slowly consumes hope, and the future becomes uncertain and less promising.

Christ's disciples cannot wait for their Master by looking at the sky, and counting the days, without the risk of getting lost in the recesses of speculation.

THE LORD DOES NOT DELAY HIS PROMISE

The Advent people are the direct result of hope. The pioneers were waiting earnestly for Jesus. They believed that the Savior would manifest Himself in their days. They preached the greatest event of all ages with passion and dedication. But it's been almost two centuries, and Jesus has not returned.

However, hope is not just a legacy of our pioneers. The disciples in the early church also nurtured their faith with the hope

of seeing Jesus in glory. They believed that Jesus Christ would return in their days. Moreover, the “blessed hope” has motivated and inspired the faith of believers throughout history.

Enoch in his day revealed this prophetic truth. “Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: ‘See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all of them of all the ungodly acts they have committed in their ungodliness, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him’” (Jude 14, 15). Enoch was a faithful and true disciple. The disciples await the return of their Master, but they do not so idly.

“Enoch continued to grow more heavenly while communing with God. His face was radiant with a holy light which would remain upon his countenance while instructing those who would hear his words of wisdom. His heavenly and dignified appearance struck the people with awe. The Lord loved Enoch because he steadfastly followed Him, and abhorred iniquity and earnestly sought heavenly knowledge, that he might do His will perfectly. He yearned to unite himself still more closely to God, whom he feared, revered, and adored. God would not permit Enoch to die as other men, but sent His angels to take him to heaven without seeing death. In the presence of the righteous and the wicked, Enoch was removed from them. Those who loved him thought that God might have left him in some of his places of retirement, but after seeking him diligently, and being unable to find him, reported that he was not, for God took him.”¹

Enoch was translated by God without knowing death, but the promise of the coming of Christ has not been fulfilled. Why has Jesus not come yet despite the expectation of His people and

the imminent character of the pronouncements of biblical writers? Perhaps the answer lies in the element of surprise that accompanies His coming. God wants His people to be prepared at all times and not to be prepared only because the day is coming.

THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

If we review what the Bible writers said about Jesus' return, we will notice that they announced the Day of the Lord as a sudden and unexpected event. Jesus said: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come" (Matthew 24:42). "Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap. For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:34-36).

Jesus placed emphasis, not on the day or the hour of His coming, but on preparing His disciples for the great day. The apostle Paul supported the same concern. "For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

THE PERSPECTIVE OF TIME

Peter is the one who best explains the reason for the apparent delay and the right way to live in order to avoid being dominated by the sense of defeat associated with unmet expectations. He wrote: "Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own

evil desires. They will say, ‘Where is this “coming” he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. . . . But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day’ (2 Peter 3:3-8).

For a human being—who in the best-case scenario lives to be 100 years old—the coming of Christ seems to be taking too long. But what does time mean for an eternal God? “With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” Originally Peter did not make this statement to explain time prophecies, but to explain the apparent delay of Jesus, given that the critics were asking, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised?”

Peter explains the different ways in which God and human beings perceive time. He says that what seems a delay to humans actually is not when God’s perspective is taken into account. These are his words: “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (verse 9).

THE RIGHT WAY TO WAIT

What is the best way to wait for Jesus? Growing desperate in waiting does not help. The best way to wait is not by constantly looking at the clock or trying to discover the day or the hour. Jesus Himself said this when He noticed the concern of the disciples for knowing when things were going to happen. “Then they gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them: ‘It is

not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'” (Acts 1:6-8).

In this statement the Master teaches that the best way to wait is by being His witnesses and fulfilling the mission. I will illustrate it in the following manner. Suppose I ask you to wait for me tomorrow in the town square. I am not telling at what time; I'm simply warning that I may appear at any moment. I say goodbye and leave.

You get to the square early; you sit on a bench and start to look in all directions. An hour goes by, and your expectation increases. You are still earnestly watching for me, but I don't show up. Three hours later you're there, tired, constantly checking your watch and waiting anxiously for me to appear. Time stretches; minutes become hours. You are hungry and thirsty, but I don't show.

Now it's 6:00 p.m. You've been waiting since 6:00 in the morning. A 12-hour wait is long. Your neck hurts from looking from side to side, and you finally reach the conclusion that I'm not returning and leave. A minute after you turn the corner I show up, but unfortunately you have already left. You waited in vain. You became desperate and frustrated. Your hope vanished. You just lost a day waiting idly and nothing happened.

WORKING WHILE YOU WAIT

But now think of another picture. I tell you to wait for me tomorrow in the town square, but this time I give you a mission. While I am gone, you have a task to accomplish. There are 10

huge boxes of candy to wrap. There are candies and wrapping papers. At 6:00 in the morning you start to work hard and full of dedication. There is so much to do that it seems utterly impossible to finish the job. But what you don't realize is that although I have other ways of accomplishing the job, I assigned it to you in order to keep you busy so that the wait will not turn tedious or hopeless.

You arrive at 6:00 in the morning and focus on the fulfillment of the mission. You are so busy that time seems to fly. Instead of staring at your watch, you find yourself totally immersed in the task I entrusted to you. You do not stop. You keep going. And suddenly you feel my hand on your shoulder. You look at me, astonished. It's 6:00 in the evening.

"Are you here already?"

"Yes, I'm home."

"I had no idea time was passing so fast."

Of course you did not sense the passage of time. You were more concerned about fulfilling the mission than looking at your watch.

IF HE DELAYS, KEEP WAITING

Peter's advice is: "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat" (2 Peter 3:11, 12). Later he says: "So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him" (verse 14).

Look at the expressions “as you look forward” or “looking forward to this”; they both refer to the coming of Christ. How do we live “holy and godly lives” while waiting for Jesus? Obviously, this is connected to the glorious and spotless church mentioned by Paul. This is the church that reflects the character of Jesus. How can we prepare the church (ourselves) for the encounter with Jesus?

In chapter 6 of Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians the apostle presents the tools that God gave to build such a church: “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord’s people” (Ephesians 6:13-18).

The church that makes use of these weapons will be able to stand its ground and remain firm, thus reflecting the glory of God. A proven church. That is the claim made by the apostle. And the tools to achieve that experience are truth, righteousness, the readiness of the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the Word of God, and prayer.

However, let me organize these tools into two groups. In the first I will place truth, righteousness, faith, and salvation. These

four are divine instruments placed in the hands of human beings, but human involvement is limited to accepting or rejecting.

The last three—prayer, daily Bible study, and preparation of the gospel of peace—are also divine instruments, but work only if the believer puts them into practice. Their participation in the use of these instruments is much more active. Let me explain. You and I can do nothing to alter the gifts of truth, righteousness, faith, and salvation, except to accept them or reject them. They will always be there, beyond our human intentions. But in the matter of the readiness of the gospel, daily Bible study, and prayer, our participation is essential. We are the ones who must pray and study the Bible every day. God will not do that on our behalf.

We all know what prayer and Bible study are all about. But what is the “readiness of the gospel of peace”? Isaiah explains: “How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, ‘Your God reigns!’” (Isaiah 52:7). The urgency of the gospel of peace is to lead people to Christ and make new disciples. We can refer to this as witnessing. It is an indispensable tool in the process of spiritual growth. Spiritual growth has as its ultimate goal to lead us to reflect the character of Jesus Christ.

Many Christians pray and study the Bible every day. For most, the difficulty lies in leading people to the feet of Jesus. Sincere and well-intentioned people, as hard as they try, often see their best intentions frustrated by repeated failures and conclude that they don’t have a “gift” for soul-winning. But from God’s perspective, praying, studying the Bible, and leading

people to Jesus are not gifts. They are key tools for Christian growth. The use of these tools will determine our growth in God's grace.

For these instruments to become effective, they have to work together. It is like dynamite. Dynamite has three components: gunpowder, a detonator, and a fuse. If they are separated from one another, there is no dynamite. But together, they have a terribly destructive power. The same is true of spiritual life. Prayer and Bible study, apart from witnessing, are not nearly as powerful. They can even lead you to mysticism or fanaticism. That's what the Spirit of Prophecy says: "But this period is not to be spent in abstract devotion. Waiting, watching, and vigilant working are to be combined."²

What does Ellen White mean by "abstract devotion"? I believe she is referring to Bible study and prayer apart from the work of bringing people to Jesus. But if you include witnessing as part of your devotional life, you will enter into an extraordinary dimension of growth, which will lead you to reflect God's glory.

"It is as we give ourselves to God for the service of humanity that He gives Himself to us."³

BLESSED

Speaking of His second coming, Jesus said: "It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns" (Matthew 24:46). Doing what? Fulfilling the mission. Committed to going out and looking for sinners to turn into disciples of Jesus.

“This is the work in which we also are to be engaged. Instead of living in expectation of some special season of excitement, we are wisely to improve present opportunities, doing that which must be done in order that souls may be saved. Instead of exhausting the powers of our mind in speculations in regard to the times and seasons which the Lord has placed in His own power, and withheld from men, we are to yield ourselves to the control of the Holy Spirit, to do present duties, to give the bread of life, unadulterated with human opinions, to souls who are perishing for the truth.”⁴



Total Member Involvement is about imitating Jesus.

Here are some ways that you can become personally involved:

1. Preach an evangelistic series in your neighborhood or overseas.
2. Invite someone to accept Jesus as their personal Savior.
3. Share clothing with the needy.

¹ Ellen G. White, *The Story of Redemption* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1947), p. 59.

² E. G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 85.

³ Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 81.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958, 1980), book 1, p. 186.

10

CHAPTER 10

DISCIPLING SPIRITUAL LEADERS

THERE IS NO ORGANIZED CHURCH WITHOUT leaders. Before establishing His church, Jesus made church leaders out of His disciples. And Jesus is our example. He worked with 12 men who were able to shake the foundations of the world. How did He do it?

The biblical account says: “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles” (Luke 6:12, 13).

BEFORE FORMING LEADERS

I am impressed by Luke’s statement “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.” It was not a mere prayer before starting nominating committee. Nor was it a couple of short sentences asking the Father to grant wisdom to the group. He “spent the night praying,” says Luke.

Why so much prayer? The fact is that the next day He was going to begin to choose 12 men whom to prepare to continue the work He had come to establish. Those men would be in charge of readying God's people for the kingdom of heaven. They needed to be chosen wisely.

Jesus taught the most important lesson about the science of forming leaders, who would then go on to make disciples. This was not about men and women who would handle theory or technical matters; they were meant to be spiritual leaders.

The first step in making leaders is to ask God for wisdom through prayer. The work of forming disciple-making leaders is a divine work. We humans, without the direct action of God, err frequently. Even when being honest, we risk being led primarily by human standards.

NOT ONLY APPEARANCE

God told Samuel, on the occasion of the election of a king for Israel: "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).

How can humans see as God sees? Only through prayer. That's why Jesus spent an entire night praying before choosing His disciples.

I am referring to the selection of disciple-making leaders, not just disciples. We are all called to be disciples of Christ in the sense of proclaiming the good news of the gospel, and that includes training other disciples. But only some are called to be leaders.

THE COMPLETE HUMAN BEING

Men and women have physical, mental, and spiritual powers. The Spirit of Prophecy says that true education is the harmonious development of these three faculties. We often make the mistake of emphasizing just one of those aspects in the making of a leader. There are those who emphasize the intellectual and theoretical preparation. Others emphasize the experience. And there are some who highlight only the spiritual aspect of leadership. In doing so, we disintegrate the person's experience of wholeness; we lose balance and give rise to deformed leaders.

The expression "deformed leaders" is not pejorative. It does not mean they're bad people, but they may have a wrong view of things, people, and life in general. Intellectual preparation is necessary. Information about the dimensions of human life cannot be left aside. But information does not transform—the transforming power comes from the Holy Spirit. He takes the theoretical information and applies it to the different circumstances of life, thus making it relevant and meaningful. If we want to make spiritual leaders, we need to lead people to a profound spiritual experience without neglecting the theoretical information, the training, or the experience.

"The first great lesson in all education is to know and understand the will of God. We should bring into every day of life the effort to gain this knowledge. To learn science through human interpretation alone is to obtain a false education, but to learn of God and Christ is to learn the science of heaven. The confusion in education has come because the wisdom and knowledge of God have not been exalted."¹

THE PRACTICALITY OF JESUS

Jesus was our example in the art of forming spiritual leaders. In chapter 6 of the Gospel of Luke we find teachings that are not limited only to the theoretical aspect of the preparation of a leader. Jesus presents a practical gospel there. The teaching of Jesus was always permeated with practical reality. He was not a philosopher presenting wonderful theories about life, but a life-giving teacher who provided answers drawn from life itself.

In reviewing His teachings, we often find it difficult to say where His words ended and His deeds began, or where His deeds ended and His words started. His deeds were words, and His words were deeds.

Luke begins his story as follows: “Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us” (Luke 1:1).

These “things that have been fulfilled among us” were facts. Luke was not a philosopher speculating on theory, but a historian who wrote about theories transformed into deeds. He continues: “Just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word” (verse 2).

Note that only “eyewitnesses” can be ministers of the Word. They are observers of fact. The gospel begins with a word. A Word that is God Himself. But the Word is not just words—it is also life. And it becomes flesh.

If the gospel had remained a word, it would not be more than a theory. Its answers to the great challenges of life would be only rhetorical answers. But when He became flesh, the answers the gospel gives to life’s great challenges became practical realities. Jesus not only said “Love your enemies.” He also loved and

died for those who tortured Him. He didn't just say "Forgive those who offend you," but on the cross He forgave those who had crucified Him. He did not give a wonderful speech about motherhood; He was born of a woman and through such an act sanctified motherhood. He did not philosophize about the hunger of nations, but multiplied loaves and fishes to satisfy the hunger of the crowd.

His ministry was an amazing mix of theory and practice, and taught us that this is the right way to develop leaders. In the life of a Christian leader, theory and practice must be made into a living reality. Thus Luke says, "In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen" (Acts 1:1, 2). Do and teach. Practice and theory. This is the right way to develop leaders.

NOT ONLY THEORY

We are in danger when we care only about the theoretical training of a leader. For some reason Jesus did not seek His first disciples in the Sanhedrin, but in the countryside and by the sea. Theory is necessary, and we can't underestimate its value, but theory alone fills the heart with self-sufficiency. Or in the best of cases, it makes leaders who float on the high seas of ideas oblivious to the drama of real life. "For this is what the high and exalted One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: 'I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite'" (Isaiah 57:15).

To find people who are “contrite and lowly in spirit” may be the greatest need in the formation of leaders. The true leader needs to accept that he does not know. That’s the only way to learn. There is no healthy leadership without learning, but how can knowledge be imparted to one who knows it all? Humility is the key virtue in the life of a leader. Paul says: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).

You cannot prepare a true disciple-making leader without bringing him or her to Jesus first. Only in daily fellowship with Christ is the character of Jesus reproduced in the person. Leaders themselves do not perceive that they are humble, but those who relate to them do notice that their lives reflect the character of the Master. “In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name” (verses 5-9).

Do you see the path of a spiritual leader? They humble themselves, and God exalts them. They do not struggle to be noticed. They disappear in the sea of service, and yet life itself is responsible for registering their names in history. God looks for men and women willing to be used by His Spirit. Women and men who are aware of their failure, and are placed in the hands of the Master to be used by Him.

THE LEADERS THAT JESUS FORMED

We need to return to the writings of Luke, the historian. This time we will read what he wrote in the book of Acts. “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 1:1-5).

How did Jesus form these leaders of disciples? Luke says, “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach.” Notice the sequence that Jesus followed in making disciple-making leaders. First He did, and then He taught. In the classroom the disciples confirmed what they had seen and done with Jesus in practice. Shouldn’t we learn from all this?

Second, Jesus spoke to them of the kingdom of God. What is the nature of the kingdom of God? How can someone be a leader in God’s kingdom on this earth without knowing its nature? The kingdom of God is spiritual; therefore, it requires spiritual leaders. They are to be trained and know the theory, but first they are to be spiritual. Later Luke records the words of Jesus admonishing His disciples not to go out to fulfill the mission

without being sure of having received the Holy Spirit. And this is obvious. Because if those leaders were to fulfill a spiritual mission, they needed to be spiritual men and women. They needed to receive the Spirit.

THE MISSION IS FOR ALL BELIEVERS

Leaders who make disciples must understand that the mission was entrusted by God to all believers, without exception. The mission is God's instrument for growing His children. The mission is for every believer, because every believer needs to grow.

"Those who stand as leaders in the church of God are to realize that the Savior's commission is given to all who believe in His name."²

This is a dramatic statement. Disciple-making leaders are called to understand that to encourage church growth is not enough to hire a group of Bible instructors and professional evangelists, baptize a large group, and increase the number of members.

Evangelistic campaigns, the work of Bible instructors, and many baptisms have their place and are wonderful when they are the result of the individual effort of every Christian. But if these activities foster the growth of statistics and leave the believer with arms crossed, they may well be the worst thing that can happen to a church. Leaders must understand that "to save souls should be the life work of everyone who professes Christ. We are debtors to the world for the grace given us of God, for the light which has shone upon us, and for the discovered beauty and power of the truth."³

SLOPPY WORK

The Spirit of Prophecy emphasizes again and again that the salvation of souls “should be the life work of everyone who professes Christ.” “Everyone.” No “some.” No “a few,” but “all.”

The world would already be reached with the gospel if we had followed Jesus Christ’s master plan and had bothered to encourage every church member to look for their friends, relatives, and neighbors to transform them into disciples. But unfortunately God’s plan became “one more method” in the midst of so many plans.

Not just today. At the end of the nineteenth century Ellen White was saying:

“Every soul whom Christ has rescued is called to work in His name for the saving of the lost. This work had been neglected in Israel. Is it not neglected today by those who profess to be Christ’s followers?”⁴

Take the word “neglected.” It does not mean rejecting the work, but considering it a matter of no great importance; taking it as obvious. We assume that all is well, while at the same time, we are concerned with discovering the next “revolutionary” way to accomplish the mission. Maybe some method that requires little time, little money, and little effort, and can multiply the number of members with extreme speed.

AN IMPORTANT MATTER

This is more important than it seems at first glance. I am often shaken by the inspired counsel we can find so readily. Here is a concept we have quoted:

“Those who stand as leaders in the church of God are to realize that the Savior’s commission is given to all who believe in His name.”⁵

Do we get what God is saying? Before choosing someone for a leadership position within the church at any level, we must ask if that person understands that “the Savior’s commission is given to all who believe in His name.” What truly matters is not their administrative skills, their résumé or list of accomplishments, but whether or not they understand and support God’s plan for His church.

Ellen White shares this concept many more times:

“‘I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people,’ God declares through his servant Isaiah. Isaiah 65:19. These words will be proved true when those who are capable of standing in positions of responsibility let the light shine forth. . . . Christ’s methods of labor are to become their methods, and they are to learn to practice the teachings of His Word.”⁶

Although these words were written originally in reference to the medical work, their meaning is no less relevant in the general sense. It says that if I am able to occupy a position of responsibility, not only should I let my light shine, but as a leader, I have an obligation to follow the methods of Christ and practice the teachings of His Word.

“The elders and those who have leading places in the church should give more thought to their plans for conducting the work. They should arrange matters so that every member of the church shall have a part to act, that none may lead an aimless life.”⁷

The church will never reach beyond the level I reach as a leader. It is my duty to take possession of God’s dream and

make it mine. I am to close my eyes and imagine the Lord Jesus returning in the clouds of heaven to find His glorious church, without spot, wrinkle, or blemish.

What kind of leaders are we forming?



Total Member Involvement is about being intentional in reaching the lost. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved:

- 1.** TMI is not stand-alone—it is about connecting the dots.
- 2.** Plan a yearly calendar and give everyone a job to do.
- 3.** Pray for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

¹ Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1954), p. 293.

² E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 110.

³ E. G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 10.

⁴ E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 191.

⁵ E. G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 110.

⁶ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1923), p. 338.

⁷ E. G. White, *Christian Service*, p. 62.

11

CHAPTER 11

THE PRICE OF DISCIPLESHIP

TO BE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS HAS NEVER BEEN easy. We walk in the opposite direction of the world around us. God's enemy is keenly dedicated to our destruction. And despite the wonderful biblical promises, we need to be aware that God's people are journeying through hostile territory toward their destiny. Our home is not in this world. We are in the world but not of the world.

For Jesus, this idea was clear since He was a boy of just 12 years of age when He told His parents: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" (Luke 2:49, NKJV). Clearly our Father's business is not an earthly affair.

IT IS NOT EASY TO FOLLOW JESUS

Our Father's business is not always congruent with the affairs of this life. The way of thinking of the Father is certainly not the way this world thinks. God sees things differently from how we see them. Thus He said: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace,

but a sword. For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’ Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:34-38).

These words of Jesus have been misinterpreted by many people throughout history. Moreover, there are those who think that Christianity promotes the destruction of the family and human relationships. But it’s not like that. When Jesus spoke these words, He was simply describing the reality lived by many disciples misunderstood by their family and friends—people who say they “love” you as long as you fit into their way of seeing things, but who turn against you as soon as they discover that you study God’s Word and want to walk in the ways of the Lord.

I remember a mother who cried night and day for her daughter to abandon the world of drugs and promiscuity in which she had been submerged for years. One day the young woman met Jesus, and by the power of the gospel abandoned her life of sin and returned home. At first the mother was very happy with the arrival of the daughter, but when she discovered she had been baptized in a church other than the one dictated by their tradition, she told the girl: “I wish you had remained a drug addict and a prostitute rather than becoming a Protestant.”

Jesus described this sad picture by saying: “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to

bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’” (verses 34, 35).

It’s not easy to follow Jesus, because human beings are naturally intolerant. Circumstances often force new disciples to decide whom to put first in their lives—Christ or people who would reject them if they chose Him. It’s impossible to follow Jesus while pleasing everybody else.

NOT ONLY SUFFERING

But not all is suffering. It’s true that while walking on this earth, the disciple will be peppered with tears and pain. But in the midst of pain, Jesus will bring relief to the heart.

There is an incident in the life of Christ that teaches us a lesson regarding this matter. “From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ he said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’ Jesus turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.’ Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it’” (Matthew 16:21-25).

Reading the complete passage gives us a clearer idea of what Jesus meant. First, He was speaking of His own mission.

He came to the world, not to live, but to die. From the moment He was conscious of the world around Him, He knew He was heading toward death. It was the only way to save the human race.

Peter apparently did not understand this, and the Master chided his inability to understand divine things. Then, while addressing His disciples, He told them they had to take up their cross and follow Him.

There are Christians who think the Christian life is synonymous with suffering because their reward is in heaven. That is partly true. Our true reward is in heaven, but that is no reason to believe that the Christian life is limited to suffering on this earth.

“It is a mistake to entertain the thought that God is pleased to see His children suffer. All heaven is interested in the happiness of man. Our heavenly Father does not close the avenues of joy to any of His creatures.”¹

But wait, didn't Jesus suffer? Of course. He came to take our death and give us life, to take our sins upon Himself and give us righteousness. He came to this world to take our pain, our afflictions and diseases, and give us abundant life. What sort of abundant life is a life of suffering?

Suffering exists. It is part of this life. We live in a world that loves neither God nor those who follow Jesus. Therefore, difficulties, attacks, and pressures are practically guaranteed. We often have to choose between staying with people and being with Jesus. But that said, to conclude that the Christian life is limited to suffering is faulty logic. The Christian life can and should be filled with joy, peace, and gladness in Christ.

However, it's important to accept that life with Jesus carries a price. And we have to be willing to pay it. This cost is not collected by Jesus. Salvation is by grace. It is God's enemy who charges a toll.

THE STRUGGLES OF DISCIPLES

The battles that disciples face are not just external, against unbelievers. They are often internal.

"The warfare against self is the greatest battle that was ever fought. The yielding of self, surrendering all to the will of God, requires a struggle; but the soul must submit to God before it can be renewed in holiness."²

What is the war against self? What does "submitting to God" mean? Many people ask: Does the Christian life require effort? Of course. Paul says: "Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

The apostle speaks of struggle. But if you study Paul's writings carefully, you will realize that he speaks of two types of struggle. The fight of faith and the fight against sin (1 Timothy 6:12; see also Hebrews 12:4). The disciple's struggle is the fight of faith. The struggle to go to Jesus and hide in Him. The struggle to study the Bible daily, to pray daily, and lead

others to Christ. This is the struggle to maintain communion with Christ. This is “submitting to God.” It’s not easy, because we carry in us a sinful nature that does not value fellowship with Jesus.

Paul explains this by stating: “Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air” (1 Corinthians 9:26). The apostle knew why he fought. There is a struggle that only Jesus can overcome. Do not dare to get into that fight, because you will fail. It is like “hitting the wind.”

But there is another fight that only you can fight. Jesus can’t force you to study the Bible, pray, or witness. You have to do it. That fight is in your hands. It depends on your will, your choice. But if you insist on seeking constant communion with Christ, the character of Jesus will display itself in your life; His will will become your will. Your sinful will will be transformed into a sanctified will, and then the enemy will be defeated. Therefore, discipleship requires struggle and the exercise of will.

“Through the right exercise of the will, an entire change may be made in your life. By yielding up your will to Christ, you ally yourself with the power that is above all principalities and powers. You will have strength from above to hold you steadfast, and thus through constant surrender to God you will be enabled to live the new life, even the life of faith.”³

A MISUNDERSTOOD MATTER

There is much confusion on the issue of victory in Christ and the use of willpower. Who does the overcoming? Jesus or you? Is it Jesus, and you just claim His victory? Or are you the

one who overcomes, with His help? What is our involvement? Is having faith basically sitting idly and waiting for Jesus to control our lives? Where is the human participation? What is the role of willpower?

The apostle Paul explains the matter simply. By going to Jesus and living with Him, Jesus becomes part of your life. He lives in you by His Spirit. “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own” (1 Corinthians 6:19).

The Spirit is in the disciple. What happens then? Does the Holy Spirit make you do the right things even if you don’t want to do them? No! You are not transformed into a machine or a robot, forced to do something against your will. What happens is a wonderful thing. When you allow Jesus to come into your life, and the Holy Spirit to live in your heart, Jesus and you become like one person. The wills are joined. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

“I no longer live,” says Paul. And where do you go if Christ now lives in you? “The life I now live in the body,” continues the apostle. Wait a minute. Didn’t you just say “I no longer live”? How can you then say, “The life I now live . . . ?” What is it after all, Paul? Are you alive or not?

This is the marvelous reality of the disciple’s experience. When you live a life of daily communion with Jesus, His will and your will come together. They are two wills in one. His wishes become your wishes. Then when the time for fighting comes,

who decides? He or you? He does; so do you. Who defeats the enemy? You do, but He does also.

Your communion with Jesus is so deep and your life with Him so intimate that the two wills become one. The life you now live you live by faith in the Son of God. This is confirmed by Ellen White's statement:

"When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life."⁴ "When self is submerged in Christ, true love springs forth spontaneously. It is not an emotion or an impulse but a decision of a sanctified will."⁵

Do you get it? The force that defeats the enemy is not a particular strength of yours, nor an exclusive work by Jesus. Not a bit from you and a bit from Him. It is a single effort. One attitude. One decision. Jesus and you are cast together in one "holy will."

All that we must do is go to Jesus and abide in Him. Jesus is life, salvation, and righteousness. Sin cannot abide in the presence of His righteousness. They are mutually exclusive.

"It was thus that the early disciples gained their likeness to the dear Savior. . . . They were with Him in the house, at the table, in the closet, in the field. They were with Him as pupils with a teacher. . . . They looked to Him, as servants to their master."⁶

They followed Jesus! Isn't that what disciples are supposed to do? We are to live with Him through prayer, daily study of His Word, and witnessing. Then Christ will dwell in us.

"When Christ dwells in the heart, the soul will be so filled with His love, with the joy of communion with Him, that it

will cleave to Him; and in the contemplation of Him, self will be forgotten.”⁷

THE COST

Is it worthwhile to follow Jesus? This is a seemingly meaningless question. We follow Jesus for love, not by human calculation or the benefits we may gain from God. But our human nature always leads us to seek what we need. Peter’s question is a proof of his humanity: “Peter said to him, ‘We have left all we had to follow you!’ ‘Truly I tell you,’ Jesus said to them, ‘no one who has left home or wife or brothers or sisters or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age, and in the age to come eternal life’” (Luke 18:28-30).

Let me explain this with an illustration. When I was a child, my parents were planning a vacation to our homeland. A few days before, my tooth started to hurt. In those days, painful teeth were not fixed—they were pulled. And my father told me: “Let’s pull it now; that way, you can have a hassle-free holiday.”

That didn’t sound good to me, so I pretended that the problem was over and that everything was OK. I said: “The pain is gone; it doesn’t bother me anymore.”

The truth was different. The tooth still hurt, but I was afraid to go to the dentist.

We went on vacation, and the pain got worse. My brothers enjoyed the activities, and I suffered. There was no dentist anywhere, and I lived through the worst vacation of my life. On seeing me suffer, my father said: “You could have been in pain just one day and then enjoyed your vacation, but you chose to suffer the whole time.”

That is more or less what Jesus told Peter. This life is short. And because we live in a world of pain and suffering, there may be some suffering for the Christian. But eternal life without pain awaits you. Now, if you prefer, you can enjoy the pleasures of the flesh on this earth. But this life is fleeting, and will soon come to an end.

AS REAL AS IT GETS

Some time ago a young man told me, “Pastor, I prefer the reality of this world I see, and not hope of a heaven I can’t see.” There have always been people who have thought this way. On the other hand, there have always been people who have left everything behind and followed Jesus. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we find an apt description of these people:

“And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. These were all commended for

their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised” (Hebrews 11:32-39).

All these men and women died without seeing the reward. But their crown of victory is assured, waiting for them in heaven. They were faithful in small matters, and the Lord will reward them mightily. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

Let’s run! Neither the race nor the fight are over. I have been running for a long time. And I still do. Maybe death will surprise me someplace, somewhere, but I keep running, certain that the crown awaits me. *What about you?*



Total Member Involvement is about intentional acts of kindness. Here are some practical ways to become personally involved:

1. Develop the habit of finding need in your community.
2. Take flowers to a nursing home or shelter.
3. Win one person for Jesus today.

¹ E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 46.

² *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴ E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312.

⁵ E. G. White, *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 206.

⁶ E. G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pp. 72, 73.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 45.

12

CHAPTER 12

THE DISCIPLE AND THE FINAL HARVEST

JEANNIE IS ONE OF GOD'S FAITHFUL SERVANTS, fully committed to the mission. She wasn't always so. She came to know the gospel as a result of the unselfish efforts of Julia, a coworker with a gift for patience. Religion was just not an acceptable topic of conversation for Jeannie. She was an active member of another church, and had promised her mother that she would never betray the family's religious tradition.

But Julia approached Jeannie according to Christ's method. She didn't speak in religious terms, and didn't even try to bring her to church. She simply engaged with Jeannie in a wonderful friendship, showed her true sympathy, helped her whenever she needed a hand, and progressively gained her trust.

One day, out of the blue, Jeannie popped the question:

"Why are you this way?"

"What do you mean?" Julia responded.

"The way you are. Kind, humble, unselfish . . . a friend that someone can trust."

“I don’t know, Jeannie. It’s certainly not planned. This is just the way I am.”

“But there’s something special about you. Are you a church-goer?”

“I’m only trying to follow Jesus.”

“What do you mean?”

“I try to follow Jesus, and to live according to His Word. And yes, I do attend church—the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

“What an unusual name. I’ve never heard it before.”

And so they started to study the Bible together. Jeannie’s prejudices dissipated, and she also became a disciple of Christ who now strives to make other disciples.

However, she has been feeling somewhat discouraged lately. She is working to bring a couple of people to Jesus, but with little result. She is coming to the conclusion that her efforts are in vain, and is ready to call it quits.

What Jeannie is ignoring is that the final harvest is soon approaching, and God’s Word will never return void.

THE PROPHECY

In Revelation 14 we find the three angelic messages that represent the prophetic function of God’s remnant raised in 1844 to preach His last appeal to the world. This final message is to be proclaimed to every “tribe, tongue, and people” (verse 6, NKJV). It’s a message for the whole world, and has at its center the eternal gospel, in the context of the pre-Advent judgment, and the worship of the true and only God, Creator of the heavens and the earth.

This function is not to be delayed. There's no time left. This is an urgent message, as indicated by the fact that the first angel is "flying" to deliver it. Members of the remnant, men and women, go out into the world to proclaim this message. They are sowing the seed. They are spreading it all over the world, in person and through all media, old and new—radio, television, the printed page, and social networks. This is an amazing work of seed sowing.

Then, in the same chapter 14, we find the following: "I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, 'Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.' So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested" (verses 14-16).

THE HARVEST

This is both a prophecy and a promise. The day will come when Jesus Himself will act to harvest what His church sowed. On that day Jeannie will learn that what appeared to be wasted time was nothing more than the time God needed to ripen the seed in the hearts of human beings.

The servant of God says:

"The good seed may for a time lie unnoticed in a cold, selfish, worldly heart, giving no evidence that it has taken root; but afterward, as the Spirit of God breathes on the soul, the hidden seed springs up, and at last bears fruit to the glory of God. In our

lifework we know not which shall prosper, this or that. This is not a question for us to settle. We are to do our work, and leave the results with God. 'In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand.' Ecclesiastes 11:6, KJV. God's great covenant declares that 'while the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest . . . shall not cease.' Genesis 8:22, KJV. In the confidence of this promise the husbandman tills and sows. Not less confidently are we in the spiritual sowing to labor, trusting His assurance, 'So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.' Isaiah 55:11, KJV. 'He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.' Psalm 126:6, KJV."¹

My mother prayed and worked for my father's conversion during 34 long years. From a human perspective it seemed that the odds of his acceptance of Jesus as his Savior were very low. He wasn't a bad person in moral terms. He was a good citizen, a good husband, and a model father, but he was spiritually dead, and had no interest whatsoever in spiritual things. One day he surprised his family and friends when he told us he had committed his life to Jesus and that he wanted to be baptized.

It was on a late Sabbath afternoon that I had the joy of stepping into a baptismal tank to baptize my own father. That day amid the crowd was a woman with tears in her eyes. She had prayed for that man for more than three decades, and could finally see God's work come to fruition.

Yes, conversion is a God thing. We can sow the seed and cultivate the ground, but we must leave the rest to Him.

“The parable of the seed reveals that God is at work in nature. The seed has in itself a germinating principle, a principle that God Himself has implanted; yet if left to itself the seed would have no power to spring up. Man has his part to act in promoting the growth of the grain. He must prepare and enrich the soil and cast in the seed. He must till the fields. But there is a point beyond which he can accomplish nothing. No strength or wisdom of man can bring forth from the seed the living plant. Let man put forth his efforts to the utmost limit, he must still depend upon One who has connected the sowing and the reaping by wonderful links of His own omnipotent power.”²

THERE CANNOT BE A HARVEST WITHOUT SOWING

The time for the final harvest has come. The world we live in is breaking into pieces. There is a credibility crisis between nations. Fear eats at the hearts of people everywhere. The planet itself is crying out in birthing pains. The climate is warming up; nature is in upheaval. Earthquakes, hurricanes, and tsunamis seem to strike somewhere almost daily. It's time to ready ourselves for the final harvest. But there can be no harvest where there was no sowing or care.

This is the mission of every disciple. To go out and seek people for Christ. We are to tell them that God loves them and that there is no time to lose. We are to go to them with love as our tool, and bring them to the kingdom of love. “It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns” (Matthew 24:46).



Total Member Involvement is about becoming active disciples of Jesus. Here are some practical ways to become practically involved:

1. Invite other members of the church to get involved.
2. Organize a small group to visit and pray for the community.
3. Ask for the baptism of the Holy Spirit daily.

¹ E. G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 65.

² *Ibid.*, p. 63.



Total Member Involvement includes men, women, youth, and children in proclaiming God's truth. Laypersons are to unite with pastors and church leaders, as Ellen G. White tells us in *Testimonies for the Church*: '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' (vol. 9, p. 117).

This is what **Total Member Involvement** is all about—everyone doing something for Jesus, including speaking for Him whether you are a layperson, a pastor, a man, a woman, a young person, or a child.

"May God bless, in every form possible, the evangelistic outreach to the world through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is coming soon!"

—*Ted N. C. Wilson, president, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*

- **TMI—is about fulfilling the Great Commission: to make disciples.**
- **TMI—is about synergy: everyone working together to fulfill the mission of Jesus.**
- **TMI—is about having a goal and a plan to achieve it.**
- **TMI—is about moving from an event-oriented church to a mission-oriented church.**
- **TMI—is about connecting the dots.**
- **TMI—is about intercessory prayer.**
- **TMI—is about YOU getting INVOLVED!**

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