



CONVERSATION: ALTON GARRISON

# Discipleship in the Assemblies of God

Alton Garrison is the assistant general superintendent of the Assemblies of God. He spoke recently with Editor Ken Horn about a new emphasis on discipleship.

**evangel:** Why is discipleship an area of current concern for evangelicals?

**GARRISON:** Evangelicals have expressed concerns over discipleship based on the Reveal Report from Willow Creek, and the books *unChristian* by David Kinnaman and *The American Church in Crisis* by David Olson.

Kinnaman said, “In virtually every study we conduct, representing thousands of interviews every year, born-again Christians fail to display much attitudinal or behavioral evidence of transformed lives.”

In other words, Christians and non-Christians seem to be living very similar lifestyles. Clearly, this ought not to be.

**evangel:** What steps were taken to measure this tendency in our Fellowship?

**GARRISON:** In 2008, the Discipleship Ministries Agency commissioned Dr. Ed Stetzer of LifeWay Christian Resources to conduct a national survey on the state of discipleship in the Assemblies of God. We mailed a survey to our 12,300 churches; 2,614 responded — a very good response percentage.

There was both good news and bad news. In some areas of discipleship Pentecostals typically do better than others, but there are certainly other areas where we have challenges.

[Editor’s note: See the Conversation with Ed Stetzer in the Sept. 27 Pentecostal Evangel about this research.]

**evangel:** Could you summarize some of the key findings?

**GARRISON:** About half of Assemblies of God adherents are involved in small groups or Sunday School. These are clearly effective ministries. Those who attend these groups are more likely to develop into true disciples than those who simply attend the Sunday morning celebration service.

Forty-five percent of churches say they regularly evaluate the progress and spiritual growth of their members. Sixty-four percent of those surveyed claim they are dissatisfied with the state of discipleship in their churches.

We know it is God’s will for

every convert to become a fully devoted follower of Jesus — a disciple of Christ. That is clearly indicated in the Great Commission: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father

strategy — assessing, resourcing, training and modeling.

**evangel:** How is AG leadership implementing this strategy?

**GARRISON:** We are putting our full effort into providing resources and training to help our churches close this gap in discipleship by strengthening expressions of both corporate discipleship and individual discipleship. Corporate discipleship is how a church promotes full Christian living among the congregation. Individual discipleship is the outgrowth of those truths in each believer’s life.

to prayer. ... They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” This basically reflects the five functions of the church: worship, fellowship, discipleship, gift-oriented ministry and evangelism. Those translate to our five elements of the process that we call worship, connect, grow, serve and go. It’s for the church as a whole, but you can also overlay that same paradigm for personal growth.

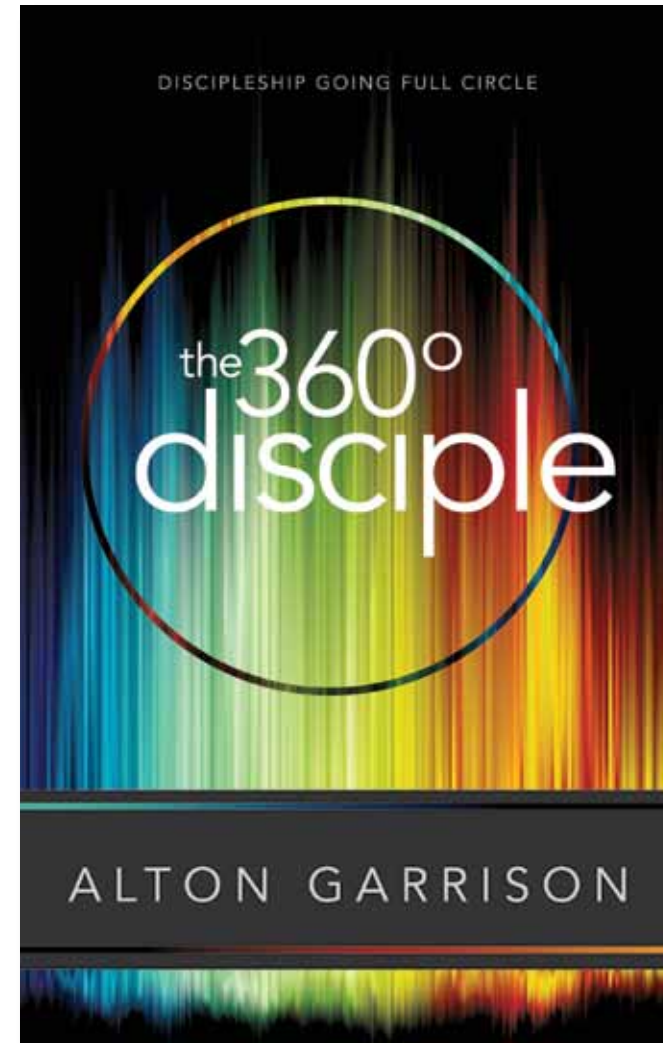
**evangel:** What resources are available?

**GARRISON:** Church Ministries and Gospel Publishing House have developed several exciting new resources to help this process along. For example:

*The 360-Degree Disciple:* This handbook will help individual believers become godly disciples who draw others to Christ. It includes a special section on discipling specific age groups, families, ethnicities and more.

The Acts 2 Process for church growth: Church growth doesn’t have to be a formula, nor does it have to be difficult. If you follow the principles outlined in Acts 2:42-47, churches can see sustainable growth. This paradigm is appropriate for churches of any size — from very large to very small. It is a simple process, but it’s not simplistic. That’s an important distinction. It is simple — that is, not complex —

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and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19,20, NIV). We decided we must create a more robust, holistic discipleship

booklet *The Acts 2 Church*. It’s based on Acts 2:42-47 which, in part, says: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and

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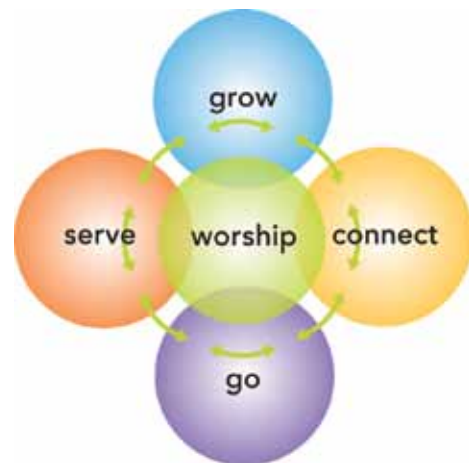
but it has to be intentional. The *Acts 2 Church* booklet includes evaluation questions and ideas to get the process started.

The *Spiritual Health Planner*: This resource has been very popular; it has been flying off the shelves. The planner is an excellent way to assess the spiritual health of any congregation — both as individuals and as a group. It doesn't just diagnose; it offers a personalized plan for growth. And it's also great for individual or small-group study.

*Faith Case: Investigating the Truth*: This is a children's church curriculum for kids in the first through sixth grades that teaches the 16 Fundamental Truths in 12 fun lessons kids will never forget.

Other helpful resources include *Secrets: Transforming Your Life and Marriage*, a book and associated small-group kit, and

### The Acts 2 Process



thefftytwo.com, an online year's worth of youth resources for the volunteer youth leader. More

tools are available at our Web site, [discipleship.ag.org](http://discipleship.ag.org).

**evangel:** You have speakers who are ready and willing to go to any church to help with this process.

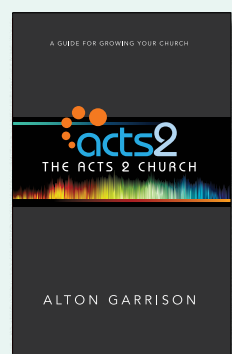
**GARRISON:** We're excited to offer training, both through the Internet and in local churches. Nationally recognized speakers are available to churches and districts to speak on how to develop discipleship in local settings. Topics include "The Acts 2 Process for a Disciple-Making Church," "Personal Assessment and Growth," "Creating Spirit-Empowered Disciples" and "Assimilation Through Discipleship." More information is available at [www.speakersbureau.ag.org](http://www.speakersbureau.ag.org). [e](mailto:pe@ag.org)

E-mail your comments to [pe@ag.org](mailto:pe@ag.org).

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## Church Growth Doesn't Have To Be A Formula Or Complicated



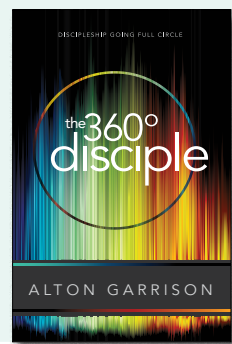
### The Acts 2 Church

by Alton Garrison



In this handy booklet, Garrison explains a simple philosophy for church growth—follow what the Early Church did in the Book of Acts. **The Acts 2 Church** provides ideas to get you going and resources to equip you to lead a healthy, growing church. Based on Acts 2:42–47, **The Acts 2 Church** finds its footing in five areas of the church: worship, connect, grow, serve, and go. No matter where you come into the process, you can start applying these insights today and watch your church take off!

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### The 360-Degree Disciple

by Alton Garrison



Get the tools you need to turn pew sitters a full 360 degrees into pew fillers! In this handbook you'll discover how to produce transformed, godly disciples who then circle around to draw others to Christ. Includes chapters specific to discipling children, youth, families, and people of diverse ethnicities.

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