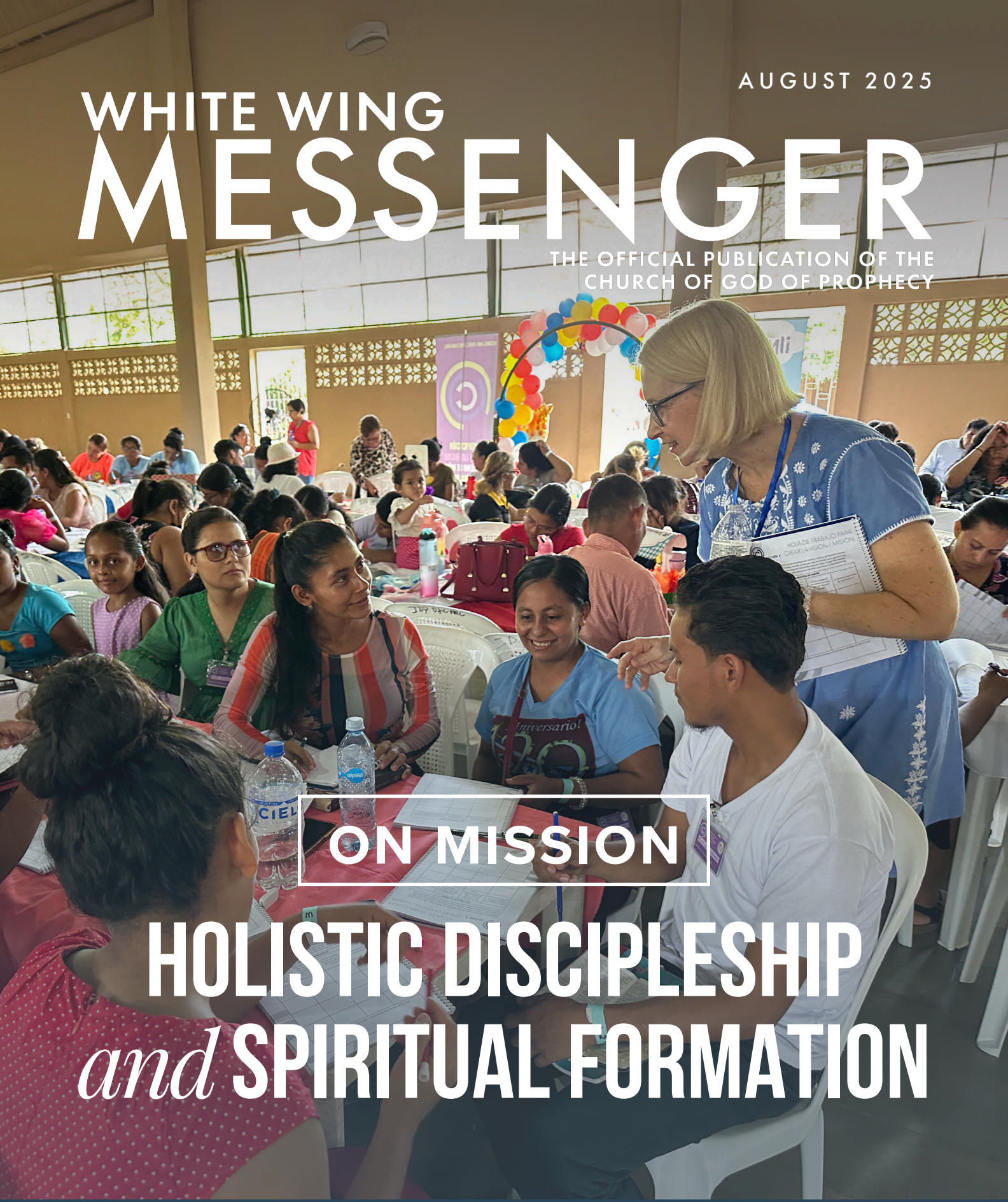
AUGUST 2025

# WHITE WING MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY



## ON MISSION

# HOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP *and* SPIRITUAL FORMATION

**ON MISSION: HOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION THE CALL**
MARSHA ROBINSON

**ON MISSION: HOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION**
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**EMBODYING CHRIST IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND HOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP**
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# MESSENGER
THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY

AUGUST 2025 • VOLUME 102, NUMBER 12

**WE BELIEVE** in the Holy Trinity—one God, eternally existing in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

We believe in one God, the Father, creator of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father. All things were made through Him and for Him. He is true God and true man. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and was born of the virgin, Mary. He suffered, died, was buried, and on the third day He rose from the dead. He ascended to the right hand of the Father, and He will return to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and giver of life, who eternally proceeds from the Father. He is Teacher, Comforter, Helper, and Giver of spiritual gifts. Through Him the saving and sanctifying works of Jesus Christ are applied to the life of believers. He is the empowering presence of God in the life of the Christian and the church. The Father has sent His Son to baptize with the Holy Spirit. Speaking in tongues and bearing the fruit of the Spirit are New Testament signs of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

We believe that salvation is by grace through faith in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross and that He died in our place. The believer's sins are forgiven by the shedding of His blood. We believe that healing of mind, body, soul, and spirit is available to the believer through the blood of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. We believe in one baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

We believe that the grace of God brings forgiveness and reconciliation to those who repent, as well as transformation in holiness, enabling them to live a Christ-like life. Sanctification is both a definite work of grace and a lifelong process of change in the believer brought by the blood of Jesus, the Word of God, and the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

We believe in one holy, universal church, composed of all true believers in Jesus Christ, offering fellowship and calling for service to men and women of all races, nations, cultures, and languages. We believe in the spiritual and ultimate visible unity of the church.

We believe that the Bible—both Old and New Testaments—is the inspired Word of God. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself and His will to humankind, sufficient for instruction in salvation and daily Christian living. The Bible is the Christian's rule of faith and practice.

We believe that God will ultimately reconcile all things in heaven and earth in Christ. Therefore, we look forward to new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Executive Editor/Publisher: Tim Coalter
Managing Editor: Marsha Robinson
Copy Editor: Katherine Osborn, DMin
Graphic Designer: Charlie Scruggs

**About the Church of God of Prophecy**
The Church of God of Prophecy is a vibrant, worldwide body of believers, united in worship, working hand-in-hand to share God's love and a message of hope to the brokenhearted. The organization has more than a million members and more than 10,000 ministers, worshiping in more than 10,000 churches or missions in 135 nations of the world.

**Church of God of Prophecy Core Values**
- Prayer
- The Harvest
- Leadership Development
- Biblical Stewardship
- Service

**Vision Statement**
Reconciling the world to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit

**Mission Statement**
The Church of God of Prophecy is a Christ-exalting, holiness, Spirit-filled, all-nations, disciple-making, church-planting movement with passion for Christian union.

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**Cover image: The cover image of this month's issue features participants of the COGOP Children's Ministry Training with Rev. Theri Santos (One Mission Society) in Nicaragua.**

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ON MISSION

# HOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP *and* SPIRITUAL FORMATION



BISHOP BRIAN T. SUTTON, DMIN | NORTH AMERICA GENERAL PRESBYTER

> *To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery,* ***which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.***
>
> **—Colossians 1:27 NIV (emphasis added)**

In a world that desperately needs hope, Jesus is that hope, and we carry him with us. There is an incredible mystery that fuels our life as followers of Jesus: *Christ in us*. This is not another religious concept—it is the glorious hope of transformation, the heartbeat of our discipleship, and the power behind our mission. The apostle Paul's words to the Colossians remind us that the Christian life is not about behavior modification or religious obligation. It is about *Christ formed in us*, dwelling within us, shaping us, and sending us.

In this season, I believe God is calling us to embrace holistic discipleship—a way of life where every part of who we are is formed by Christ, for Christ, and in Christ. It all begins with one wonderful invitation: to *be with him*.

## THE INVITATION: BE WITH HIM

Before Jesus sent his disciples out, he first called them to himself. Mark 3:14 says, "He appointed twelve that they might *be with him* and that he might send them out to preach." The order of this sequence of events is important. The foundation of being on mission is communion with Jesus. The catalyst of discipleship is intimacy with Jesus.

Discipleship begins not with doing for God but by *being with God*. This is our first and highest calling: to abide in the presence of Jesus. In a world of relentless noise, crowded schedules, and hurried (and often haggard) people, the Spirit is calling us to the stillness where transformation by the Holy Spirit happens. When we carve out specific space and spend time with Christ, we discover that we are loved, chosen, and cherished—not for what we do, but for who we are in him. It is this *being with Christ* that begins to change us from the inside out.

## THE FORMATION: BE TRANSFORMED INTO HIS IMAGE

As we create this sacred space and dwell with Christ, something holy begins to take shape—we are *transformed into his image*. Discipleship is not merely about information; it is about transformation. It is not about acquiring spiritual knowledge alone, but allowing the Holy Spirit to shape our character, values, and priorities into the likeness of Jesus.

This is what Paul meant when he spoke of "Christ in you." The goal of the Christian life is Christlikeness. It is about the fruit of the Spirit flourishing in us. It is about faith replacing fear, humility conquering pride, peace pushing out anxiety. We are called to be *formed*, not just *informed*—to be shaped in the secret place, so we can live boldly in the public space.

## THE MISSION: PARTICIPATE WITH HIM

From this transformation comes our calling: to *participate in the mission of God*. Jesus did not form disciples so they could stay in comfort; he formed them so they could be sent into the world as carriers of the hope of Christ within them. As Christ is

formed in us, he naturally flows *through* us—to our neighbors, our communities, and the nations.

We live in a world desperate for hope, truth, and meaning. As Holy Spirit-formed disciples, we carry the "hope of glory" everywhere we go. Our mission is not a burden; it is a joy. It is not something we initiate, but something we join—because it is God's mission first. When we walk with Jesus, we join him in reconciling the world to himself. Every act of compassion, every conversation of faith, every church planted, every disciple made—it is all part of God's redemptive story unfolding through us.

## MARKS OF SPIRIT-EMPOWERED FAITH AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

What does a healthy disciple look like? What are the marks of one who is truly being with Jesus, becoming like Jesus, and living on mission with Jesus? Let me offer four "outcomes" that are the results of a transformed life, on mission with Jesus:

- **We love the Lord**. Through a transformed heart, we have experienced a deep, personal devotion to God. As we receive his love, our love overflows back to him through worship, prayer, and obedience.
- **We love his people**. We walk daily in Christlike love for humanity, the church, and the family of God. This love is marked by humility, unity, and service. We understand that all people are created in God's image and are worthy of love, so much so that God sent Jesus to die for all.
- **We live his Word**. We live a life built on the Scriptures, allowing the truth of God to shape every area of thought and action. God's Word has a central place in our lives, and we create space to receive from God's Word. "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11) is our cry to receive his Word in us that it may be reflected through us.
- **We live his mission**. We are active participants in God's redemptive work in the world, both locally and globally. We are on mission, recognizing even our day-to-day work, life, and activities join us in God's greater mission of redemption.

These four Spirit-empowered outcomes are not achieved by striving but by surrender. They are the fruit of a life rooted in *"Christ in you, the hope of glory."*

## TRANSFORMED AND ON MISSION

The world does not need more celebrity Christians. It needs *Christ-filled* disciples, surrendered to the full work of the Holy Spirit. It needs people who have been with Jesus, are being transformed by Jesus, and who live for the mission of Jesus.

Together, we can continue this journey of holistic discipleship and spiritual formation. As we walk closely with the Lord, we are shaped into his likeness and sent by the Spirit into every part of life—carrying with us the transforming hope of *Christ in us*. This is Christ's invitation to us. This is our mission. This *hope of glory* is the hope of the world.

**▼ The cover image of this month's issue features participants of the COGOP Children's Ministry Training with Rev. Theri Santos (One Mission Society) in Nicaragua.**





## ON MISSION: HOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

# THE CALL

Jesus never said, “Go and get people to attend church.” He said, “Go and make disciples.” That distinction matters. The Great Commission is more than a call to evangelize—it is a call to form whole people, inside and out, in every season and station of life. Holistic discipleship is not optional or supplementary; it is central to the mission of the church.

Being “on mission” is not limited to missionaries or pastors—it is the calling of every believer. And to fulfill that mission well, we must recover the depth, patience, and practice of true spiritual formation. This is not a program to complete; it is a lifelong journey of becoming like Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, for the sake of others.

### Defining Holistic Discipleship

Holistic discipleship is the integrated process of spiritual growth that engages the whole person: intellect, emotions, will, body, and relationships. It teaches not just what to believe, but how to live. It does not create spectators but shapes everyday saints who embody Christ at work, at home, in suffering, and in service. To disciple holistically is to nurture the following:

- Orthodoxy – right belief (mind)
- Orthopathy – right affections (heart)
- Orthopraxy – right action (hands)

When any one of these is missing, formation is stunted. Knowledge without transformation becomes prideful. Passion without grounding becomes shallow. Action without intimacy becomes burnout.

### The Long Obedience

Spiritual formation is not about achieving spiritual perfection but about being continually shaped by God’s presence. As Ruth Haley Barton writes, “Spiritual transformation is the process by which Christ is formed in us—for the glory of God, for the abundance of our own lives, and for the sake of others.”[1] This shaping happens through intentional rhythms of grace—practices like silence, solitude, Scripture meditation, confession, and Sabbath rest. It also happens in the crucible of suffering, the dailiness of community, and the humility of obedience.

The problem is, we often want the results of discipleship without the lifestyle of discipleship. We want depth without discipline, power without pruning.

### Slow Work

I know a female minister who began having intentional conversations with a young woman who had grown disillusioned with church. The young woman had been saved as a child, heard many sermons in her life, but had never been systematically discipled. Their “discipleship meetings” were not labeled as such, and they certainly were not textbook or flashy. They involved honest conversations about life and the Scriptures.

At first, the young woman was guarded and skeptical. She had a lot of baggage to work through. But over time—months, not weeks—trust grew. The younger woman began asking more questions, deeper spiritual questions, about the Bible and the Christian life. The mentor/minister introduced words like “calling” and “purpose” and “spiritual gifts” into their conversations. Eventually, the young woman said, “I’m not sure exactly when it happened, but something shifted. I’m not just talking about myself and my issues anymore—I have a hunger to be like Jesus.”

She volunteered to work in children’s ministry. She joined the choir. She began fully participating in the life of the church; she served in various churches as youth pastor, worship leader, and testified she was called into ministry. Today, she is a licensed minister who has served as guest speaker in churches and conferences, is a published author, a community chaplain, and the editor of the *White Wing Messenger.* That is the slow work of spiritual formation. It rarely makes headlines, but it transforms and grows spiritually healthy believers.

### Emotional Health

One of the critical, missing elements in many discipleship models is the lack of attention to emotional maturity. Spiritual growth that ignores emotional wounds, trauma, or relational

dysfunction will eventually collapse. We cannot disciple people in wholeness while ignoring the areas of their lives that are fractured. As Henri Nouwen wrote, "You have to trust that your own bandaged wounds will allow you to listen to others with your whole being. That is healing ministry."[2]

Discipleship is not about appearance; it is about authenticity. It is in the naming of pain, the processing of grief, the forgiving of wounds, and the surrendering of shame that deep transformation occurs. This emotional work is not a detour from spiritual formation—it is often the doorway.

## Vocational and Relational Discipleship

Holistic discipleship cannot be confined to the four walls of a church or reduced to a midweek curriculum. We must disciple people to follow Jesus in the context of their vocations, families, and communities. A lawyer, a stay-at-home parent, a student, and a retired mechanic each have different contexts—but all are called to reflect Christ where they are.

Discipleship should help people discern how their gifts, passions, and life experiences intersect with the mission of God. We must help believers see that their work, their parenting, their friendships, and even their hobbies can become sacred spaces when surrendered to Christ.

Similarly, relational discipleship—intentionally walking with someone over time—is irreplaceable. People grow best when they are known, loved, and challenged. One-on-one mentoring, small groups, and spiritual friendships create space for accountability, growth, and grace.

## The Pace

One of the greatest enemies of formation is not heresy—it is hurry. The modern world runs fast, and often, so does the church. But discipleship cannot be rushed. It requires time, attentiveness, and the flexibility to be interruptible.

John Ortberg quotes Dallas Willard to warn, "Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day. You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life."[3] When we slow down, we make space for people. We make space for presence. And it is in that space that transformation takes root.

## Discipling Disciples Who Disciple

The end goal of discipleship is not personal spiritual enrichment—it is missional multiplication. Every follower of Jesus is called to help others follow him. This is not reserved for pastors or professional ministers. It is the fruit of a Spirit-formed life.

Multiplication begins when people are empowered to disciple others in their own spheres. But that requires training, trust, and a culture that values "sending" over "keeping." Too many churches focus on retaining attendees rather than releasing disciple makers.

Churches must move from content delivery to culture development—from programming to a people-empowering mindset.

## The Vision

We stand at a crossroads. Cultural pressures are rising. Biblical illiteracy is growing. Trust in institutions is waning. And yet, this is also a moment of profound opportunity. If we return to the heart of the mission, if we invest in holistic discipleship and true spiritual formation, if we commit to walking with people in truth and grace, then we will see lives transformed, not just informed.

This is not a trend to follow but a foundation to recover.

## Become and Help Others to Become

To live "on mission" is to be in the lifelong process of becoming more like Christ and to invite others into that journey. It is to engage every part of our being—mind, heart, body, and soul—in relationship with God. It is to make room for others to encounter healing, truth, and transformation. It is to walk slowly, deeply, and authentically in step with the Spirit.

We must disciple people—not just for church life but for real life. We must form people who are resilient, compassionate, courageous, and rooted in Christ. This is the mission. This is the formation. This is the call.

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1 Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 15.
2 Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (New York: Image Books, 1979), 82.
3 Dallas Willard, quoted in John Ortberg, *The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 20.



**MARSHA ROBINSON**
EDITOR

Marsha Robinson is the publications coordinator for the International Offices and managing editor of the *White Wing Messenger*. She is a contributing writer for the Regal Books anthology, *I Believe in Miracles*, and writes an online devotional, *The Fragrance of Flowers*. Marsha is an ordained COGOP minister actively working in prison ministry and community chaplaincy. Marsha serves as International Assembly Chief Clerk.



▲ Freedom Gate Tabernacle in Lagos, Nigeria

## ON MISSION:

# HOLISTIC DISCIPLESHIP AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Jesus's final charge to his followers in Matthew 28:19–20 was not just to make converts but to "make disciples of all nations." This command was not about numbers alone; it was a call to transformation, a journey of spiritual formation that cultivates mature believers who, in turn, disciple others. Today, more than ever, the church must embrace a holistic approach to discipleship that shapes the whole person and spans across culture, age, and context.

### Discipleship Beyond Conversion

Holistic discipleship moves beyond the initial decision to follow Christ. It encompasses a lifestyle of obedience, transformation, and mission. In Acts 2:42–47, we see a picture of the early church devoted to teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayer. This is not passive attendance; it is active engagement. True discipleship involves growing in Christlikeness, both in character and in mission.

At Freedom Gate Tabernacle in Lagos, we have witnessed how intentional discipleship transforms lives and communities. Take, for instance, Sola Akinwumi, a young professional who, after giving his life to Christ, was plugged into a small group that met weekly for Bible study, prayer, and life-on-life mentoring. Over time, he has become a strong force in the music department in Nigeria. With the support of the children's ministry leadership, he began discipling teenage girls and boys in his community, helping them navigate issues such as identity, peer pressure, and faith. His story illustrates that discipleship is both cyclical and reproductive.

### Practical Tools and Resources

Effective discipleship requires tools that respect cultural diversity and life context. Here are practical ways churches and ministries can disciple across boundaries:

- **Contextual Bible Studies.** These include materials that speak to the local culture and local challenges and are designed to help believers apply Scripture meaningfully in their context. For example, discipleship curricula tailored for urban youth in Lagos will differ from what is needed in a rural village outside the continent of Africa.
- **Life-on-Life Mentorship.** Just as Paul mentored Timothy (2 Timothy 2:2), one-on-one or small group mentoring remains a powerful tool for spiritual formation. It is important to note that intentional relationships built on trust help believers grow spiritually and emotionally. This personal investment fosters accountability and growth.
- **Digital Discipleship Platforms.** In our tech-driven world, apps, podcasts, and video lessons can bridge geographical gaps. The Church of God of Prophecy offers a variety of podcasts, including the *Sound Doctrine Podcast* and *The Steward Podcast*, which emphasize biblical teachings and theological principles of stewardship. They also produce the *White Wing Messenger Podcast*, featuring messages and updates from the Church's global community. All these provide accessible, sound theological content globally.

- **Service-Based Learning.** James 2:14–17 reminds us that faith must be lived out. Encouraging disciples to serve—whether in feeding programs, children's ministry, or outreach—builds both compassion and conviction.

## Lifelong Growth, Maturity, and Multiplication

Spiritual formation is not a sprint but a marathon. Ephesians 4:13 (NIV) urges us toward maturity, "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." This means intentional, consistent spiritual practices: prayer, study, worship, community, and service. Lifelong discipleship also includes emotional and relational maturity—developing healthy relationships, managing conflict biblically, and embodying Christ's character in the home, workplace, and society.

Multiplication is not optional; it is essential. Jesus invested deeply in twelve men so they could multiply the mission (Mark 3:14). Churches must prioritize equipping every believer to be a disciple maker. This can happen through structured leadership training, teaching how to share the gospel, and empowering new believers to lead small groups.

## Challenges and Solutions

The journey of holistic discipleship is not without its hurdles. In many contexts, cultural norms and long-standing traditions often conflict with biblical truths. These tensions can make discipleship feel like walking a tightrope—balancing grace and truth.

The way forward is not to confront culture harshly but to engage with humility, much like Paul did in Athens (Acts 17:22–34). When disciple makers take time to understand the cultural lens through which people view the world, they can more effectively communicate the gospel in ways that resonate and bring transformation over time.

Another significant obstacle is the shortage of trained and willing leaders. Many churches find themselves with passionate believers but few who are equipped to disciple others. This bottleneck can slow the growth of a healthy discipleship movement. Yet, a powerful remedy lies in adopting a multiplication mindset—training faithful individuals who can train others, as Paul instructed Timothy (2 Timothy 2:2). By empowering local believers and using a reproducible model of leadership development, churches can begin to see sustained momentum in making and maturing disciples.

The modern church also faces a subtle but dangerous drift toward consumer Christianity. Many believers have embraced a faith that is centered on personal blessings and convenience rather than mission and sacrifice. This mindset weakens the call to discipleship. The antidote is to model the life of Jesus—a life marked by service, self-denial, and obedience. When church leaders embody and teach a Christlike, sacrificial walk, they inspire others to embrace the cost and joy of following Jesus (Luke 9:23).

Sustaining long-term commitment to discipleship can also be draining. Those involved in mentoring, teaching, and shepherding others often carry emotional and spiritual burdens. If not refreshed, they can burn out. Creating rhythms of rest, reflection, and retreat—like Jesus often did (Mark 6:31)—is essential. Providing safe spaces for leaders to renew their strength and share their struggles can foster resilience and long-term effectiveness in making disciples.

## Conclusion

The Great Commission is not complete until disciples become disciple makers. Holistic discipleship and spiritual formation are not optional extras; they are the very heart of our mission. It is a sacred journey that requires intentionality, grace, and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. Let us, therefore, commit afresh to making disciples who not only know Christ but make him known—across cultures, through generations, and unto the ends of the earth.



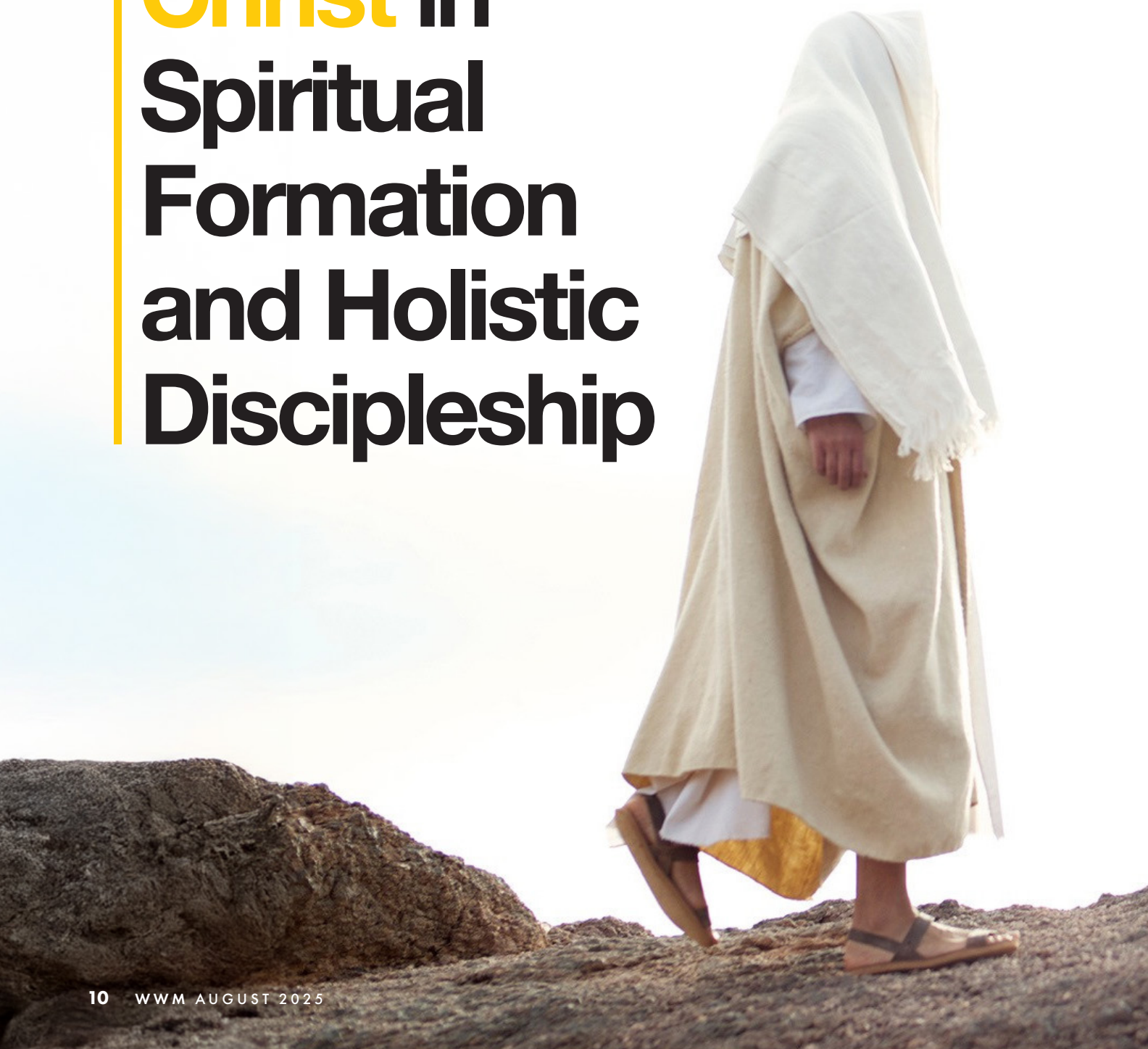

▲ Freedom Gate Tabernacle in Lagos, Nigeria



**PETER OSARO EHIGIATOR**
LAGOS, NIGERIA

Peter Osaro Ehigiator serves as the national children's ministry director for Nigeria and associate pastor of the national church. He is currently pursuing an online Certificate in Ministry and Theological Studies at Spirit and Life Seminary.

# Embodying Christ in Spiritual Formation and Holistic Discipleship



Are we on a mission or are we the mission? From my perspective, it may be both. Holistic discipleship and spiritual formation go hand in hand with being both ***the mission*** and ***on mission***. As believers and followers of Christ, we acknowledge that Christ is ***the mission*** and that he is also ***on mission***: For God so loved the world that he gave Jesus. God saw our need. God offered Christ. Christ consented and came. Christ died. Christ left us the gift of his Spirit. If we believe we are the *imago Dei* (Genesis 1:27), then we are partakers with Christ as being both *the mission* and *on mission*. We have the capacity for reason, love, relationship, and reflecting God's attributes.

## What does it mean to be *the mission*?

God had a plan from the beginning. His plan was to give Christ to the world. Christ was the mission—the plan to bring salvation to the world. This salvation consists of more than repeating the sinner's prayer or an acknowledgement of faith. In contrast to the law, it was [and is] a new way to be reconciled to God, one in which we become more consciously aware as active participants in God's plan of redemption. To be *the mission* means we are invited to embody Christ. This embodiment is a process of spiritual formation where Jesus teaches us the "unforced rhythms of grace" despite any inward resistance towards not being productive.

Jesus tells us, "Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly" (Matthew 11:28–30 MSG).

Another passage that comes to mind is found in Luke 10. Christ was *on mission* to visit with Mary and Martha. They were *the mission*. We know that both women had different understandings about the purpose of Jesus's visit. Mary sensed she was *the mission*, and Martha felt they both were *on mission* to serve Jesus. In that moment, one was overwhelmed with a to-do list, while the other was present with Jesus. Jesus differentiated between the two and shared what was necessary.

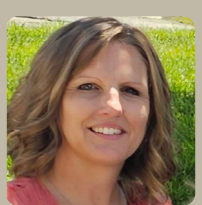
The embodiment of Christ is twofold: It is about the relationship with Christ (recognizing we are *the mission*) and the ongoing work of grace through Christ to the world (we are *on mission* with him). To be *the mission* leads to being *on mission*. Unfortunately, many skim over being *the mission* and quickly learn how to be *on mission*. This leads us to another question.

## What does it mean to be *on mission*?

It is possible to be *on mission* without the embodiment of Christ. Whereas church services, retreats, and other fellowship events are wonderful opportunities to learn from others and have new experiences, nothing substitutes learning from Christ himself. Without the embodiment of Christ, evangelism and discipleship become shallow and oppressive. In other words, it eventually becomes a burden. However, when we become consciously aware of Christ's presence in and around us, we cannot help but to be *on mission*. This embodiment helps us to be *on mission* in a more holistic and authentic way. This means that even though we may be firm in our faith and belief, our hearts are light and open to receiving others as they are and without the need to change them. It also means that we trust the work that God is already doing in us, and we do not try to impose it on another. We become more gracious, compassionate, and curious while *on mission* instead of assuming and judging. We are in tune with God's movements. We learn when to speak up and when to remain silent. We learn how to rest in silence and trust God with everything in between. The world becomes brighter. Vitality increases and our very presence ushers in the presence of God where holistic discipleship unfolds gradually.

To be *on mission*, as Teresa of Avila prayed, unfolds in a more natural and authentic way when we learn that we are *the mission* of Christ:

> Christ has no body but yours,
> No hands, no feet on earth but yours.
> Yours are the eyes with which he looks
> Compassion on this world,
> Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
> Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
> Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
> Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
> Christ has no body now but yours,
> No hands, no feet on earth but yours. . . . Amen.



**MARIE PROCTOR**
LANCASTER, SOUTH CAROLINA

Marie Proctor is an ordained minister in the Church of God of Prophecy. She recently transitioned from pastoral ministry to work with individuals and small groups as a spiritual director. Her previous role as a pastor (2013–2024), along with serving the women of South Carolina as Women's Ministries director (2010–2019), is what led her to the ministry of spiritual direction (2022 to present). She loves spending time with her family and finding the quiet, serene places that God has woven into each day.



# STAY AWAKE, GROW DEEP, MULTIPLY WELL

More than 20 years ago, Nitin Nohria and Anthony Mayo embarked on a research project to discover the defining characteristics of extraordinary leaders. From their sample of 1,000 leaders, Nohria and Mayo expected to end up with a list of enduring traits to define "extraordinary," but what they found was a little surprising. Their report showed that "great leaders were defined less by enduring traits and more by their ability to recognize and adapt to opportunities created by a particular moment."[1] The extraordinary leaders could sense the spirit of the era—the mood, ideas, and beliefs that defined it—and then seized it.

The inverse of this indicates that tremendous opportunities are missed due to being unaware, unalert, and dull. Jesus addressed this topic, recorded in Luke 19:41–44. He was expressing his sorrow for Jerusalem because they had rejected him. In verse 44 (NKJV), his statement, "because you did not know the time of your visitation," identifies the reason for their rejection. Their self-absorption had created a blindness and deafness that resulted in not knowing the Son of God, even though he was walking among them.

In his discourse about the end times, recorded in Matthew 24, Jesus said this "unaware" mindset prevailed in the days of Noah. In Matthew 24:37–39, he described how in those days, they were absorbed with their lives—short term (eating and drinking) and long term (marrying and giving in marriage). In verse 39, Jesus noted their unawareness: "[They] did not know until the flood came and took them all away." He said this same mindset would be widespread in the end times: "But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (24:37).

"RECOGNIZING OPPORTUNITIES COMES FROM ABIDING IN GOD'S WORD, WALKING IN HIS SPIRIT, LISTENING, AND CAREFULLY OBSERVING OUR ENVIRONMENT."

We can easily become self-absorbed, unaware, and dull by just moving from one to-do item to the next without thinking. We often follow Martha's example (recorded in Luke 10:38–42). Verse 40 states, "But Martha was distracted with much serving." In the following verse, Jesus responds to her busyness, saying, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things." The Son of God was sharing words of life in the next room, but she was frantically moving from one to-do item to the next, unaware of the significance of this moment. She was missing a tremendous opportunity. But according to Jesus, Martha's sister, Mary recognized it and seized the moment. He said, "But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her" (10:42).

## How do we recognize shifts and adapt to opportunities?

Recognizing opportunities comes from abiding in God's Word, walking in his Spirit, listening, and carefully observing our environment. In John 8:31–32, Jesus declares, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Jesus later states, "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come" (John 16:13). Jesus is describing people who are alert to the voice of God and the timing of his move. He even tells Peter at one point, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this" (John 13:7).

Bob Sorge said, "When I talk, nothing happens; when God talks, the universe comes into existence."[2] James admonished us to be quick to listen and slow to speak (James 1:19). As we spend time listening, God's Word produces spiritual knowledge and fuller revelation within us. Brother Lawrence, who lived in the 1600s, wrote, "We must do everything thoughtfully and carefully, without recklessness or hurry, which are marks of an undisciplined mind."[3] Today's hurried culture promotes undisciplined minds. One person called this overwhelming volume of data we are confronted with daily as "suffocation of the mind by junk."

## "Let us know, Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord."

Hosea 6:3 states,

Let us know,
Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.
His going forth is established as the morning;
He will come to us like the rain,
Like the latter and former rain to the earth.

Over twenty-five years ago, Professor Michael B. Metzger wrote about a disturbing trend he was observing in the culture: a move away from knowledge-based to opinion-based decision making. Here is how he framed the discussion:

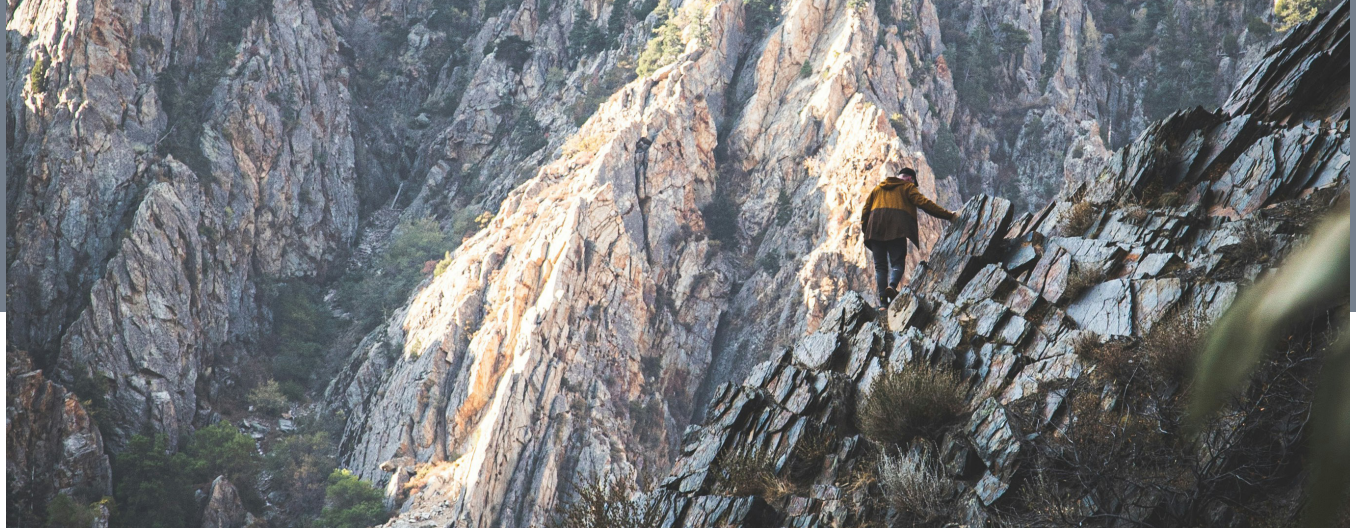
There are typically three kinds of questions we ask:

- Questions with many "right" answers, such as what is your favorite color, sports team, or brand of sneakers? He labeled these ***opinion*** questions.
- Questions with only one "right" answer, such as what is 2 + 2, or at what temperature does water boil at this altitude? He labeled these ***knowledge*** questions.
- Questions with several possible answers—some of which may be better than others—such as how an economy should be operated. He called these ***judgment*** questions.[4]

Dr. Metzger said that the foundation we build in the knowledge category determines our effectiveness in the judgment and opinion categories. His concern was amplified as he observed an increased importance being placed on the opinion and judgment categories while less emphasis was being placed on having a strong knowledge base.

Dr. Metzger taught this concept for many years at the Kelley School of Business, Indiana University; but this information also presents a tremendous spiritual lesson. There was a time in Israel's history, recorded in Judges 21:25, when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." They did not use God's Word as their standard; they used *their* opinions as *their* standard. The consequences were damaging and far-reaching. Unfortunately, the same trend is rampant in today's culture.

The prophet Hosea, who ministered to the Northern Kingdom (Israel) around 750 BC, warned the nation about the approaching invasion by the Assyrians. God told him to speak specifically to the tribe of Ephraim. Hosea 12:1 records that they were feeding on the wind (no substance). This led to a daily increase in lies and



desolation. They made covenants with evil nations. They fed themselves on vain hopes, displaying self-righteousness. Hosea warned Ephraim against focusing on politics instead of worshiping God and listening to him. God spoke to Israel in Hosea 13:9 (KJV), "O Israel, thou hath destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." Because Ephraim was feeding on wind, they were blind to their spiritual condition.

This is very similar to the church at Laodicea (Revelation 3:14–18). From their perspective, they were rich, increased with goods, and had need of nothing. Jesus said that in his eyes, they were wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. That was quite a difference between Laodicean's view of themselves versus how Jesus saw them. How could that be? It was because Laodicea was basing their information on the wind rather than on God's Word.

The culture of our day says, "How quickly can I share my opinion?" When people are asked why they prioritize their opinions and judgments over knowledge from the Word of God, their responses tend to express one of the following:

- They lack time for study and reflection.
- They are engaging excessively in social media and entertainment.
- They lack knowledge of how to research topics.
- They find the Bible difficult to understand, especially when navigating complex passages or historical contexts.
- They question how the Bible's teachings are relevant to the issues faced in modern society.
- They are (over)confident in their own personal knowledge.

God is speaking to us today through his Word and his Spirit. Are we aware and alert to the opportunities before us? Are we willing to be modern-day Nehemiahs, or do we only see a corrupt culture with little or no hope? It will require discipline on our part to see growth. Sean McPheat uses his military experience to give insight:[5]

1. Discipline (doing what needs to be done even when we do not feel like doing it) leads to habits.
2. Habits leads to consistency. (Without consistency, we will not finish.)
3. Consistency leads to growth; it is what transforms average into excellence.

May we rise up like Hosea (6:3 NKJV) and declare,

Let us know,
Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.
His going forth is established as the morning;
He will come to us like the rain,
Like the latter *and* former rain to the earth."

[1] Nitin Nohria, "As the World Shifts, So Should Leaders," *Harvard Business Review* (julio–agosto de 2022), https://hbr.org/2022/07/as-the-world-shifts-so-should-leaders.
[2] Bob Sorge, *Secrets of the Secret Place* (Kansas City, MO: Oasis House, 2001), 11.
[3] Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God: A Modern Translation*, editado por Peter Northcutt (Publicado independientemente, 2022).
[4] Michael B. Metzger, *Critical Thinking X504* (Indiana University: Kelly School of Business, Fall 2000).
[5] Sean McPheat, "Success loves consistency. Here's how to nail it." LinkedIn, October 2024, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/seanmcpheat_success-loves-consistency-heres-how-to-activity-7238101205388861441-Hple.



**JANICE MILLER**
GALLATIN, TENNESSEE

Janice Miller loves studying and teaching the Word of God. She has published two books, *While Men Sleep* (2016) and *Critical Thinkers* (2018), and has recently begun screenwriting. Married since 1975, she and her husband, Roy, live in Gallatin, Tennessee, where both are active in ministry at the Gallatin COGOP.

# Water Baptism: Sign and Symbol

Our understanding of the ordinance of Water Baptism is that it is non-salvific (it has no power to wash away sins), but it is the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Peter 3:21). It also represents the believer's identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Water baptism, then, is outward evidence of our submission to the salvific work of Christ in the life of the believer and the public declaration that the one being baptized is a follower of Jesus.

Consider the following water baptismal texts:

> Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?"[1] And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. (Acts 8:35–38 ESV)

> At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. (Acts 16:33 NIV)

> Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized (Acts 9: 17–18)

The texts presented above are well-known baptismal narratives. I raise them primarily because they underscore the centrality, the criticality, and the urgency of water baptism in New Testament soteriology. There was not only a clear sense of the necessity of baptism, but also a clear sense of urgency as well. Simply said, for the New Testament church, water baptism was

**Baptism service at Peerless Church, Cleveland, Tennessee, on March 30, 2025**






not optional, and it was not something to be delayed. The question is, why was this ostensibly simple act of immersing someone in water so critical, so central, and so urgent to the lives of believers? It was so critical that, in most cases, it was seen as something that should be done immediately after a profession of faith in Christ.

One of the issues that is critical to this dynamic is understanding the nature of baptism. Essential to this understanding is the question, is baptism a sign or a symbol? Although they are often used interchangeably and assumed to be the same thing, theologically there is a difference between a sign and a symbol. Simply put, a sign simply points to something, while a symbol both points to and participates in it. German theologian Paul Tillich offers the following explanation: "A sign then points beyond itself but does not participate in the reality of that to which it points. Conversely, a symbol points beyond itself and participates in the reality of that to which it points."

Let me offer an example: A road marker with a specific shape and the word **STOP** written on it is known as a stop sign. The sign points to a particular reality—the reality that there is a law that demands that you stop when your vehicle gets to the sign. The sign does not participate in the reality, which is the law; it simply points to it. Now, let me give you an example of the power of a symbol. On every computer, you can find what are known as icons. An icon is literally a symbol. The icon points to a greater reality known as a program. But the icon does not only point to the reality of the program—it not only tells us that there is a program—but it participates in it. Why? Because when you click on the icon, it activates the reality (the program). It can also be said that the program is embedded in the icon. The icon is not just representative, it is participatory.

Tillich refers to what he calls the *immanent level of symbols*. When we talk about the immanence of God, it means that God participates with us. The name *Immanuel* is a name of immanence because it is literally translated as "God with us." The Incarnation was an act of immanence. Jesus became like us so that he could participate with us. This differs from the transcendence of God, which means that God identifies with us, but he is beyond us.

One of the elements of the Christian faith that is representative of the immanent level of symbols is the cross. The cross, as a symbol of faith, not only points to the reality of Calvary, but by faith, it allows us to participate in that reality. The old church hymn says,

> On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
> **The emblem of suff'ring and shame;**
> And I love that old cross where the Dearest and Best
> For a world of lost sinners was slain.

The rugged cross, identified as the "emblem" of suffering and shame, is not simply a sign that points to the suffering and shame experienced by Jesus. The emblem is a symbol that allows participation in the same suffering and shame. Gospel artist Donnie McClurkin's song elucidates the same point:



What does the cross of Jesus mean?
It's more than songs we sing,
**Much more than the emblem on your chain.**
But it means I am free, yes,
From the chains of slavery.
And the blood he shed won't let my sins remain.

So, now we come to water baptism. While baptism holds an important place in our Pentecostal soteriology, we tend to look at it more from the standpoint of identification. We primarily understand water baptism to be a means by which we identify with the vicarious death of Christ. Consequently, we have understood it more as a sign than a symbol. We often recite the mantra, "Baptism is a public (outward) sign of an inward work of grace." Certainly, I embrace that understanding, and thus, that is not a point of refutation here. However, I am positing that it is more than that. In other words, in my understanding, it is not only a sign; it is also a symbol. Stated a bit differently, water baptism has a dual nature—it has an extrinsic aspect (public profession and identification), and it also has an intrinsic aspect (spiritual participation).

So, what does all this mean? It means that we dare not forget that when we engage in the extrinsic (outward) aspect of baptism (the immersion in water), there is also something profoundly spiritual that is occurring simultaneously. The apostle Paul wanted to ensure that the Roman church (and we by extension) did not forget or misunderstand this aspect of water baptism. He wrote,

> Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3–4 KJV)

When a believer is immersed in the water, by some mysterious and mystical operation of the Spirit, the water becomes a watery grave. And while the believer is under the water (for maybe less than a second), there is a mystical participation with Jesus in his death—not the physical death, but the reality of the death and all the benefits and blessings of that death. That is why Paul wrote, "**Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death."** And just as mystically, when the believer is raised out of the water (the grave), they participate in the reality of the resurrection. Paul continues, "**That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."** This is the mysterious work of the Spirit that must be accepted and appropriated by faith.

[1] Some manuscripts add all or most of verse 37: *And Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he replied, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God."*

BISHOP CARSWELL LEONARD, PHD | PARAGON REGION NATIONAL BISHOP



# PASTORAL CARE: A CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

## Navigating Mental Health Challenges in Ministry (Part 3)



BISHOP ROGER BALL, LCSW, PHD | NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK

Many gut-wrenching stories can be found in the Scriptures. One that has always captured my imagination covers the scene of Jesus weeping and praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Bishop Brian Sutton conveyed the image effectively in his presentation during a pastors' retreat earlier this year: "The shadow of the cross had grown longer for Jesus, knowing that at any moment he would be arrested, tried, and crucified." After breaking bread with the disciples, naming the deniers and the betrayer, and washing their feet, Jesus entered Gethsemane—where the beginning of the end would commence.

The disciples entered the garden with him, but Jesus went on a bit further, taking Peter and the two sons of Zebedee with him. He told them, "My soul is overwhelmed . . . to the point of death" (Matthew 26:38 NIV). Yet, we get no response from these three. Jesus continued, "Stay here and keep watch with me" (26:38). He then walked yet a bit further and broke down. He stopped talking to his disciples and now spoke directly to his Father, attempting to negotiate the non-negotiable. He prayed in anguish, "If it be possible, let this cup pass . . ." (26:39 KJV). Several times, he got up from prayer and returned to his disciples, only to find them sound asleep; in his darkest hour of need, they were sleeping (26:40–45).

This moment in Scripture highlights the loneliness and deep emotional burden that Jesus carried, and for many pastors, the weight of pastoral work can often feel similar. Pastoral work can be incredibly isolating, and there may be times when pastors feel abandoned—by God, by the congregation, and even by themselves. How incredible would it be for us to create space within the church to engage with and understand these experiences, which are all too common among pastors and ministers? The sense of being utterly alone in their walk and work can be a heavy burden for pastors to bear.

Countless books and articles have been written on how pastors can and should care for the congregation, but more conversations should be taking place about how the church can and should care for pastors. Pastors are not "hired servants" or "lords" over the people of God. We are part of the church, part of the family, and part of the kingdom of God. Just as the congregation is cared for, pastors should also be afforded reciprocal care from the church. Such care will go a long way in supporting the overall well-being of the pastor and their family.

In this final segment on "Navigating Mental Health Challenges in Ministry," I will address five important ways that local churches can support and encourage their pastors as they serve their congregations:

### 1. Consistently pray for your pastor and their family.

Pastors carry significant spiritual and emotional burdens, often juggling multiple responsibilities. Regular prayer for your pastor and their family is one of the most powerful ways to show your support. It provides them with strength, peace, and wisdom in challenging times and helps them navigate the complexities of their role with greater clarity and grace. Prayer works. Prayer helps. Prayer heals. Let's pray for our pastors and leaders.

### 2. Express gratitude for the impact of their ministry.

Pastors invest significant time and energy into preparing sermons to build and strengthen the congregation. When their preaching resonates with you—whether helping you through difficult situations or offering practical insights—expressing gratitude can be




incredibly encouraging. Take a moment to share how their sermons and teachings have impacted your life. Like the one leper who returned to thank Jesus (Luke 17:15–16), your words of appreciation will affirm their efforts and remind them that the Word is taking root in the hearts of the community.

### 3. Show kindness to your pastor and their family.

Kindness is essential in maintaining a healthy pastoral relationship. Pastors and their families also face challenges, both public and private. It is vital to create an atmosphere of kindness and support, not only toward the pastor but also their children and spouse. If a pastor feels that their family is being treated with respect and care, it eases their burdens and allows them to serve more effectively. In contrast, if a pastor feels that their family is being mistreated or neglected, it can hinder his or her ability to lead with confidence, peace, and anointing.

### 4. Join in the mission of the church through active participation.

Pastors cannot carry the weight of ministry alone.



▲ **Idaho, USA, COGOP State Convention, 2023**

◀ **COGOP Children's Ministries training in the Virgin Islands, 2024**

The congregation's involvement in the mission of the church—through service, volunteering, evangelism, discipleship, and giving—helps lighten the load. Active participation in advancing the cause of Christ not only supports the pastor but also strengthens the entire church body. When everyone works together, the pastor can focus on preaching, teaching, and shepherding, knowing the congregation is fully invested in the work of the kingdom. In such a community, the notion that 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the work and that 80 percent of the people do 20 percent of the work becomes obsolete. In this type of congregation, work—and better yet, service—is a shared responsibility of the whole community.

### 5. Provide opportunities for rest and renewal.

Just as anyone in a demanding profession needs rest, pastors require time away to recharge spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. Encourage and support your pastor in taking time off, whether for a short break or a longer sabbatical. This time of rest allows pastors to return to their ministry with renewed energy and passion. It is important to recognize that self-care is vital for long-term effectiveness, and by offering opportunities for rest, you demonstrate that you value the pastor's well-being. A pastor that is suffering from exhaustion or burnout will ultimately prove ineffective.

By consistently praying for our pastors, showing gratitude, offering kindness, actively participating in the church's mission, and supporting their need for rest and renewal, we can help create a healthy and supportive environment for our pastors. They are not only called to care for the congregation, but the congregation has a responsibility to give them the care they deserve in return. Through mutual support, we ensure that our pastors can continue to serve with joy, strength, peace, and anointing.



# WE ARE THE CHURCH OF GOD OF PROPHECY

## A GLOBAL CHURCH, A FILIPINO VOICE

There are few things more unifying than a shared language. Words foster belonging, frame understanding, and fill a collective history with stories. In the global family of the Church of God of Prophecy (COGOP), we do more than acknowledge our diversity—we celebrate it.

As we shared last month, there are more than 7,100 languages spoken worldwide. The mission of sharing the gospel demands that we speak to people in the languages they understand. Our message is sure; the way we tell it must be clear.

At the heart of this mission is a powerful booklet, *We Are the Church of God of Prophecy*, a succinct and vibrant explanation of our identity, vision, and values as a movement. Months ago, Global Communications Executive Director Bishop Shaun McKinley, PhD, launched a vision to have his team work together to translate and publish *We Are the COGOP* into every language spoken in our churches and ministries around the world. The goal is attainable. We are a people of unity in identity, diversity in expression.

As an update to last month's information, 15 language translations are now complete, and distribution is underway. One of the earliest and most significant translations is Tagalog, the dynamic, resilient language of the Philippines.

### Tagalog: A Voice of the Islands and the World

Tagalog is more than a language; it is a lifeline of culture, history, and identity. Spoken by over 28 million people as a first language and understood by more than 82 million Filipinos, Tagalog remains a cornerstone of daily life in the Philippines. But its impact reaches far beyond the islands. In bustling neighborhoods of Los Angeles, across the cities of the Middle East, in Canadian provinces and European communities—you will hear its rhythms in homes, marketplaces, churches, and classrooms.

Though often used interchangeably with Filipino, Tagalog is a specific language—an Austronesian tongue that forms the foundation of the Philippines' national language. Filipino, the country's official language, builds upon Tagalog, incorporating

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elements from other Philippine languages and colonial influences, particularly Spanish and English.

The evolution of Tagalog reads like a narrative of the Filipino people, shaped by centuries of trade, colonization, resilience, and revival. About one-third of its vocabulary is derived from Spanish—a legacy of over 300 years of Spanish rule. Words like *mesa* (table), *sapatos* (shoes), and *silya* (chair) are everyday examples. The English influence is unmistakable in terms like *serbisyo* (service), *kompyuter* (computer), and *traysikel* (tricycle). Chinese, Malay, and even Sanskrit contributions round out the linguistic palette, making Tagalog not only diverse but deeply expressive.

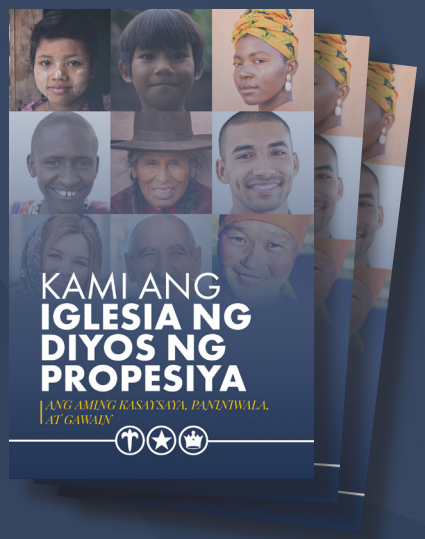
More than its vocabulary, Tagalog carries a warmth and poeticism that speaks to the soul. From the lyrical *kundiman* love songs to everyday expressions like *araw-araw* (every day) or *mabilis na mabilis* (very fast), the language naturally invites repetition and rhythm—a cadence of closeness.

Additionally, before the Latin alphabet was used, the Tagalog language was written in *Baybayin*, a pre-colonial script with characters that remain a proud part of Filipino heritage. Due to surging interest, this ancient writing system is now studied in schools and can be seen in various cultural expressions.

## The COGOP and the Call

The Church of God of Prophecy in the Philippines is steadily growing, ministering to a nation of over 115 million people through 55 local churches and a faithful membership of approximately 4,000. This may seem small in comparison to the population, but the Filipino COGOP is mighty in spirit and unwavering in mission.

Beyond its shores, the Filipino diaspora—estimated at over 10 million strong—is a powerful and faithful force, often described as modern-day missionaries scattered across the globe. They work, worship, and witness in countries where the gospel is often unseen. They are our fellow laborers in the harvest.




To provide resources in Tagalog is not just a gesture of inclusivity—it is a strategic step of empowerment. It acknowledges that the Filipino voice has a vital role in the global chorus of the Church of God of Prophecy. With the Tagalog edition of *We Are the Church of God of Prophecy*, we equip leaders, encourage believers, and echo the heartbeat of our movement—we are one Church, many nations, one mission.

## A Future Multiplied by Language

This is just the beginning. The vision of Global Communications is to continue releasing this booklet in language after language until our people across the globe can hold it in their hands, read it in their heart language, and say with confidence, *"We are the Church of God of Prophecy."*

As we go forward, the Tagalog-speaking church—and every language group within our movement—will know they are seen, heard, and needed. The global tapestry God is weaving cannot be complete without every thread. And in the pattern he is forming, the Filipino strand is strong, bright, and full of hope.

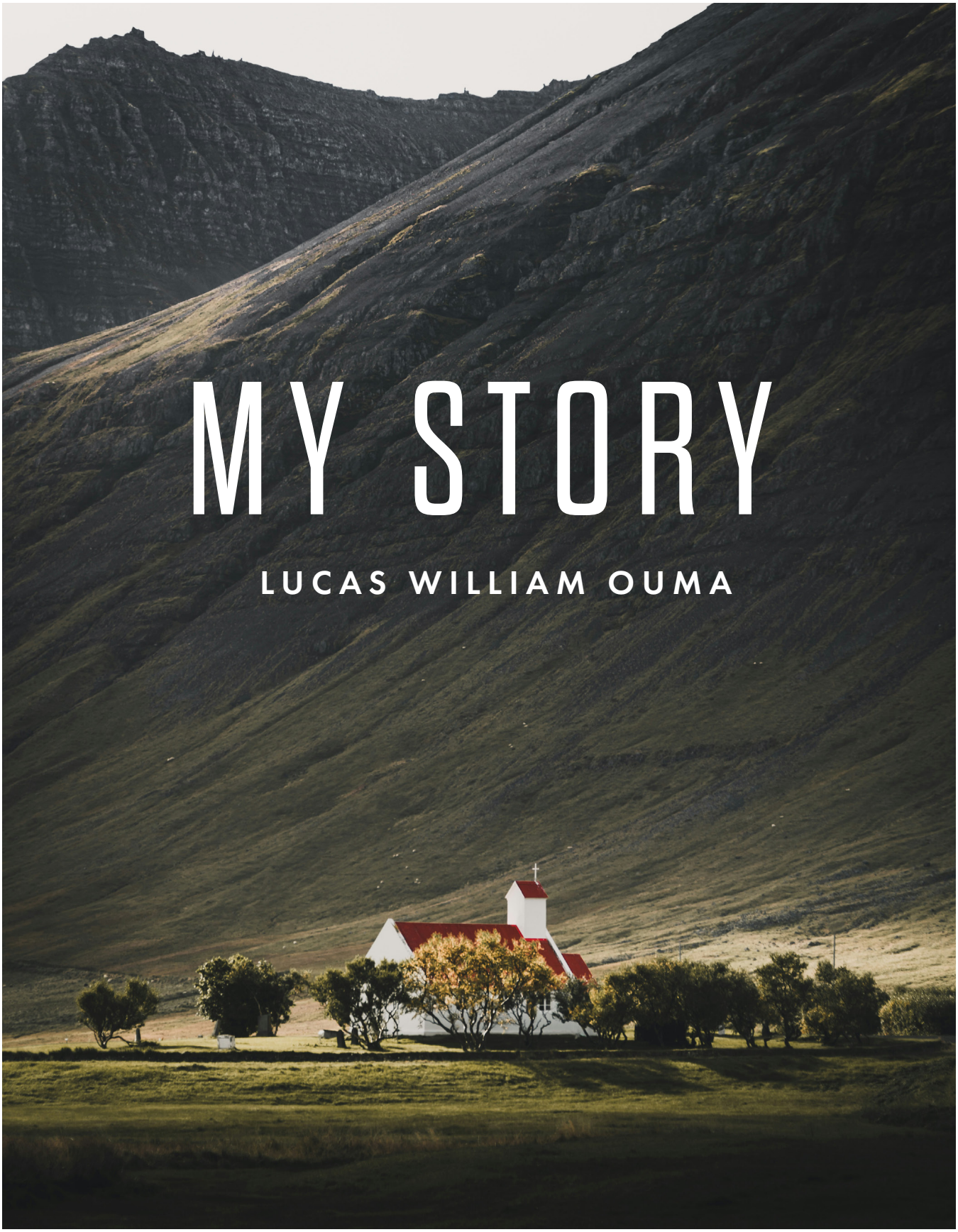
*Mabuhay ang Iglesia ng Diyos ng Profesiya!*
(*Long live the Church of God of Prophecy!*)

**▼ The images below, received from Global Missions, are from the Horizon of Hope orphanage in the Philippines. The faces of the children are blurred in accordance with the Philippines national law.**








MY STORY
LUCAS WILLIAM OUMA

## Introduction

I am called Lucas William Ouma (Msukuma) now that I am saved. I was born in 1975 in Lukungu Village, Magu District, Mwanza Region (now the Bariadi District, Simiyu Region, since Mwanza was divided) in Tanzania. My parents are now with the Lord.

I am married with five children. I was married in 2005, and God gave us two sons, but my first wife went to be with the Lord in 2014. In 2016, God gave me another wife, and we have been blessed with three children, all boys. My biological parents had no other children; I remain an only child.

## Salvation

On April 25, 1994, I received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior of my life. As Romans 10:9–10 (NIV) says, "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved." John tells us that "to all who did receive him, **to those who believed in his name**, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

I thank God for saving me through his Son Jesus Christ. At the time I was saved, the preacher preached on the topic "Give Me Water to Drink." As he preached the words of God, he asked if any wanted to drink the water of life. I picked myself up, ran to the altar, and knelt in prayer. At that moment, I was prayed for, and I was saved. This experience brought great joy to my heart—a joy that I had not experienced before because I was filled with sadness, suspicion, and grief. Psalm 34:8 (KJV) says, "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him."

I have not been unhappy or unsettled since receiving the Lord Jesus. Even through difficult and painful situations and frustrations from others—my own family, friends, relatives, and those who call themselves God's people—I remember the words of Jesus in John 16:33, "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer. . . ."

## Knowing God's Church

In 1997, after prayer at dawn, I saw a great vision. I stood under a big tree as it rained heavily, and I saw a man wearing a white garment coming towards me. He asked me what I was doing there and why I didn't go inside the church that was on the mountain. I asked him, "Where is the church? I don't see the church." He told me it was on top of the mountain, and he invited me to follow him there. I asked him who he was, and he responded, "Jesus." He told me to go to God's church on the mountain. After climbing the mountain, we approached the small door of the building. I was told to go inside, but Jesus remained outside. I asked why he was leaving me here and with whom would I stay. He said he was leaving me with Pastor Joshua Peter, the bald pastor who was preaching as we talked at the door. The believers were inside worshipping. The church itself was on the mountain as spoken by the prophet Isaiah:

> In the last days the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; and it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream [flow] to it. Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Isaiah 2:2–3 NIV)

After the vision, I began to follow its message very closely, focused on prayer and asking numerous pastors about the man in my vision—Pastor Joshua Peter. Many told me that they did not know him or the church. It took me three years before I met him.

## The Vision Fulfilled

In August 2000, I arrived in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, at the home of the brother of my guardian. I did not know that they were worshiping in this church that I was seeking, the Church of God. It is a day I will never forget. A collective district service was taking place with all the churches meeting together.

On that day, at that joint district worship served of the Church of God, Pastor Joshua Peter was present. The vision I had returned once again as if it were happening

right before my eyes. The voice inside me said, "There is Pastor Joshua," and he was bald as in the vision. Without hesitation, I ran to him and greeted him with great joy. Pastor Joshua did not know me; he thought that I was one of the regular believers from their church.

I thank God for his goodness and faithfulness to me, and for allowing me to find the Church of God. I now serve as Pastor Joshua's assistant pastor and have been an ordained licensed minister in the COGOP since 2021.

## My Participation in the Church of God

Since August 2000, I have studied extensively and attended various seminars and national and international conferences (such as SOPAS) conducted by leaders from the United States. I even traveled to the nearby nation of Rwanda three times to attend international conferences, and during those events, I also attended the Rwanda National Convention. It is certainly a joy for me to be a part of the Church of God of Prophecy.

Various levels of responsibility in the COGOP have been entrusted to me over the years. I served as children's leader (2006–2011) in our local church and leader of the senior youth (2011–2018) for District 5 Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Since 2021, I have been serving as the Tanzania national youth director, and in December 2024, I was appointed as COGOP youth coordinator for East Africa (a group of eight nations). All this has been a surprise, but God knew the plan he had for me. In the process, I have observed the following:

- Obedience to the Word of God. The life of faith that God has enabled me to live, even with its occasional storms that he allows to come my way, has encouraged others to follow and obey the Word of God. Paul writes, "Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12 NKJV). God continues to be my advocate, even during difficult times of testing.
- Humility. It is God who has made me who I am and has brought me here as a leader.
- Honesty. God has been with me since I was saved. He helps me even if I mess up, and by his grace, I keep moving forward with him.
- Commitment, devotion, and dedication. God has given me a heart to dedicatee my resources, time, and efforts to his work. He has enabled me to conduct various evangelical activities (e.g., person-to-person and door-to-door witnessing, local and outdoor activities, conferences, seminars, youth camps, gospel work sessions, assisting financially to enable various choirs to record their music, etc.).

Patience and perseverance when walking with God greatly strengthens one's faith in Christ Jesus. I have held onto the grace of God extended to me, despite many slanders and spiritual blows from the enemy. Jesus said, "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall" (Matthew 7:24–25). It is very humbling what God has done in us and for us through the precious grace of our Lord Jesus. We would not be present today if we relied solely on our mind, our wisdom, and our knowledge.

## Conclusion

These are some lessons learned in my own story that can help us walk and grow with God:

- Stand on God's Word.
- Pray to God always, either vocally or in your heart.
- Serve God according to the purpose he has placed in you, without looking back and without distraction.
- Be focused in your commitment, devotion, and dedication to the gospel.
- Maintain faith in patience, obedience, humility, honesty, giving, devotion, and prayer.

"The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4 NIV).



LUCAS WILLIAM OUMA
DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA

# **What Was Seen from Afar:** The Promise, the Glory, and the Church Today

**Introduction**

From the days of Abraham to the Old Testament prophets, God's people have lived with a vision set on something not yet attained: a promise, a land, a kingdom. Hebrews 11:13 declares with soberness and hope, "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." This passage highlights the faith of the ancient ancestors as they waited for the promises [of God] without having received them. One of the most glorious moments where that eternal hope became visible in human history is at the Transfiguration of Jesus (Matthew 17:1–8). The story of Jesus's Transfiguration took place with Moses and Elijah on a mountain—a mountain where the eternal was intertwined with the temporal, and the future glory shone forth before three human witnesses.

**Hebrews 11 and Faithfulness Without Instant Reward**

Hebrews 11 presents us with a parade of men and women who walked by faith, many of whom did not see the fulfillment of the promises God made to them. Among them are Moses, who led the people to the borders of the Promised Land but did not cross into (Deuteronomy 34:1–4), and Elijah, who was taken up without having seen the complete fulfillment of the messianic kingdom he proclaimed (1 Kings 19:11–13). Both were witnesses and bearers of the future hope but not immediate recipients of its fulfillment. This did not weaken their faith, but instead strengthened it, because they knew that the final fulfillment would come from the faithful God.

**The Glorious Fulfillment in the Transfiguration**

In Matthew 17, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John to a high mountain, and there he is transfigured before them. His face shines like the sun, and his garments become white as light. Moses and Elijah appear with him, talking. This scene is not a symbolic act without purpose; it is a glorious declaration that the promise, the one the ancients hailed from afar, has come. Moses, who only saw the Promised Land from afar, now stands in the presence of the true fulfillment of the promise: Jesus Christ. Elijah, who sought God's voice at Horeb, now hears the Father declare, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." (Matthew 17:5). The Transfiguration reveals Christ as the center of history, the bridge between the awaited faith and the manifested glory.

**The Church of God of Prophecy is a Witness of the Eternal.**

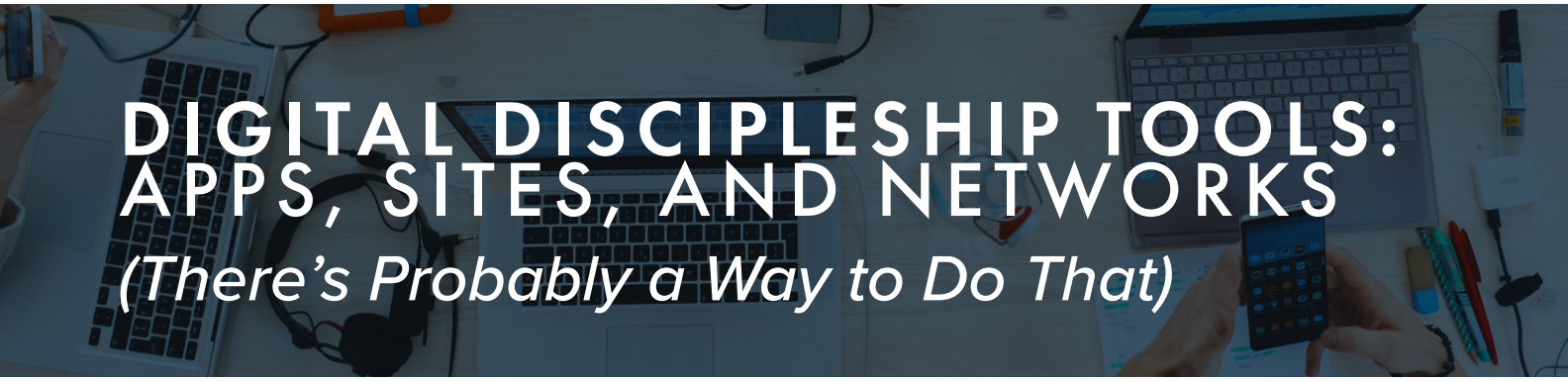
The Church of God of Prophecy, as a movement born out of a longing for apostolic restoration, deeply understands this call to live on the threshold between the visible and the invisible. Founded on the basis of the New Testament being the only rule of faith and practice, its history is marked by fervent prayer, practical holiness, and hope in the glorious return of Christ. The Transfiguration, from our Pentecostal perspective, is a powerful affirmation that we do not labor in vain: the kingdom we preach, the harvest we reap, and the leaders we train—they all make sense because we are aiming for eternal glory. Just as Moses and Elijah were called to be present on the glorious mountain, so we will witness the complete fulfillment [of God's promises] at the coming of the Lord.

**Conclusion**

The Transfiguration was not just a vision for three astonished disciples; it was a proclamation to the whole church: The promise is real, the glory is yet to come, and Christ is at the center of it all. In times of trial or apparent delay, the church is called to keep her eyes on the mount, knowing that what was seen afar will one day be entirely ours in Christ. Let us live, like Moses and Elijah, with the assurance that our faith is not in vain. And like Peter, James, and John, let us come down from the mountain with renewed vision and with ears attentive to the voice of the Father: "Hear ye him."



JIMMY MEJÍA
DISTRICT 1 MEN'S MINISTRIES DIRECTOR, SOUTHEAST HISPANIC REGION



# DIGITAL DISCIPLESHIP TOOLS: APPS, SITES, AND NETWORKS

## *(There's Probably a Way to Do That)*

Your church can have an effective online ministry presence and can disciple people through a variety of apps and tools. In the following article, I will share several links to tools and resources that will help your congregation grow and flourish in our very digital world.

As I sit here thinking through the many digital discipleship tools that are available to churches of every size, I get a little bit excited. For the lay person or pastor, it truly seems like a lot. So, I am going to share some of my favorite easy-to-use, effective, simple tools for churches of any and every size. These may also work for individuals and ministries. This is not, by any stretch of the imagination, an exhaustive list, but it is a good starting point.

### Social Media (Great for Information Sharing, Encouragement and Growth)

- **Facebook Pages** are good for public posting of events, activities, inspiration and encouragement. Most users are in the 30+ age demographic.

  POST IDEAS: upcoming church services, small groups, quotes by the pastor, scriptures, photos (with permission), etc.

- **Facebook Groups** are connected to a Facebook page, but they serve as a more private place to share information that is more attendee based.

  POST IDEAS: volunteer needs, prayer requests, meal train plans, etc.

- **Instagram** is the space where the younger demographic operates. Use it to share edgier content.

  POST IDEAS: youth group photos and fun youth-made videos, children's ministry photos (faces should be blurred unless parental permission has been obtained), reels to encourage and share information about the church

- **TikTok** is still a very current, very much in-the-news app that young and old find useful.

  POST IDEAS: sermon clips, photo montages, videos, encouraging Scripture verses, etc.

- **YouVersion for Churches** allows you to create a space for your church where you can do Bible reading/devotional plans with your congregation.

### Communication (Effective Tools to Share the Word)

- **Remind** (group texting software): https://www.remind.com/apps
- **GroupMe** (group texting software): https://groupme.com/
- **WhatsApp** (private messaging and calling app): https://www.whatsapp.com/
- **Zoom** (great for Bible studies and small groups): https://www.zoom.com/

### Graphics Design (For General Church Use and for Creating Presentations, Sermon Notes and Other Helpful Materials)

*Note: Not all images are free to use for commercial purposes. Some need to be purchased or a license for use obtained.*

- **Canva** (FREE design software for charities, easy to use, has great templates); available through an app or web browser: https://www.canva.com/canva-for-nonprofits/
- **Life.Church Open Network** (FREE resources for local churches): https://open.life.church/
- **Pixabay** (royalty-free images and stock photos): https://pixabay.com/
- **Adobe Fonts** (FREE with Creative Cloud subscription): https://fonts.adobe.com/

## Live Streaming (Spread the Word)

*Note: When using music in your live stream, remember to use it in the form covered by your CCLI license.*

- **Open Broadcaster Software (OBS)** is a FREE streaming software for Windows or Mac that allows streaming to multiple platforms with required internet bandwidth (https://obsproject.com/).
- **YouTube** offers FREE streaming, directly or via software plugins, for those with a verified YouTube account and 50 subscribers (https://restream.io/).
- **Church Online Platform** is a FREE live streaming platform geared toward churches (https://churchonlineplatform.com/).

## Studying the Word of God (Discipleship Tools)

- YouVersion Bible App: https://www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/
- Blue Letter Bible (app or browser): https://www.blueletterbible.org/
- Enduring Word Free Bible Commentary: https://enduringword.com/

## Projection Software (For Music and for General Church Use)

*Please make sure you have a current CCLI License.*

- EasyWorship Presentation Software (nominal monthly fee): https://www.easyworship.com/
- ProPresenter Presentation Software (monthly fee after free trial period): https://www.renewedvision.com/
- Proclaim Presentation Software (monthly fee after free trial period): https://proclaim.logos.com/

## Website Building (A Great Way to Start the Ball Rolling for Any Church)

- **Google Sites** (FREE with Google or Gmail account): https://sites.google.com

  (I use this option a lot. With a FREE Gmail address comes a suite of FREE options.)
  - Google Sites
  - YouTube Channel
  - Google Calendar
  - Google Forms
  - Google Slides
  - Google Documents
  - Google Drive (15G of storage)
  - Google Spreadsheets
- **Wix** (FREE website builder; upgraded plans available for a fee): https://www.wix.com/
- **SquareSpace** (Free trial, but must purchase a plan to go public): https://www.squarespace.com/

## Administration and Giving Software (Make Giving Easy in a Digital World)

- Planning Center (church management software): https://www.planningcenter.com/
- EasyTithe (online giving platform): https://www.easytithe.com/
- Zeffy (FREE fundraising platform): https://www.zeffy.com/
- PushPay (online giving platform with other management tools): https://pushpay.com/

## Children and Youth Ministries (Teach About Jesus and the Path to Salvation)

- Ministry to Children: FREE Lessons and Resources: https://ministry-to-children.com/
- Bible App for Kids: https://open.life.church/preschool
- Youth Lessons: https://thesource4ym.com/ or https://ymresource.com/index.php/ideas-curriculum-free/1543-the-source-for-youth-ministry

What are you dreaming of? How do you want to further the gospel? With some ingenuity, some creativity and patience, all churches can make an impact on the lives of those around them. Take a few moments to check out the resources available to you. By simply implementing just one of these tools effectively, you could be taking a huge step toward advancing the gospel through growing great disciples.

As with any resource, be certain to do your research to see if what is offered affordably meets your needs, and feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions.

Email: glynisvarlack@gmail.com
Website: https://www.glynisvarlack.com/
Facebook: https://www.facebook. com/glynisvarlack
Instagram: https://www.facebook.com/glynisvarlack



GLYNIS VARLACK-ALLGOOD
CLEVELAND, TENNESSEE

HERITAGE MINISTRIES

OUR HERITAGE

# Holiness

The Church of God of Prophecy stands today as a representation of the Holiness Pentecostal belief legacy. The very foundation of our movement reflects a call to holiness that led to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost upon our early church founders. Holiness has been our foundation from the movement's inception. Holiness has been our call throughout our history. We have desired to be a holy people according to the Word of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit of God.

As we reflect on holiness, we see that holiness is foundational to our belief in God. The Bible teaches us that God is holy. In Leviticus, we see the call from God to Israel is that they would be a holy people because he is holy (Leviticus 11:44–45; 19:2; 20:7; 21:8). The New Testament Scriptures continue this call of holiness to all believers in Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter 1:15, the writer states, "But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy" (NLT).

The New Testament call is not simply a call to outwardly follow a list of rules and regulations. Rather, it is a call to a transformation of heart and mind that aligns the believer's life to the heart and mind of Jesus Christ himself, who was holy and without blame.

In reflecting on our heritage, we see a people who believed—even in spite of persecution—that the truth of the Word of God called them to live a holy and pure life through sanctification. This work of grace, when allowed to work in the heart of a believer, would lead to a pure and holy life. As our founders sought this life of holiness, God answered their prayer and guided them in holy living.

In God's great wisdom, he realized man's inability in himself to fulfill this call. And thus, he sent his Holy Spirit upon our forefathers to empower them to holiness and for the call of reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ. John, in recording the words of Jesus, writes that "when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). As the Holy Spirit continues to come on believers today, they too are guided into all truth and reflect the nature of God—the Holy One.

This world continually pulls individuals to believe that attaining a life of holiness is impossible. Yet, through the power of the Holy Spirit and the submission of the individual, we believe that being holy is attainable by the grace of God. As we walk in faith and seek the truth of God's Word, step by step, we grow into a sharper reflection of our holy God.

Our heritage teaches us of a people who chose to sit together, open the Word of God, pray, and discern the truth for God's church. They were not people who thought they knew it all, but rather, they were searchers that desired to learn more. This desire birthed in them a passion to share with others what they were learning and experiencing so that they, too, could be holy as God is holy.

It is through our hearts to disciple—to teach others what we have learned—that we also will experience the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. We will experience a powerful revitalization. We will experience dynamic opportunities to share the hope of Christ with a world that is in desperate need of him.

Remember the prayer that Jesus prayed for you in John 17: "Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth. I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message" (17–20).

**Bishop Todd D. Bagley**
Finance & Administration Executive Assistant
Heritage Ministries Coordinator
Assembly Task Force



# FOWRENEW

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FIELDS OF THE WOOD
A PLACE OF PEACE

# Stewardship at Home Is Proportionate to Stewardship in the Church



When I first applied for my license as a minister in the Church of God of Prophecy in 1988, one of the questionnaires asked something like this: "Do you let your children run in the church during service?" The premise of the question is from 1 Timothy 3:4–5 (NKJV), which says a bishop, overseer, or elder (the various terms used in different Bible translations for *episkopos*) is "one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)." Good stewardship in the church is reflected in how a minister manages his own house or family.

A bishop, overseer, or elder must be able to rule his own family; in fact, a man's ability to rule his family is a fair indication of his ability to care for God's church. The word for *rule* includes the sense of managing, governing, caring for, and being concerned about. *Rule* and *care* are synonymous, with the latter having the components of leadership and concern. Another way to express this first clause is that "he must be able to control his own family."

An important aspect of ruling one's family is making sure that the children behave properly. Thus, a bishop's children should be submissive and respectful. If the bishop is gentle and peace-loving, his children will respect him. While reverence can be understood as respect for their father, it is perhaps better interpreted

as referring to conduct in general; this means that the children should show respect not only to their parents but to others as well.

Dr. John Maxwell, in his book *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, said, "Leadership is influence, nothing more, nothing less."[1] Leaders seek to influence people to achieve their objectives. Influence is a direct result of teaching and example. What a man is will influence his followers to be fully committed to what he says.

Not surprisingly, the Scripture has much to say about the power of example to influence behavior, both for good and for evil. In Leviticus 18:3, God warned Israel not to follow the example of their pagan neighbors: "According to the doings of the land of Egypt, where you dwelt, you shall not do; and according to the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do; nor shall you walk in their ordinances." Deuteronomy 18:9 repeats that warning: "When you come into the land which the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations." Proverbs 22:24–25 warns, "Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways, and set a snare for your soul." The power of an evil ruler to influence his subordinates is seen in Proverbs 29:12: "If a ruler pays attention to lies, all his servants become wicked." Our Lord gave this indictment of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:2–3: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore, whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do."

The Bible also encourages us to follow godly examples. Paul commended the Thessalonians for becoming "followers of us and of the Lord" (1 Thessalonians 1:6). To the Philippians he wrote, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (4:9). He encouraged both Timothy (1 Timothy 4:12) and Titus (2:7) to be good examples for their people to follow. Hebrews 13:7 exhorts us to "remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith [you] follow, considering the outcome of their conduct," while James 5:10 points us to the example of the prophets. Peter admonishes elders to be examples to their flocks (1 Peter 5:3).[2]

There are four keys to producing children who bring honor to their parents:[3]

- First, a father must exercise the authority that makes it advisable for his children to obey. Disobedience must be met with immediate negative consequences. Proverbs 13:24 says, "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly."
- Second, a father must have enough wisdom to make it natural and reasonable for his children to obey. Authority must not be arbitrary, but it must be tempered with reasonableness. Children may not challenge their father's authority, yet they should understand why they are expected to behave in a certain way.
- Third, a father must show a love that makes it delightful to obey. Children should be motivated to obey because they do not want their intimate love relationship with their father to be hindered.
- Fourth, a father must be able to convince his children of the urgency, priority, and privileges of salvation and obedience to the Word of God.

The importance of managing one's family well is now reaffirmed in Scripture by making it a requirement before managing the church's affairs. In the present minister's licensure application, the question I mentioned at the beginning is not there anymore. However, the church added another requirement in the process called the Ministerial Review Board Interview. The eligibility of the applicant can be ascertained during this stage. Discernment is needed. I have seen many ministers who have done great in the ministry to the detriment of their family. The minister needs to prioritize his family next after God. It is a real tragedy when a minister wins many souls for the Lord but loses his family. The minister's first ministry is his family.

1 John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 29.
2 John MacArthur, *1 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 111.
3 MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 111.



BISHOP ROGELIO D. JUSTINIANO, MDIV
PHILIPPINES NATIONAL BISHOP

# LEADING BEYOND INFLUENCE

*"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"*
(Philippians 2:5 KJV; see also vv. 3–8).

Many authors and speakers have correctly noted that leadership is influence—*the ability to motivate people to action without force or demand.* We know this is true, and we see this demonstrated in King David. In 2 Samuel 23:1–2, David identifies himself as the son of Jesse, the man who was raised up on high by God, the anointed of God, and the sweet psalmist of Israel. God had spoken to him and through him by the Spirit of the Lord, and the word of the Lord was in his tongue. He was a leader by all accounts and had great influence on others.

So great was David's influence that his very suggestions or desires compelled men to act on his behalf. In 2 Samuel 23:13–17, David found himself amid a battle with the Philistines. While fenced in by these Philistines and hiding out in the cave of Adullam, he had a moment of yearning for the familiar—for the comforts of his homeland. In his longing, David said, "Would I ever like a drink of water from the well at the gate of Bethlehem!" (23:15 MSG). He simply mentioned his desire, and without a second thought, his top three warriors swung into action. They fought their way through the enemy line to access the well of Bethlehem, gathered water into a container, and brought it back to David to drink.

David was esteemed by these men. Maybe it was because of David's victories in battle, his position as king, and his courage. But David understood that the glory for his victories belonged to God. The loyalty demonstrated by his mighty men, the willingness to give one's life for another, was something that only God was worthy of. In this moment, not only did David display the power of influence but, far beyond influence, the courage to lead by example.

Leadership requires humility, discernment, sacrifice, and wisdom. We see these characteristics displayed in King David. When the three mighty men brought back the water, David, in his wisdom and discernment, did not drink it. Instead, he considered the lives of those who willingly sacrificed their safety for his comfort, and he honored their efforts by recognizing their sacrifice. David understood that all things were lawful for him, but all things **were not expedient** (1 Corinthians 10:23), so he offered a sacrifice instead. In humility he chose not to be so selfish as to partake of the water, though he had every right to as the king and leader. Instead, just as the three warriors sacrificed their safety, David sacrificed his comfort and desire by pouring out the water as an offering to the Lord.

Leadership is about being the example—about humbling ourselves before the Lord, being first a partaker, leading from the front, being what we preach and teach. On this day, David did this very thing. He did not look on his own desires; instead, "in lowliness of mind," he esteemed the effort of the three warriors more important than his personal pleasure!

We see this behavior in Jesus: In lowliness of mind, he esteemed others better than himself. He did not look on his own things—his own interests—but was concerned for the interests of others. Paul goes on to describe him,

> Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. (Philippians 2:6–8 KJV)

*Leadership is more than influence*. Leadership is loving sacrifice, service, humility, and submission to a greater authority than one's self.

**Let this mind be in you**, which was also in Christ Jesus—**Philippians 2:3–8.**



**BISHOP JEFFERY DAVIS**
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND DISCIPLESHIP EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# *Discipleship:* A Commitment to Our Transformation

PART 1

## Introduction

What is transformational discipleship? Is discipleship a momentary event or a lifelong commitment?

Discipleship involves the relationship between a teacher who imparts their knowledge, skill, and life experiences to students who are willing to learn. The definition of disciple is "one who learns knowledge under the guidance of a teacher."[1] The verb "disciple" means "to make a disciple of someone, to teach, to instruct someone."[2] From these definitions, we can conclude that a disciple is someone who lacks certain knowledge that they will acquire from their teacher. Furthermore, the verb "disciple" emphasizes the fact that a disciple is made, and that it involves the process of teaching and instructing someone.

In line with the topic at hand, there is a difference between discipling children and adults. Children learn easily—they are malleable, their minds are eager to learn new things, and they readily receive the teachings of their teachers. They are being formed in their growing stage. Adults, on the other hand, have more difficulty learning new things. We are reluctant when it comes to new teachings and changes. Often, our own knowledge becomes an obstacle to new learning. We challenge our teachers, we oppose them, and often we even reject all new teaching outright.

While children are being *formed*, we adults, who are already formed, need to be *transformed*. Transformation is a change in form or state, moving from one state to another through a process of change. We can compare it to concrete. When concrete is being poured, you can shape it any way you want. Once it hardens, it no longer allows for any kind of change. In other words, it is already formed, it is already hardened, and the only way to change it is to break it and, in the process, ruin it. However, when we take the root "form" and add the prefix "trans-" (meaning "from one place to another") and the suffix "-tion" (meaning "action and effect"), we have *transformation*,[3] which describes a process that involves a change or movement from one initial form to another. The word "transform" indicates the action of producing that change.

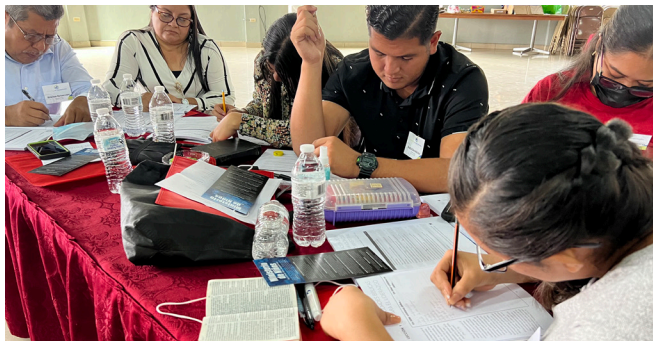
Discipleship requires transformation. Transformation is the goal of discipleship, especially Christian discipleship, whose aim is to reflect the glory of the Lord and be transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, according to the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV).

In this series, I propose to share with you the metamorphosis experienced by Jesus's disciples, especially Peter, John, and James. These three men

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were the closest to Jesus. Leadership experts talk about the law of concentration, which shows that Jesus ministered to the multitudes and had many disciples, but from among them, he chose twelve, and of those twelve, he concentrated on three: Peter, James, and John. And of the three, he concentrated on one: John, the beloved disciple.

This model of concentration, from a leadership perspective, highlights the fact that while we lead many, we should concentrate on a few to invest in them. However, when Jesus called his twelve disciples, I do not believe he was thinking of training twelve leaders. According to Scripture, his primary purpose was to train twelve disciples. In fact, Richard Burridge says that "John uses the term 'disciple' seventy-eight times—more than any other gospel . . . , 'the twelve' are rarely mentioned [twice] (6:67–71; 20:24), and 'apostles' never appears."[4] That is, in John's Gospel, Jesus has a primary focus on the discipleship of those he called.

I do not necessarily believe that Jesus chose Peter, John, and James because he wanted to focus more on them than on the others, as many propose, but because Jesus knew the kind of men they were. Peter was a dangerous man. He carried a sword, and it was not with good intentions. When the time came to use it, he used it ruthlessly, cutting off the right ear of the high priest's servant (John 18:10–11). Jesus called John and James the "Sons of Thunder," possibly because of their inflammatory nature (Mark 3:17). On one occasion, John encountered a man casting out demons in the name of Jesus and forbade him because he did not belong to the Twelve (Luke 9:49). On another occasion, when they were rejected in a Samaritan village, James and John did not hesitate to ask Jesus's permission to call down fire from heaven to annihilate them completely (Luke 9:54). Contrary to what we often do with those we consider dangerous or difficult to deal with—that we tend to remove them from our circles of discipleship and relationships—I believe that Jesus's closeness to these was to show them through his life the essence of discipleship. Instead of discarding them, he chose to transform them from unstable and inflammatory individuals into stable and patient men, and then he charged them with the mission of transforming others.

In the Gospel of John, I find a model of relational discipleship that I want to share with you. First of all, John tells us about the Incarnation of Jesus, which shows us Jesus's relationship with his Father. Secondly, Jesus has an intimate knowledge of those whom he calls. Thirdly, I want to highlight Jesus's relationship with his disciples, one that progresses from followers to friends, brothers, and sons. This model of relational discipleship results in the transformation of the disciples.

Although our relationship with our teachers usually ends when we graduate from our respective courses and careers, Christian discipleship, seen from this relational point of view, goes beyond the temporary relationship between a teacher and a student. It is a filial relationship that lasts for eternity.

## The Incarnation of Jesus

The Incarnation of Jesus is crucial to our theme because he is the one who calls us to discipleship, and our commitment is to learn from him in order to be transformed into his likeness. His life is our example to follow. John tells us that "the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth" (John 1:14 KJV).

Jesus has much to teach us through his Incarnation. The apostle Paul commands us to have the same attitude as Jesus, "who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he [voluntarily] 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!" (Philippians 2:6–8 NIV).

In these verses, we can see the language Paul uses when referring to the Incarnation of Jesus: "He made himself nothing . . ."; he took on "the very nature [form] of a servant [slave] . . ."; "he humbled himself . . ."; he became "obedient to death. . . ." These terms describe someone who, being God and having a high status, does not seek greatness, position, or social status. The Incarnation tells us of someone who emptied himself, deprived himself of his position, and became nothing. Jesus did not cling to his deity; on the contrary, he humbled himself, denied himself, and clothed himself in humanity.

In that process of emptying himself, Jesus then took on the form or nature of a slave. This statement is both shocking and important. The will of the slave, or servant, is subject to the will of his master or lord. Jesus said, "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). Discipleship requires us to submit our will to the will of the Lord. Discipleship requires us to learn to obey just as Jesus did, who "though he was the Son, he learned obedience through his sufferings" (Hebrews 5:8 CJB).

This attitude of voluntary humiliation on the part of Jesus was necessary to model the kind of life and behavior that the disciples were to replicate. Let us not forget that these men were looking for a political leader who would free them from the power of Rome. Perhaps that is why Peter kept his sword at his side, waiting for the moment when the revolt would begin. John and James were seeking a position of superiority over the other disciples: "Teacher, we want you to grant us what we are going to ask of you. . . . Grant us that in your glorious kingdom one of us may sit at your right hand and the other at your left" (Mark 10:35–37, paraphrased). This display of personal ambition caused the other ten disciples to be upset, an opportunity that Jesus used to teach against the oppressive political systems of the world, in which those who consider themselves rulers oppress the people, and high officials abuse their authority (Mark 10:42).

The model Jesus was teaching his disciples was the opposite of what they wanted. Jesus came to show them with his life that a true disciple comes to serve, not to be served. True discipleship teaches that we are not called to lord [authority] over others, to oppress them, or to abuse them. Jesus uses his life as an example to teach those disciples who are eager for power, authority, and position that "even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45 NIV).

Through Jesus's Incarnation, the disciples were to learn that in order to continue the task that Jesus was going to assign them, they had to empty themselves and be filled with him. They had to have the attitude of servants and not of masters. They even had to be willing to give their lives for others as the ultimate sacrifice of a disciple transformed into the likeness of his Lord.

[1] Amador Ángel García Santos, *Diccionario del griego bíblico* (España: Editorial Verbo Divino, 3ª reimpresión, 2021), 537.
[2] García Santos, *Diccionario del griego bíblico*, 537.
[3] "Transformación," deChile.net, accessed May 12, 2025, https://etimologias.dechile.net/?transformacio.n.
[4] Richard A. Burridge, *Four Gospels, One Jesus?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 151.



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