The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Timothy 2:2)
DESCRIPTION OF DISCIPLESHIP LIFE EXPERIENCE IN A SERVANT LEADERSHIP CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT: Becoming a true follower of Jesus Christ and helping others to become such a disciple of Christ remain the greatest challenges of our day. Discipleship life calls for living a life of love, humility, integrity, and consistent growth with the goals of understanding the matters of God, forming character, and developing skills for ministry (McCallum and Lowery, 2012). Servant leadership values and behaviors can help Christians experience the being and making aspect of discipleship life if applied well (Winston, 2003). Using phenomenological research method (Moustakas, 1994), interviews were conducted with 20 participants, describing the discipleship life experience of the staff at Life Ministry Zimbabwe in servant leadership context. Nine themes emerged through first-cycle and second-cycle coding process (Saldana, 2016). The themes are discussed and recommendations have been made for contemporary practitioners and future research.

KEYWORDS: Disciple Being, Disciple Making, Service, Phenomenological Study
Description of Discipleship Life Experience in A Servant Leadership Context

Ogden (2007) argued that contemporary Christianity does not care much about discipleship since Christian leaders, in one or another way, send the signal that “it is alright to be a Christian without being a disciple of Christ” (p.7). Geiger, Kelly and Nation (2012) believed that discipleship deficiency prevails among churches and Christian organizations in these days. This is an embarrassing and hard truth of our era. Dodson (2012) asserted that being a disciple is an identity that essentially differs from what a disciple does. A disciple’s identity is eternal; whereas, a disciple’s role is a temporal one according to Dodson. This implies the reason that Christians should prioritize becoming disciples, and making disciples, for Christ.

When it comes to disciple making, Eims (2009) lamented the shortage of laborers since spiritually dedicated laborers who can disciple other disciples are very few. Coleman (2010) stated that ministering to the masses is not enough to bring followers of Christ to the desired maturity level. Coleman suggested that the example of Jesus must be followed to serve people by staying close to them so that they can learn from leaders in natural settings as well.

Few studies (Dodson, 2012; Ogden, 2007) explored how discipleship life experience can be described from a servant leadership values and principles perspective. Dodson and Ogden indicated discipleship life experience - as being disciples of Jesus Christ, and making disciples for Him. The scarcity of information on the link between discipleship life experience and servant leadership values and behaviors (Dodson; Ogden) is regrettable because it is the sort of connection that would help churches, if they are to gain a detailed description of discipleship life experiences of believers from servant leadership perspectives (Dodson; Ogden).

McCallum and Lowery (2012) shared that the word “disciple” comes from the Greek word “mathetes – a student or learner. Similarly, Geiger, Kelley, and Nation (2012) confirmed the Greek word mathetes to represent the word “disciple” in the New Testament with a connotation of “pupil or apprentice” which simply means “learner or student” (p.7). Coleman (2006) echoed the same voice that “disciple” means “learners” or “pupils” of the Master (p.49). This leads to the first interview question - how would you describe your understanding of discipleship?

At this stage in the research, the discipleship life experience is generally defined as being a disciple of, and making disciples for, Jesus Christ (Dodson, 2012). To measure this definition, McCallum and Lowery (2012) cited three general goals of discipleship – character formation, knowledge of God, and ministry capability, which constitute a complete person in Christ as Paul described it in Colossians 1: 28.

This research will add to the knowledge base by bringing clear understanding on discipleship effectiveness when practiced in servant leadership context. Discipleship practitioners such as church communities, faith-based organizations, theologians, seminary students, and individual Christians will gain more understanding on the description of discipleship life experience in servant leadership context. This may ensure becoming an effective disciple of Jesus Christ and making disciples for Him effectively.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the discipleship life experience of staff at Life Ministry Zimbabwe when described from a servant leadership point of view. This study contributes to the knowledge base by answering the research question - what does the discipleship life experience of staff at Life Ministry Zimbabwe look like when described from a servant
leadership perspective? Servant leadership theory was used as a context to describe the discipleship life experience of the staff at Life Ministry Zimbabwe using phenomenological study through field interactions and face-to-face interview qualitative data collection methods.

ASPECTS OF DISCIPLESHIP

Dodson (2012) argued that discipleship is not only following Jesus alone but also making disciples for Him. In Christian context, discipleship entails being and doing aspects, which is – becoming a disciple of and making disciples for Jesus Christ (Coleman, 2006; McCallum & Lowery, 2012; Ogden, 2007). This connects with servant leadership in a sense that servant leaders are servant first (aspect of being) and then serve (aspect of doing) followers by putting them first (Greenleaf, 1977; Patterson, 2003; Winston, 2003).

THE BEING ASPECT OF DISCIPLESHIP

Who is a disciple? Dodson (2012) presented a disciple of Jesus as someone who lives a gospel-centered life through learning, internalizing and communicating the gospel. Coleman (2006) equates the essence of being a disciple with absolute surrender, which “meant the surrender of one’s whole life to the Master in absolute submission to his sovereignty” (p.50). Servant leaders are seen as servant first (Greenleaf, 2012). This matches the being aspect of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

According to Ogden (2007), God uses the disciplines of quiet time, bible study, prayer, and worship to grow disciples into Christlikeness which is the ultimate aspiration of being a disciple. Dodson (2012) stated that discipleship involves a fight for life, in pursuit of gaining more of Jesus, who is more satisfying, and thus desirable than anything else.

Coleman (2006) viewed obedience and loyalty as a hallmark of being a true disciple of Jesus Christ since Jesus did not require his disciples “to be smart, but they had to be loyal” (p.49). Dodson (2012) concluded that Gospel-centered discipleship is primarily about who we are rather than what we do for God. Servant leaders uphold the value of altruism that sacrifices for the sake of others (Northouse, 2015), and that relates with the being aspect of discipleship. This leads to the second interview question - would you describe the being aspect of your discipleship life experience?

THE MAKING ASPECT OF DISCIPLESHIP

What does it mean to make disciples? Coleman (2006) suggested that new believers should be entrusted with a mature believer to follow until they reach a stage where they will be able to stand on their own and help others. Ogden (2007) shared the terms – internalization and multiplication as the disciples making model of Jesus Christ. Internalization refers to the intentional investment in terms of being together, building relationships and teachings that a disciple does to facilitate for growth and maturity. Ogden (2007) argued, “Disciples cannot be mass produced but are the product of intimate and personal investment” (p.20). Servant leaders add value to the lives of their followers through serving them with selfless motives (Northouse, 2015) which also signifies the internalization approach of the disciple maker.

Jesus used multiplication as well to grow exponentially his impacts through the few people he chose and discipled as Coleman (2006) emphasized that Jesus’s concern was not producing
multitudes through teaching but few selected disciples whom the multitudes can follow. Eims (2009) highlighted that Jesus was spending a significant amount of his time and energy with 12 men only multiplying his life and ministry into their lives.

Geiger, Kelley, and Nation (2012) saw prayer being an essential role of disciple maker. Dodson (2012) observed that disciple making involves the sharing of lives from disciple makers by being vulnerable about their personal lives such as failures and successes. Eims (2009) suggested going out together to evangelize as such acts motivates the disciples to stick together and their discipleship program alive. In the process of disciple making, Dodson (2012) acknowledged that discipleship processes are messy, uncomfortable, and could be challenging. This leads to the third interview question - would you describe the disciple making aspect of your discipleship life experience?

CHARACTERISTICS OF DISCIPLES

Geiger, Kelley, and Nation (2012) posited that maturing believers consistently exhibit behaviors such as “bible engagement, obeying God and denying self, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, and building relationships” (p.59). These attributes of discipleship overlap with service, community building, altruism, and stewardship values of servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1977; Patterson, 2003; Spears, 2002; Winston, 2003). This leads to the fourth interview question - how would you describe your lived experience of discipleship?

Ogden (2007) presented the attributes of discipleship as being filled with the Holy Spirit, bearing the fruit of Spirit, and developing values such as “trust, love and justice” (p.120). These attributes of discipleship overarch the values and behaviors of servant leadership such as agapao love, empowerment, humility, trust, and justice (Greenleaf, 1997; Paterson, 2003; Spears, 2002; Winston, 2003). This indicates that disciples of Jesus Christ and servant leaders have much in common. This leads to the fifth interview question - would you describe a characteristic of a true disciple of Jesus Christ from your life experience?

PROCESSES OF MAKING DISCIPLES

Discipleship is a process that takes time, requires energy and patience (Coleman, 2006; Eims, 2009). It takes good skills and solid character for effective discipleship (Dodson, 2012; Geiger, Kelley & Nation, 2012). McCallum and Lowery (2012) described the process of discipleship to be: friendship building, meeting regularly, enhanced interpersonal sharing, bible study, theological content study, prayer, counseling and helping in areas of weakness among other things. These processes drive the outcomes of effective discipleship. This leads to the sixth interview question - would you describe the processes of discipleship from your life experience?

From their perspective, Geiger, Kelley, and Nation (2012) presented five basic steps to transformational discipleship: “Bible study, prayer, silence, service, and worship” (pp.121-125). This implies that doing these things on a regular basis together, ensures growth and reaching maturity level. These processes of discipleship link up with servant leadership practices when the disciple maker espouses the servant leadership values of service, healing, commitment, empowerment and community building to achieve the discipleship goal (Patterson, 2003; Spears, 2002; Winston, 2003).
This leads to the seventh interview question – from your own discipleship life experience, how would you describe servant leadership values and behaviors drive the effectiveness of discipleship?

HINDRANCES TO EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP

Dodson (2012) claimed that there are challenges that arise from sinful nature of men who are proud, self-dependent, arrogant and dishonest in their values and behaviors lacking godly characters. Such challenges could be explained as a lack of servant leadership values such as trust, self-awareness, agapao love, humility, commitment and building community in the disciple maker (Patterson, 2003; Spears, 2002; Winston, 2003). This leads to the eighth interview question - would you describe hindrances to your discipleship life?

Eims (2009) emphasized that discipleship will not be effective when believers lack motivation to grow, intimacy with Jesus Christ is compromised, and passion for sharing the gospel grows cold (pp.50-56). Eims further described that effective discipleship will be hindered when sense of disciple possession is developed, blindness to disciples’ weakness is entertained, failure on disciple maker to correct mistakes, and overloading the disciples with assignments occurs (p.105). These challenges of discipleship tend to reflect lack of servant leadership values and behaviors such as commitment, self-efficacy, and organizational citizenship behavior (Winston, 2003; Yukl, 2013). This leads to the ninth interview question- As a leader in the ministry, how would you describe being a disciple and making disciples from the servant leadership point of view?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the discipleship life experience of staff at Life Ministry Zimbabwe when described from the servant leadership point of view. The research design for this research is phenomenological study (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas,1994) for the rationale that Padgett (2008) presented, “Phenomenological findings explore not only what participants experience but also the situations and conditions of those experiences” (p.36). The phenomenological method appears as best fit because it enables one to study the lived experiences of the research participants in servant leadership context, and help answer the central research question - what does the discipleship life experience of staff at Life Ministry Zimbabwe looks like when described from servant leadership context?

PARTICIPANT SAMPLING

Padgett (2008) stated that the phenomenological research participants are “individuals who share a particular life experience” (p.35). Moustakas (1994) indicated that participants could be selected without pre-established advanced criteria as long as they had the experience of the phenomenon, available for long interviews, willing to be electronically recorded, and allow the researcher to publish the findings (p.107).

In this phenomenological study, out of the 45 staff of the ministry, 20 participants from Life Ministry Zimbabwe, a non-profit organization that exists to go and make disciples of all nations in Zimbabwe since 1979, were selected and interviewed. Participants were selected utilizing purposive sampling following Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2014) guidelines. The participants in this study
represent a variety of leadership experiences at local, national and global levels. At the time of the interview, every leader was actively engaged in their role of practicing discipleship and leading their teams to do so. Of the 20 research participants, nine were female and 11 were male.

**DATA COLLECTION**

In the phenomenological study, the main data collection method remains in-depth interview that “begins with a social conversation or a brief meditative activity aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere” (Moustakas, 1994, p.114). Leedy and Ormrod (2010) outlined that phenomenological study rely on “a lengthy interview” (p.141) that may require one to two hours with 5 to 25 participants. Creswell (2014) indicated that phenomenological study demands “three to ten” participants (p.189). Padgett (2008), on the other hand shared that phenomenological study interview is conducted with “6 to 10 participants” (p.36) with multiple interview requirements with each participant for the sake of achieving depth until “saturation has been achieved” (p.126). Face-to-face lengthy interview (40-60 minutes) was determined as primary data collection method with the chosen participants until saturation is reached (Padgett, 2008). The data collection procedures were followed, and all participants agreed to willingly participate in the research and signed informed consent form (Padgett, 2008).

The scope of this study is limited to the description of discipleship life experience in servant leadership context at faith-based organization (Life Ministry Zimbabwe). This study does not include churches or other faith-based organizations. However, the findings can be generalized to other faith based organizations and churches who do discipleship since the concepts, aspects, processes and challenges of discipleship remains although the strategy may differ across cultures (Dodson, 2012; Geiger, Kelley & Nation, 2012). Phenomenological study might pose a challenge as the participants might not be able to describe their experience fully due to the emotions that might get involved or unforeseen circumstances during interview (Moustakas, 1994). However, the data collection was done with great care in a way that made possible to extract as much information as possible during the face-to-face interview.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Researchers use coding to analyze data, to look for patterns, and to assemble theories (Saldana, 2003). Patterns coding, which are indeed vital to coding in qualitative inquiry, were applied (Patton, 2014). In this study, first-cycle coding for the responses from the nine questions were manually done following Saldana (2016) guidelines. Then, themes from the coding processes were derived (Saldana, 2003). Then, second-cycle coding was applied as per Saldana (2016) suggestions.

In the second cycle coding processes, the portions coded can be the exact same units, longer passages of text, analytic memos about the data, and even a reconfiguration of the codes themselves developed thus far (Patton, 2014). Second coding helps researchers to take bias out of the research (Saldana, 2016). The second-cycle codes are presented as final coding processes from which answers to the research question were derived.
RESEARCH RESULTS

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the discipleship life experience of staff at Life Ministry Zimbabwe when described from the servant leadership point of view. Following is a summation of the themes derived from first-cycle coding and then refined through second-cycle coding processes along with the frequency of themes for each interview question 1-9, that help answer the research question - What does the discipleship life experience of staff at Life Ministry Zimbabwe look like when described from servant leadership perspective? The findings are summarized in Table 1 below.

DISCUSSION

Discipleship life experience from a servant leadership point of view has been described generally as being a disciple of, and making disciples for, Jesus Christ. The discipleship life experience from servant leadership point of view theme has been described as teaching in words and deeds for inner life transformation. The theme which had high respondents’ frequency to describe what discipleship life looked like was obedient based teaching through life and words. This agrees with McCallum and Lowery’s (2012) three general goals of discipleship: character formation, knowledge of God, and ministry capability that constitute a complete person in Christ as Paul described it in Colossians 1: 28.

The being aspect of discipleship life experience from servant leadership point of view has been described as practice of biblical disciplines. The themes that had high frequency of respondents describing discipleship life experience from servant leadership point of view were: discipler’s commitment to help, availability and accountability for growth, studying the bible, do prayers, and personal time with God. This finding is consistent with Dodson (2012) conclusion of gospel-centered discipleship, which is primarily about who we are than what we do for God.

The making aspect of discipleship life experience from servant leadership point of view has been described as walking alongside to help mature in Christ. The theme that had the top frequency of describing the making aspect of discipleship life experience from servant leadership point of view was, making intentional effort to teach skills of following Christ and addressing holistic needs of people. This goes in line with McCallum and Lowery’s (2012) assertion of ministry capability.

The experience of making disciples for Christ entails bittersweet experience of serving people to grow in Christ. The theme with high frequency that described the discipleship life experience from servant leadership point of view was growing people through following Jesus model of incarnational, teaching, understanding and knowing means. This is consistent with McCallum and Lowery’s (2012) assertion of knowledge of God.

The characteristics of a true disciple of Jesus Christ reflect transformed life producing the fruit of the Spirit. This description agrees with Ogden (2007) attributes of discipleship that include: filled with the Holy Spirit, fruit of the Holy Spirit, and trust. However, the themes lacked what Ogden (2007) described as “Justice” (p.120) which not only meeting the spiritual, emotional and physical needs of the vulnerable.
Table 1. Nine Ways Discipleship is Experienced in Servant Leadership Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes from second-cycle coding</th>
<th>Number of codes</th>
<th>Explanation of the themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching in words and deeds for inner life transformation.</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>Discipleship involves obedient-based teaching through life and words, in the journey towards Christ likeness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice of biblical disciplines.</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>Growth through prayer, word of God, fellowship with like-minded followers of Christ, accountability to people around, and being controlled by Christ to obey his teachings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk alongside to help mature in Christ.</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>Making intentional effort to teach skills of following Christ by walking alongside someone prayerfully, wisely, and lovingly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bitter sweet experience of serving people to grow in Christ.</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>Growing and serving people is a difficult and messy process that demands patience, perseverance, setting boundary, self-development, kingdom mindset, understanding, and skill sets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformed life producing the fruit of Spirit.</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>Disciples grow into authenticity, integrity, honesty, faithfulness, love, joy, peace, patience, faith, compassion, perseverance, kindness, forgiveness, and self-control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praying, caring, teaching, sacrificing, and influencing through relationship of trust.</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>Discipleship process is likened to motherly care to nurture, and fatherly discipline that help set boundaries through established relationship of trust, love and growth objectives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Put people first and serve them selflessly, humbly, and sacrificially.</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>Servant leadership facilitates environment of trust, love, care, sacrifice, perseverance, and focus on goals, and enables to make eternal contribution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes from second-cycle coding</td>
<td>Number of codes</td>
<td>Explanation of the themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure, busyness, distraction, resource</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>Discipleship may be hindered due to cultural dynamics, pressures from peer, family, media or immature Christians, unwillingness to learn, refusing to sacrifice, and fear of getting dirty in the processes of discipling someone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>constraint, irrelevancy, pride, lose of focus, wrong</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expectation, and lack of commitment.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servanthood attitude generates humble life and better</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>Servanthood life style facilitates effective discipleship by generating empathy, building trust, promoting humility and empowering disciples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>service to the lord and people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The processes of discipleship include: praying, caring, teaching, sacrificing, and influencing through relationship of trust agrees with McCallum and Lowery’s (2012) assertion of discipleship process that included: friendship building, a regular meeting time, enhanced interpersonal sharing, appropriate biblical and theological content to study together, times of prayer, counseling and helping your friend in areas of weakness, helping your friend develop a ministry, and releasing your friend to pursue a life of service to God.

The practice of servant leadership in discipleship processes help the practitioners to place people first and serve them selflessly, humbly, and sacrificially. The top-rated themes that described the discipleship life experience from servant leadership point of view include sacrifice, vulnerability, love, and humility, and walking in constant awareness of divine calling to serve, sharpens discipleship effectiveness. This partially agrees with Geiger, Kelly, and Nation’s (2012) five basic steps to transformational discipleship: bible study, prayer, silence, service, and worship. The findings go into detailed description of the discipleship life experience from servant leadership point of view.

Hindrances to effective discipleship from servant leadership point of view has been described as life pressures, busyness, distraction, discouragement, resource constraint, irrelevancy, pride, loss of focus, wrong expectation, and lack of commitment. The theme that had top frequency was unwillingness to learn and sacrifice and fear of getting dirty which in turn becomes hindrance to discipleship in servant leadership context. This goes in line with Dodson’s (2012) assertions of failure of accountability, religious accountability, confessional-booth accountability, lack of true confession, religious performance, and spiritual license which misappropriates God’s grace and freedom through Christ.

Servant leadership values, behaviors and practices improve the quality and quantity of discipleship by energizing people to humbly live with God and serve others. The most recurring theme was that becoming a disciple precedes making disciples and embracing consistent heart to serve and walk alongside someone in the difficult journey with accountability structure. This agrees with Eims (2009) description of a disciple as having qualities of service, vision for reproducing other disciples, offer free help, setting standards of performance, taking initiatives, leading bible studies, caring for others, and strategic thinking.

IMPLICATION FOR CONTEMPORARY PRACTITIONERS

From the context of servant leadership, discipleship practitioners would do well to increase their understanding of discipleship as teaching in words and deeds for inner life transformation. Practitioners need to focus on the being aspect of discipleship that surfaced as the practice of biblical disciplines. In making disciples, disciplers need to walk alongside disciples to help them mature in Christ. Disciplers should be aware that discipling people entails a bittersweet experience of serving them to grow in Christ. As practitioners of discipleship are prepared, it may be beneficial to note the characteristics of a true disciple of Jesus Christ as transformed life producing the fruit of Spirit. It is suggested that practitioners know and apply the processes of discipleship that have been identified as prayer, caring, teaching, sacrificing, and influencing through a relationship of trust. These processes of discipleship are partially spiritual in nature that go beyond serving people. Disciple makers need to pray, trust God, and sacrifice not only their time and resources but also lives for the growth and welfare of the disciples they make for the Lord Jesus Christ.
Practitioners of discipleship may benefit from embracing servant heart and attitude since servant leadership enables putting people first and serving them selflessly, humbly, and sacrificially. Practitioners may strategize solutions ahead of time by knowing the hindrances to discipleship that have been identified as pressure, busyness, distraction, discouragement, resource constraint, irrelevancy, pride, loss of focus, wrong expectation, and lack of commitment. Practitioners may think solutions such as love, focus, determination, sacrifice, humility, faith, and sharpening own skills among others. Finally, practitioners should note that the description of being a disciple and making disciples from the servant leadership point of view revealed that servanthood attitude energizes people to humbly live with God and people they serve. The temptation to quit discipling people arises when disciples’ growth become so slow over considerable amount of time in spite of the disciplers’ great effort put into the process. At such time, the ideals of servant leadership may save the disciplers’ from quitting and walk humbly with God and the people they serve.

CONCLUSION

The discipleship life experience from servant leadership point of view has been described in this study. Discipleship life experience has been described generally as being disciple of and making disciples for Jesus Christ. Firstly, it is suggested that every disciple-making organization produce standard messages of discipleship that would be readily available so that practitioners may get access for teaching in words and deeds for inner life transformation. Secondly, it is recommended that the concept of servant leadership would be understood and embraced by practitioners of discipleship so that effective discipleship in servant leadership context is possible. Thirdly, it is suggested that ongoing contextual motivation and regular encouragement would be provided to practitioners of discipleship due to the hindrances to effective discipleship from internal and external environments. Finally, it is recommended that further research is done to describe the relationship between servant leadership and discipleship effectiveness. It is regrettable that few studies (Dodson, 2012; Ogden, 2007) have explored how discipleship life experience can be described from a servant leadership values and principles perspective. Future studies on this subject may improve the quality and quantity of discipleship development in faith based organizations and churches that practice disciple making initiatives.

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