

APPLICATION OF FOSTER'S CELEBRATION OF DISCIPLINES TO PROMOTE
SPIRITUAL COMMITMENT OF MEMBERS AT FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH,
FESTAC TOWN, LAGOS

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ABSTRACT

It has been observed by the researcher that some members of First Baptist Church, Festac Town, Lagos, have lukewarm attitude towards Church corporate spiritual exercises that will help them have deeper relationship with God. Richard J. Foster whose work served as the spring board for this research, said that, when people's attitude become lukewarm to Church activities, it is possible that they have become spiritually bankrupt as a result of not observing personal spiritual exercises or not doing them regularly. In order to arrest this attitude of lukewarmness, there was need to educate members on how important it is for them to regularly observe personal spiritual exercise of prayer, fasting, Bible study, worship and retreat which will help them to grow spiritually and be committed to God. This was done by designing a manual for teaching the members about spiritual exercise of prayer, fasting, Bible study, worship and retreat. A pre-test and post-test questionnaire was designed and given to members to fill and return. The purpose of the questionnaire is to dig out necessary information from respondents. The pre-test questionnaire tested the level of knowledge of respondents on spiritual exercises and how regularly they observe them. After the teaching, the post-test questionnaire was administered to know the level openness, responsiveness and readiness to regularly observe spiritual exercises and commitment to Church activities. The analysis of the pre-test and post-test questionnaires and the interaction with members during the teaching sessions showed that the opinion of Foster that believers' attitude to Church activities is dependent on their commitment to personal spiritual exercises was confirmed. In the course of the research, there was great improvement in the commitment of members to Church activities and the rendering of service in the Church. The comparison of the results of the pre-test and post-test questionnaires, attendance record and financial record before and after the teaching showed that members are now more spiritually committed because they are regularly observing spiritual exercises. Thus, it can be said that spiritual exercises when carried out genuinely by believers, will promote spiritual commitment and spiritual growth. In view of the results obtained from this research, the researcher recommended that pastors should teach members on the spiritual exercises at least twice a year. The first teaching should be done at the beginning of the year in order for Christians to start the New Year with full commitment to serve God and grow spiritually. When Church members grow spiritually, they will be committed to God and there will be visible manifestation as they bear fruits in keeping with the confession of their faith. The second teaching should be done at the last quarter of the year. It was also recommended that Christians should form regular habit of going on retreat in a quiet place. Prayer partner model was encouraged in order to promote effective praying. Prayer can also be effective when combined with fasting. It was recommended that Christians should fast in accordance with God's instruction in Isaiah 58. Baptists believe that the Bible is the standard by which all statements of faith and creeds are to be judged. Therefore, it was recommended that believers should study the Bible and meditate on it daily for spiritual growth and guidance. It is only true worship that will cause transformation; therefore, it was recommended that Church pastors should lead members to worship God in spirit and in truth so that Churches will continue to raise Christians that will be transformational in the society. Spiritual exercises when done with all sense of commitment will cause behavioural and attitudinal change. Therefore, all Christians should be committed to regular observance of spiritual exercises.

Conclusion

From all the analyses and discussions about this project, the following conclusions are drawn: (1) There is need to have a manual for training of members of local Churches on spiritual exercises. (2) Christians who are committed to regular observance of spiritual exercises will be spiritually committed. They will be God's partners and render quality service to God in making the kingdom of this earth to become the kingdom of our Lord, Jesus Christ. (3) Christians who observe personal spiritual exercises regularly will also desire to participate in corporate spiritual exercises with other believers. (4) When Christians are committed to practicing spiritual exercises, they will bear fruits of truth, righteousness and justice. This is because any Christian who genuinely encounter God in daily quiet time will not dwell in sin. Such Christians will practice what they profess and their lives bring glory to

God. This glory will attract others to God. (5) That Christians who regularly and genuinely practice spiritual exercises will not be members of secret cults. (6) That Christians who regularly practice spiritual exercises will believe that God through Jesus Christ has answers to all their problems. (7) Christians who are committed to regular observance of spiritual exercises will submit to the control of the Holy Spirit and live at peace with neighbours (Heb. 12:14). (8) When God's people fast with a proper Biblical motive, seeking God's face with a broken, repentant, and contrite spirit, God will hear from heaven and heal their lives, churches, communities, nation and world (2 Chron. 7:13-15).

Furthermore, it could be deduced from findings in this project that people were slack in their personal prayer life because they do not know how to develop effective prayer life and things that can hinder effective praying. Also, the busy and fast life of Lagos is hindering some people from having time to do quality personal Bible study and attend Church weekly activities. These facts were revealed during responses of the members to teachings on spiritual exercises of prayer and Bible study. But after the teaching sessions, the post-test results showed that the personal prayer and Bible study life of the people have improved. This they also testified about. It therefore means that when people know the benefits they will derive from something, they will do all that they could to have it. The people who were lazy in carrying out the spiritual exercises are now sacrificing time to do them. Some Christians, who saw fasting as something they could not do, now appreciate the spiritual exercise because through fasting and prayer, the Holy Spirit has transformed their lives. The awesome power of God that brings revival is released as Christians retreat, study the Bible, fast, pray, worship, and carry out other spiritual exercises. The results of the post-test and observable attitudinal and behavioural changes seen in the members show that spiritual exercises promote spiritual commitment.

Going by the results of the post-test, the objective of this project which is to help members of First Baptist Church, Festac Town, Lagos to cultivate the habit of observing spiritual exercises that will promote spiritual commitment which will be seen in their commitment to God's service, committed worship lifestyle and godly lifestyle has been achieved. This confirms Foster's argument that when believers in Christ are committed to regular observance of personal spiritual disciplines they will come out of spiritual bankruptcy, grow spiritually and be spiritually committed to God (6). In other words, the spiritual disciplines open the door and bring believers to the place where God can touch their lives and cause changes. This fact was also emphasized by Lucado, when he said that Christians who take time to pray, fast, worship, study the Bible, retreat and carry out other spiritual disciplines will do same when it comes to corporate worship and living godly life (16).

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the findings made in the course of carrying out this project:

1. Pastors should teach members on the spiritual exercises at least twice in a year. First, the teaching should be done at the beginning of the year to help members evaluate the spiritual commitment in previous year and make decision to regularly observe the spiritual exercises that will promote spiritual commitment. Second, it should be done at the middle of the year so as to remind members of the importance of spiritual exercises to their spiritual growth and commitment to godly living.
2. Just as it is good starting the year with the study of spiritual exercises, it is also good starting a day with God. Therefore, quiet time should be done early in the morning before setting out for the day's work. The psalmist said, "In the morning, I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation (Ps. 5:3). Martin Luther said, "I have so much

