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Teaching Reflective Scripture Reading In The Context Of Small Groups In The Walla Walla University Church

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Abstract

Problem.

While the Seventh-day Adventist Church has emphasized the importance of God's Word and is effective in teaching people how to search Scripture for doctrinal truth, many disciples are not spending significant time in Scripture or growing in relationship with God. This lack of formational Scripture reading is due to numerous challenges that can discourage people from spending time in God's Word. A primary challenge is that many people confess that they do not know how to read Scripture for relationship with God; they long to know how to read Scripture to hear from God and relevantly and meaningfully apply Scripture to their daily lives. This demonstrates a great opportunity in the church to further disciple people, teaching them how to abide in Jesus and His Word. This need has been seen in the Walla Walla University Church as many expressed a desire for deeper experiences in God's Word. Therefore, it became apparent that a resource was needed to disciple members in the practice of reflecting on Scripture.

Methods

An eight-week Scripture reflection curriculum was developed and two pilot groups

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conducted with the intent of discipling participants in abiding with Jesus and His Word. Because God and Scripture are relational and communal, the Scripture reflection curriculum was intentionally implemented in a small group context. The interplay of personal and communal Scripture reflection practice is characterized as significant and interdependent "sacred spaces" that lead to deepening faith formation. An experiential learning model was used to engage participants in relationship with other growing disciples. Each week a Scripture reflection practice was introduced, taught, and experienced both personally and communally. The emphasis of these practices was to savor small portions of Scripture until the Holy Spirit brings it to life in one's heart and mind. Time for discussion and prayer together was integral to the group process and community connection developed. After the conclusion of the two pilot groups, focus groups were conducted to assess the impact of the Scripture reflection practices, and the small group community experience in the lives of the participants.

Results

Nine women enrolled in the first pilot group and continued throughout the eightweek group. The second group included 10 members, both men and women. Assessing their own experiences in the pilot groups, members expressed various significant benefits from the Scripture reflection practices experienced that led to a deepening relationship with God and His Word. All members expressed appreciation for the small group community context, and felt that reading and experiencing Scripture together with other disciples was meaningful and resulted in a closer connection with one another. While it was hoped that there would be further implementation of these groups and curriculum, this project did not include a way to mentor and develop new leaders or additional groups. However, as demonstrated in the focus groups, a natural result of meaningful time in God's Word is the desire to share it with others. Subsequently, a member from one of the pilot groups started and led two additional Scripture reflection groups, utilizing the curriculum and material developed for this project. There are also plans in place for implementation of additional groups.

Conclusions

Jesus called his disciples into a faith-forming community, where they lived the spiritual life together, challenging and strengthening each other as they each grew in a deeper relationship with Jesus himself. This call continues today. Significant obstacles exist that threaten this ideal, and few resources are available to help disciples experience Scripture and the God of Scripture more deeply. However, this project demonstrated that meaningful spiritual growth can take place in the lives of individual disciples by spending time reflecting on Scripture rather than reading for information alone and when done within a supportive, spiritual community this leads to an on-going faith formation. As a result of this proj

Subject Area

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