



Discipleship and Stewardship as Vital Aspects for Church Mission: A Case of Kwamrombo SDA Church in Arusha, Tanzania

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Abstract

This study sought to establish the linkage between stewardship and discipleship in the context of Kwamrombo SDA Church in Arusha City, using 20 church members as participants. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews and the thematic approach was employed in analysis. The study holds that in order to resolve the discipleship and stewardship issues in the Kwamrombo church, members need to make decisions to equally support the church through discipleship and stewardship. If couples plan their finances together, they will be more likely to remind each other on the importance returning tithe and giving offering faithfully. They will also be of help to their children and other church members. Church programs need be conducted in a holistic approach by encompassing both spiritual and economic empowerment aspects including entrepreneurship and personal financial management. There is need for intentional discipleship program that will enable the church members to know their God given responsibilities as Disciples of Christ. Church pastors and church leaders need to launch stewardship programs that will include faithfully receiving the word of God in their lives and living in harmony with the word. This will motivate members to return tithe, give offerings and participate in discipleship programs effectively.

Keywords: Discipleship, stewardship, Bible study community, tithe, offerings planning, and blessings

Introduction

Disciple is “a follower of a religious, political, an artistic leader or a teacher” (Horby, 1995). It is also defined as “follower or adherent of any leader of thought” (Sykes, 1987). “A disciple is one who embraces and obeys the teachings of Christ and endeavors by word and deed to make others disciples” (Watson, 2014). One of the works of Jesus Christ was to make disciples (Mat 10:1) and one of the great assignments that Christ gave to His disciples was to make disciples of all nations (Math. 20:19). Before commanding them to go and make others disciples, they had to become disciples first. Going to make others disciples is therefore more than just making. It involves applying the word of Jesus to practice the word and to teach the same (Ezra 7:10). Teaching others what we don't practice is contrary to the teaching of Jesus Christ (Math. 23:3).

On the other hand, stewardship is defined as “... a relationship that every person bears to his Creator” (Mel Rees, 1982). Disciples, as far as stewardship is concerned, are required to be faithful (1 Cor. 4:12). Every person who has been called to be a Disciples of Christ needs to be a good steward of God (1 Petro 4:10). Stewardship is further defined as, “... a person employed to manage another's property, especially a large house or land” (Horby, 1995). It is “a person entrusted with management of another's property, especially paid manager of a great house or estate” (Sykes, 1987).

One of the main challenging problems of Kwamrombo SDA Church is that it had only 36% of the church members who give tithe and offerings faithfully to God, which leaves 63% of membership unsupportive to the church financially (Dickson, 2020). This figure is

generally similar to the Adventist Church trends in Tanzania (Ntabindi, 2021) which leaves 63% of membership unsupportive to the church financially. Tithe is one of the key aspects of stewardship, hence a reliable indicator of one's faithfulness to the Church and to God. Moreover, at Kwamrombo SDA Church, there is lack of effective discipleship. According to church records, only 25% of members are bold enough to witness the message of Christ to others (Dickson, 2020). The aspect of witnessing is a viable indicator of true discipleship.

Kwamrombo SDA Church is located in the suburban of Arusha City. It was purposely selected after initial visits by one of the researchers who detected the existence members' lack of involvement in stewardship and discipleship matters. The lack of financial support by the majority of the church membership cripples church's mission and infrastructural development of the church. It must be clear that God does not rain funds from heaven, but funds are in God's people. In the Old Testament era, the Hebrews built the sanctuary while travelling to Canaan (Exo 25:8; 39:42, 43). In the time of David and Solomon, people gave their possessions to build the temple (1 Chro 29:6-8). Jesus himself said, blessed is the one who gives than one who merely receives (Acts 20:35). Therefore, it will always remain important that stewardship and discipleship ought to be reflected in church's mission as well as in the church's infrastructural development (Stanton, 2021).

Sanou (2021) makes it clear that discipleship should be taken and regarded as a long-term commitment in making disciples. Just as mother takes care of her children, church members should be cared and guided to be true Disciples. This suggests that discipleship making should be taken as a lifelong commitment and not a short-term business. Making disciples calls us to use all that we have to reach the target. Klingbeil (2020) agrees with this when he says, discipleship requires all our resources including time, cash, energy influence and creativity in order to build the kingdom of God. Literature indicates that stewardship shows the lifestyle of the believer and it is the indicator of spiritual maturity of the Christians. Stewardship, in a true sense, is carrying the cross of Christ. Ngesthi (2021) further suggests that discipleship and

stewardship are closely related. A practical example can be drawn from Paul. Although technically Paul has not been referred to in the bible as a disciple, he was a disciple in the sense that he continually learned from Jesus about the spirit of giving and ultimately this made him to handle funds faithfully. The entire New Testament is evidential that Paul never misappropriated church funds and that is discipleship blended in stewardship (Watson, 1984).

This study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. What are factors that determine participation of church members in disciple making among the church members at Kwamrombo SDA Church?
2. What are the causes of irregular returning of tithe and offerings to God among the church members at Kwamrombo SDA Church?

Literature Review

Literature has been taken from America, Europe, Asia and Africa. This literature dealt with discipleship and stewardship aspects. Statistics indicates that about 63% of the church members at Kwamrombo SDA Church are not faithful in returning tithe and offerings to God (Dickson, 2020). In search of a possible solution to this problem, the researchers read the work of Radley who conducted a study to find the causes for the inability to manage financial resources in the context of disciple making in Roundup – Lewistown, Canada. The key cause of this problem was found to be lack of financial literacy and desire to make disciples. In addressing the issues, both pre-financial literacy and post-financial literacy seminars were conducted. Additionally, topics on disciple making were presented. About 151 out of 200 church members participated in the seminar. The seminar had a series of 14 periods each lasting for one hour and half. After every period, there was a session of questions and answers. The results showed that the intervention was effective as tithe and offering began to increase and people were motivated in making disciples. It is therefore concluded that when financial literacy and discipleship are linked together in training sessions, there is a likelihood of seeing

increment in tithe and offering as well as more people becoming Disciples of Christ (Raduly, 2017).

Moon (2021) conducted a study to find ways to enable the Collegedale Seventh-day Adventist Church to be aware of the spiritual needs of the people in its ministry context. It was revealed that the Church needed a relational catalyst to help the members be true Disciple of Christ. In the process, Ebenezer Model of Missional Prayer was created to be a relational catalyst for discipleship in the church. The results of this study were positive as church members were more responsible in ministering to others (Moon, 2021).

The growth of the church depends on its ministry to others. It is crucial therefore, that church members need to be connected with Christ, that they may hear Him speaking to them and get power of living His life and leading others to the same experience. This is true essence of discipleship. As the church members take upon themselves their discipleship role and work for the salvation of others, the church members will strengthen their faith and grow in grace. In other words, there is no better way of helping the new church members than helping the longtime Christian to lead and to live the life of their Master Jesus Christ.

Wellington conducted a study in the Greater New York Conference (GNYC), which showed that the church in its local context was struggling to make discipleship strong regardless of usage of technology. Special training was conducted for a group of pastors on new media technology. The program was successful in that, pastors were able to adapt new media technology within the ministry context. As a result, the new technology was proven to be an effective tool for making other Disciples of Christ (Wellington, 2017).

Cote (2021) conducted a study at the Cornerstone Adventist Church in British Columbia Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The church was on the state of decline. There was a number of the church members who were inactive in discipleship and stewardship. This was evident in poor church attendance, disunity among members and failure to invite others to church. The study used survey questionnaires and literature, seminars, revival meetings as well as sermons (Cote, 2021). The results of the study were fruitful as the church experienced unity and

spiritual renewal among its members, a core ingredient for discipleship and stewardship (Niekerk, 2021).

Izungo and Muneja (2021) conducted a study on how discipleship and stewardship work together in churches. The findings indicated that discipleship and stewardship have been inadequately studied together. Hence this study is a response to fill the gap.

Research Methodology

This study employed a case study design through interview schedule as source of data. It was conducted at Kwamrombo SDA Church. This church is situated in West part of Arusha City, North East part of Tanzania. The aim of the study was to find out why some of the church members were not sustainable disciples and stewards. The researchers purposely selected the Kwamrombo Church because her members experienced challenges in discipleship and stewardship issues. The interview sessions involved 20 respondents and took 15 to 30 minutes for each respondent. The information was recorded and soon after one of the researchers transcribed it ready for analysis. The 20 participants were men and women, ordinary church members, church leaders young and old. Each participant was given number in place of his/her name for the purpose of privacy. Data was analyzed through the thematic approach.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study base on the data collected from the field regarding discipleship and stewardship at Kwamrombo SDA Church. During the interview schedule, several themes emerged as appears in Table 1.

Table 1: Themes and Subthemes

SN	Theme	Subthemes
1.	DISCIPLESHIP	Blessings Bible study Witnessing
2.	STEWARDSHIP	Reformation Planning Program Improvement

Research Question 1: What are factors that determine participation of church members in disciple making?

This research question sought to establish factors that determine participation of church members

in disciple making. There were three subthemes that emerged from interviews regarding discipleship. These are blessing, bible study and witnessing as appears in table 1.

Blessing as a Result of Devotion

One of the subthemes that emerged during the interview schedule was blessing as a factor that determines participation of church members in disciple making.

Majority of the participants (18 out of 20) mentioned 'blessing' as the main reason of conducting their daily devotions. The findings show that respondents considered blessing as the result of daily devotion without recognizing that discipleship must be connected with devotion. One of the respondents, for instance, said,

I am doing well in my daily devotional program, and I can witness the blessings that the Lord is giving me as a result of the seminar which our pastor gave us. The seminar is important and it makes a difference in my life (P1).

Another respondent commented, "It is the source of peace. Through private prayers, I get to know God better and love Him more as He continues to answer my prayers" (P2).

The finding implies that the main motivation for daily devotion was to be blessed. While indeed it is good to be blessed before a person can be motivated to make other people disciples, this does not reflect the agape love which is mentioned in the bible, the love that does good to others without necessarily expecting a reciprocal treatment.

Bible Study

This subtheme emerged to find out if the participants took the word of God seriously in their lives. The question asked on this part was, how have you been conducting your private Bible study as an aspect that enriches discipleship? The findings show that most respondents had the challenge in studying their Bible on the daily basis as an aspect that enriches discipleship. The respondents tended to read the bible as a means of personal devotion and some did not read it at all. It was evident that the core motivation for reading was not discipleship as the respondents would not connect the idea to their responses. One respondent, for instance, said

"In the beginning I was reading the Bible alone, but later I began to read it with the bible study guide. This time around I am reading the Bible with the devotional book and I am comfortable with the plan." (P4). Another respondent said, "I have not been able to read the Bible according to the given plan as presented in the Bible study guide. (P5).

This suggests that respondents need to be conscious that bible study clearly may help a person to be a disciple of Christ, who will later reach out to other people. Bible study should not be an end in itself, but it should motivate readers to make others be followers of Christ. Allder (2020) concurs with this when he points out that the word of God is needed in making preparation for the ministry. In other words, without the word of God, very little can be accomplished in making other Disciples of Christ. It is the word of God that qualifies church members to be the disciple of Christ indeed, through regular devotions (John 8:31).

Witnessing

It was necessary to find out if church members played their role in making the members of their families be the Disciples of Christ as it is important to begin the work of discipleship making at homes (Deut 6:6, 7). The question that was asked in this section was, how do you manage to make members of your family Disciples of Christ?

One participant said,

In making the members of my family the Disciples of Christ, I am doing well, but there are some challenges that I am facing on this matter (The challenge was not shared). I am praying that God may help me that I may overcome the challenges that I am facing. If God will help me then I will be able to lead the members of my family to be the Disciples of Christ. (P6).

Another participant added;

To some degree, I have been successful in leading the members of my family to be the Disciples of Christ. I have been involving them during morning and evening worship daily. I have also been involving them in teaching the word of

God. Some are doing well and some are still struggling. However, there is hope of achieving the goal (P7).

Failing to make first the members of the family Disciples of Christ could be one of the reasons that make people fail to make others in their communities the Disciples of Christ. The concern is that how can other people accept the gospel when the same gospel does not make sense with the members of the families of those who propagate it? Or how can church members feed others the word of God when the members of their families are languishing? If truly the gospel is good, it must begin its good work at home and then spread over to all other places. Most importantly, the good works of the gospel at home would be the undeniable evidence of its power to other people. Therefore, if parents are not making their own children disciples, they are not true disciples. If parents fail to make the members of their families the Disciples of Christ, it is likely that they will not be able to carry out the same work of making others disciples in their community. Just as it was essential for the gospel to be preached first in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8), it is also crucial that the gospel must find its roots at home before it spreads over to other places.

In summing up the first research question, it has been made clear that there are some factors that determine the participation of church members in disciple making. The respondents need to reflect the agape love, the love that does well to others without expecting any sort of reward by doing so. It is therefore important that church members should engage themselves to study the word of God for the purpose of getting to know the will of God, living it and making others Disciples of Christ. It is crucial that the gospel work must begin its good works at home before it spreads over to others places. If the gospel work begins at home then we can witness its power to other people.

Research Question 2: What are the causes of irregular returning of tithe and offerings to God among the church members at Kwamrombo SDA Church?

This research question sought to determine causes of irregular behavior in returning tithe and offering among Church members at Kwamrombo SDA Church.

There were three subthemes that emerged from interviews regarding stewardship as reflected in table 1. These are reformation, planning and program improvement.

Reformation

The findings indicate that lack of reformation among individuals and to the whole church at large is one of the causes of members not to return tithe and give offering. It has been made clear that church leadership is doing quite a lot to teach the church members on the matter of returning tithe and offerings. This has been done through sermons and even through house-to-house visitations, but the results have not been encouraging. This is indicated by what one of the respondents revealed: "church leadership is involving members in various programs which help to fulfill its mission. But what we need most is reformation. I think this will have an exponential effect in tithe and offerings as an aspect of stewardship" (P19).

One more respondent revealed that:

There is one department in the church that is crucial in doing the mission of the local church, and this is the youth department. I am not convinced if our youths know the importance of returning tithe and giving offerings as a tangible aspect of stewardship. I think reformation needs to begin with the youth. When this energetic group catches the fire, there will be plenty of tithe and offering in God's storehouse (P20).

It seems that while the church members attend worship and get the messages from the word of God, they don't live up to what they are expected of. They need to hear the word of God and put it into practice. Paul exhorts members of the church not only to be hearers of the word of God, but also the doers (James 1:22). The reformation is needed in this aspect that is corresponding to the instructions received from God regarding returning tithe and giving offerings. According to Jesus, the person who hears the word of God and lives in harmony with it, is the wise person (Mat 7:24) but the person who does not apply God's word in his life, is a fool who has built on the sand (Math. 7:26).

Planning

Another question was whether couples do plan together how to give tithe and offering since this

could be one of the reasons for irregular returning tithe and giving offering. This question was responded to by married people. The overall finding showed that most couples who responded did not plan together because they felt that each member has to be responsible for his or her own income. One participant, for instance, said, "I think my money is my money and it is me and God. I do not need to consult my wife for this matter" (P3). Another respondent said: "since my husband does not want me to know his income, I hide mine as well. So sometimes, I give and sometime I don't (P15). Therefore, one of the reasons that made couples not to return tithe and give offerings sustainably, was fear to disclose what one of the couples give as this would reveal one's monthly income.

Since the bible is clear that husband and wife are one body (Gen 2:24), there is a need for couples to plan together in giving tithe and offering. If this ideal behavior is cultivated among couples, they will be helping each other in such a way that if one is tempted not to give for God's work, the other one will rescue.

Program Improvement

It was vitally important to find out the attitude of the church members toward the church programs and whether the programs that are conducted meet their needs, in helping them to have a behavior of returning tithe and giving offering regularly. The overall finding showed that respondents agreed that church programs are satisfactory to make them have regular behavior in returning tithe and offerings. One of the respondents had this to say: "Honestly the Seventh-Day Adventist Church has best programs which can make worshippers be regular in returning tithe and giving offering—I think the problem of irregular behavior remains as an individual matter" (P13).

Another respondent added:

I joined the SDA Church from Sunday keeping churches. I am comfortable with church programs which are intended to have a regular behavior in returning tithe. In the SDA church, we give to the church not to some individual who could have personal interests of enriching oneself (P11).

Nevertheless, a segment of others had a different view that church programs needed improvement

in order to change the behavior of irregular returning of tithe and giving offering. One of the respondents, for instance, said:

Seventh - day Adventist church has so many programs that are aiming to inspire and motivate church members to return to God what belong to Him through tithe and offerings, and this is done while focusing on spiritual aspect alone – I think there is a need to have seminars on entrepreneurship or economic empowerment (P 16).

Another respondent, added

Personally I am not comfortable with stewardship emphasis week; this is because the emphasis is centered on becoming faithful on tithe and offerings most of the time. My thinking is the church needs to address the issues pertaining my income also to make a reasonable balance. I think the time has come that the church should have stewardship programs that are balanced and suitable to address the church members' financial challenges (P18).

There is therefore a need of improving the programs of the church for the purpose of meeting different needs of the church members in order to enable the church to fulfill its mission. While the spiritual needs of members are essential, the physical needs should not be overlooked. The two should be considered and addressed accordingly for proper growth of the church members. While the church is doing well in addressing the matter of returning tithe and offerings to God, it has to do well in addressing to the church members on how to get money and how to manage finance matter intelligently.

The Link between Discipleship and Stewardship

The study shows that there is link between Discipleship and Stewardship. For example, Paul was by implication a disciple of Christ as it is recorded that he was calling others to Christ, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4). This is in harmony with the commandment that Jesus Christ gave to all His disciples before He went to heaven (Math 28:18-20). After Paul has

experienced such a relations with his Master, he called others to follow his example in Christ (1 Cor. 11:1. Paul's life was united with Christ; his life was in Christ. That is why he was able to make disciples. According to Jesus, those who are united with Christ and keep His words become His disciples (John 15:8). Paul was involved in making disciples for Christ while living in harmony with God's word. And this made him to be Christ's disciples indeed (John 8:31). It is only the disciple who is able to make other Disciples of Christ (Watson, 2014).

Moreover, as a faithful steward, he was a tent maker as well (Acts 18:3). He knew that he was also a steward of God (1 Cor 4:2) just as he knew that he was called to make others stewards of God (1 Cor. 4:1). Paul is recorded calling Galatian and Corinthian churches to prepare offerings for God's work (1 Cor 16:1,2). He never overburdened others in requesting the support but he worked to sustain his own life and the work of God (2 Cor 12:16). Paul did not only work but he exhorted other to work, "if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2Thes 3:10). What he lived and what he taught was in the harmony of God's commandment regarding work (Exodus 20:9). Discipleship and stewardship are therefore two essential aspects that should be found in every faithful Christian.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that in order to address the discipleship and stewardship issues in the Kwamrombo church, members need to make personal decisions to equally support the church through discipleship and stewardship. If couples plan their finances together, they will be more likely to remind each other on the importance returning tithe and giving offering faithfully. They will be of help to their children and other church members as well.

Church programs need be conducted in a holistic approach by encompassing both spiritual and economic empowerment aspects like entrepreneurship and personal financial management. This will boost the financial power of church members and inspire them to return tithe and give offerings faithfully. There is need for intentional discipleship program that will enable the church members to know their God given responsibilities as Disciples of Christ. Church pastors and church leaders need to

launch stewardship program that will include faithfully receiving the word of God in their lives and living in harmony with the word. This will motivate members to return tithe, give offerings and participate in discipleship programs effectively.

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