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A STRATEGY FOR CREATING A WORSHIP CULTURE THAT ENGAGES
OLDER AND EMERGING GENERATIONS AT GRACE BAPTIST CHURCH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

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JUNE 2008

ABSTRACT
**A Strategy for Creating a Worship Culture that Engages Older and
Emerging Generations at Grace Baptist Church**

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2008

To educate older generations and engage younger generations in the authentic worship of God, this paper will develop an intentional strategy to create a culture of worship at Grace Baptist Church that is conducive to people at all ages and stages of life. The purpose of this three-part paper is to detail a strategy for introducing a biblically sensitive worship culture into the ministry of Grace Baptist. The goal is to unite those with enduring spiritual heritages and new worshippers who approach God through postmodern senses into a worship community that values diversity. One way to facilitate this is through a worship culture that reflects God's glory and creatively retells his story.

The first part of this discussion investigates the ministry context at Grace Baptist and traces its spiritual identity. Located in Fort Worth, Texas and steeped in Independent Baptist fundamentalism, the church has enjoyed a stable ministry during its over fifty-year existence. As it approaches midlife, however, Grace Baptist must adapt to reach emerging worshippers who have been influenced by changes in the broader culture. Part One will explore these cultural changes and relevant demographic data.

The second part will detail the biblical and theological foundation of a worship culture that is sensitive to unbelievers and Christians alike. A brief overview of pertinent Scripture will highlight the creativity of God, his pursuit of those who worship him in spirit and truth, the example of Paul and his preferring others for the sake of the gospel, and the consummation of human relationship with God. A theology of ministry as it pertains to leading change will be included. Stemming from these underpinnings, the final part of the paper will offer a core strategy for creating a culture of worship and implementing worship renewal. Short-term and long-term ministry initiatives for enhancing the worship culture also will be presented. Finally, a tool to provide routine appraisal of the worship environment will be provided.

Content Reader: Robb Redman, ThD

Words: 345

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INTRODUCTION

Leading and nurturing spiritual growth in younger generations is becoming increasingly more complex. Many never have pursued a relationship with God actively, some have drifted away from earlier faith encounters, and others have grown disillusioned with the formality of traditional worship. Consequently, churches routinely are challenged to develop fresh strategies to reconnect with those in emerging generations and create safe, engaging environments that foster spiritual investigation and conversation.

Equally difficult is shepherding seasoned Christians, who defend traditional worship, to embrace a worship culture that invites those who are ignorant or skeptical of God. Many well-meaning, good-intentioned believers become overly enamored with the style, approach, or methodology that was instrumental in shaping their early Christian experience. This becomes the “correct” or “acceptable” way to influence contemporary seekers toward a faith relationship with God. Accordingly, some find it difficult to develop a sensitive, accepting attitude toward the spiritual struggles and needs of others.

Amid the inherent tension of reaching emerging worshippers and refining believers, Grace Baptist Church seeks to emulate the emphases of the early Church of shared sacrifice, genuine worship and fellowship, and passionate yet purposeful ministry to all people with the life-changing influence of the gospel of Christ. It is both possible

and preferred for people of different generations and stages of their spiritual journeys to find Grace Baptist to be a safe, inviting place to grow their relationship with God.

Ultimately, Grace Baptist should prioritize its ministry to all generations, including those who worship and mature in new and different ways.

To educate older generations and engage younger generations in the authentic worship of God, this paper will develop an intentional strategy to create a culture of worship at Grace Baptist that is conducive to people at all ages and stages of life. The goal is to unite those with enduring spiritual heritages and new worshippers who approach God through postmodern senses in a worship community that values diversity. Humans routinely mishandle the need to worship and make others, possessions, themselves, and the like the preferred objects of worship. The church, then, has an opportunity to recapture the attention of worshippers and encourage them to give God the place of prominence in their lives. One way to facilitate this is through a worship culture that reflects his glory and creatively retells his story.

The first part of this paper will investigate the ministry context at Grace Baptist and trace its spiritual identity. Steeped in Independent Baptist fundamentalism, the church has enjoyed a stable ministry during its over fifty-year existence. Among its core attributes are a commitment to the exposition of Scripture, a conservative approach to issues such as women in ministry and ecumenicalism, and hesitancy to employ “worldly” components—such as drums or movie clips—in corporate worship. While these have served the church historically, it must adapt to reach emerging worshippers who have been influenced by changes in the broader culture. A discussion of these cultural changes, including relevant demographic data, will be included.

More specifically, Chapter 1 will develop the pressing need to engage emerging generations in the authentic worship of God. It will evaluate the broad expectations of the Great Commission against the backdrop of postmodernism and its wide-ranging influences in contemporary culture. It will discuss the implications of worship in an experiential society and highlight the biblical precedent for a lifestyle-oriented approach to worship that is informed by both spirit and truth.

Chapter 2 will describe the challenge of reaching contemporary worshippers in an Independent Baptist context. The spiritual identity of Grace Baptist, including an overview of its core values and fundamental heritage, combined with inherent issues within the church will support this assertion. This chapter also will trace the impact of popular culture on the church and detail the makeup of its surrounding community using current demographic data.

The second section of the paper will explore the biblical and theological underpinnings that inform a worship culture that remains sensitive to unbelievers, the inevitability of change, and the role of creativity in Grace Baptist's ministry to all generations. A brief overview of pertinent texts will highlight the creativity of God, his pursuit of those who worship him in spirit and truth, the example of Paul and his preferring others for the sake of the gospel, and the consummation of our relationship with God—in essence, the privilege of worshipping him forever. A theology of ministry as it pertains to leading change will conclude this section.

Chapter 3 will detail the biblical foundations for worship. Old Testament worship concepts will be examined, the New Testament teachings and example of the apostle Paul will be highlighted, and worship as the consummation of our relationship with God

resulting in the privilege of enjoying him forever will be established. It also will discuss worship in the Christian tradition by surveying worship trends through the centuries and how Baptists have navigated them.

Chapter 4 will develop several core theological convictions that flow from the biblical foundations outlined in Chapter 3. It will assert the central purpose of humanity as worshipping God and enjoying him forever. It will discuss creativity in worship and ministry as a natural outcome of God's creative work in the world and through humanity. Finally, it will suggest that a culture of worship should be both adaptable and accessible.

Chapter 5 will address the process of leading and managing change in a ministry context. God's role, through the work of the Holy Spirit as chief agent of change will be discussed; and, worship will be explored as a core entity of transformation (Romans 12:1-2).¹ It will affirm the necessity and inevitability of change in a fluid, growing organism. It also will study the role of the pastor in leading and managing change.

The final part of the paper will present the core strategy for creating a culture of worship at Grace Baptist. From brainstorming sessions with leaders to the introduction of a contemporary worship service, the major components will be detailed. Other modifications, including worship renewal in the older generations and retooling the worship approaches in the youth and children's ministries, will be framed in their context. Short- and long-term strategies for sustaining and enhancing the worship culture also will be discussed. Finally, a tool to provide routine appraisal of the worship environment will be offered.

¹ All Scripture has been taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984) unless otherwise noted.

Chapter 6 will describe the strategy employed to create a worship culture at Grace Baptist that purposely engages older and emerging generations. The initial step of creating a climate of vision and acceptance among the church leaders and influencers will be addressed. Next, how the vision is communicated to the broader church community via the pulpit and smaller, more intimate gatherings will be presented. Finally, a strategy for serving and encouraging those who oppose the vision will be provided.

Chapters 7 and 8 will set forth the specifics of the strategy. Chapter 7 will detail several practical enhancements to the worship culture at Grace Baptist. The development and initiation of a contemporary worship service will be explained. A sample service will be included. Finally, steps taken to effect change in other ministries—encompassing seasoned believers, youth, and children—will be offered. Chapter 8 will present the short- and long-term goals for sustaining and enhancing the worship culture at Grace Baptist. It also will introduce the assessment tools necessary to facilitate this process.

God continues to actively seek worshippers who will worship him in spirit and truth (John 4:23). Much like the Samaritan woman whom Jesus encountered at the well, he knows that all who approach him will be burdened with the baggage of broken promises, ruined relationships, and misguided decisions and priorities. He understands the plight of humanity; yet, he still sees, befriends, and draws people to himself. His love, compassion, grace, and mercy can overcome and restore any sin-laden life.

Today, Grace Baptist Church sits at a pivotal intersection in its half-century history. God has blessed the people and ministry of the church incredibly with a deep, godly heritage and an equally impressive opportunity to impact the rapidly growing Westside of Fort Worth, Texas for Christ. Blending the established traditions of the

church with the ever-changing needs of the emerging community will require sober reflection, patience, and visionary risk. Reaching the “Samaritan women” in the surrounding context will necessitate a unified, Christ-centered mission. Worshipping God with passion and authenticity will demand openness to diversity and a fresh move of the Spirit of God. To that end, this paper is dedicated.

PART ONE

CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

THE NEED TO ENGAGE EMERGING GENERATIONS IN THE WORSHIP OF GOD

To worship God and reflect his glory is the noblest and most satisfying pursuit of humanity. From beginning to end, the unifying theme of the Bible affirms the persistent desire of God to reveal himself to and through what he has made; all creation is intended to expose and revel in God's glory. The psalmist exclaims, "Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods" (Psalm 96:4).

Sadly, human beings are bent on pursuing their own glory and stubbornly have disregarded the core biblical command: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only" (Matthew 4:10). Since the initial transgressions of Adam and Eve in the garden, individuals consistently have sidestepped the worship of God for idolatrous relations with themselves, others, and even inanimate objects. As a whole, humanity has "exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen" (Romans 1:15). The resulting tension between God and his crowning creation has rendered the entire human race spiritually deficient and helpless.

In a radical display of love revealed most powerfully in the death of his son on the cross for the sins of humanity, God initiates an opportunity for humans to abandon self-worship and pursue worship of the one true God. Jesus' death and ensuing resurrection,

then, simultaneously satisfy the demands of a holy God and cancel the sin debt of an unholy human race, making relationship with God a legitimate possibility. Paul teaches that “this righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:22-24). Accordingly, the authentic worship of God links intricately with the finished work of Jesus on the cross; Christ is both the source and the catalyst for all God-honoring worship.

Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus’ example and teachings affirm that God actively seeks those who will worship him in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). Interestingly, the New Testament text that presents this reality highlights a midday conversation Jesus had with a Samaritan woman at a well. The woman, shunned due to her sordid reputation, likely came for water during off-peak hours to avoid the rush-hour ridicule. In simply acknowledging the woman, Jesus overstepped societal, gender, ethnic, and religious barriers to spur a dialogue about a variety of topics including drinking water, her lackluster marital record, and where and how true worship occurs. The woman was stunned by Jesus’ interest in her and his deep spiritual intuition. Ultimately, Jesus captured the woman’s heart and met her core spiritual needs. Her newfound faith in him triggered a spiritual awakening among her family and friends.

John 4 provides a compelling analogy into the need to engage emerging generations in the worship of God. The Samaritan woman represents many in contemporary American culture who reel from relational failures, hide shameful reputations, and struggle to understand spiritual concepts like faith and worship and

forgiveness. Desiring acceptance from others and willing to suffer to acquire it, some have endured years of mental and emotional abuse and are starving for genuine love and grace. They are desperate for hope and authentic spiritual community.

Jesus represents those who intentionally engage spiritual seekers in the compassionate modeling of God's truth, encouraging them to glorify him with their lives. Through gentle words, availability, and patient acceptance, Jesus exhibits a humble approach that both engages and intrigues. He has a masterful knack for combining a deep love for others with a clear understanding of spiritual truth that results in an earthy realness and transparency. Fully aware of both the needs of those around him and the culture, he is able to meet people where and how they are and to inspire them toward a relationship with God that offers far more rewards than any human being or experience can provide. To effectively reach those in the emerging generations in the twenty-first century, a follower of Jesus must purposefully mimic his approach by identifying with them, appreciating their spiritual struggles, understanding their culture, and offering them true love.

The Opportunity and Obligation of the Church

Jesus assembled his core followers just prior to his ascension into heaven and gave them a clear directive: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). In his writings, Matthew records a similar encounter in which Jesus commissions his disciples in this way, "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and

teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). In both cases, Jesus challenges his followers to penetrate their culture and beyond with his gospel and to teach others how to observe his truth. Furthermore, he promises them that he will visit their efforts with his presence and power. Essentially, Jesus chose to extend his ministry of reconciling people to God through regenerate sinners who passionately engaged fellow strugglers with his story.

Several implications are relevant to a local church which takes this mission from Jesus seriously. First, Jesus presents a penetration model of concentric circles, beginning with the context of closest proximity and moving outward. For these first-century disciples, Jerusalem would be the area of initial concentration, followed by Judea, then Samaria, and into the regions beyond. In American society, the city in which a church is located would be the context of closest proximity, followed by the state, then the larger United States, and into the world. Accordingly, disciples are to initiate the strategic mission of representing Jesus in their sphere of immediate influence. The obligation of the local church is to impact its community for Christ.

Second, to effect change in a given context requires perpetual study and assessment of the surrounding culture. Only when one understands the world, what gives shape to its impulses and convictions, can one speak with any relevance.¹ Despite her suggestion to the contrary, Jesus knew the Samaritan woman’s history, culture, and religious beliefs when he initiated the conversation with her at the well (John 4:9).

¹ David W. Henderson, *Culture Shift: Communicating God’s Truth to Our Changing World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 38.

Ironically, Jesus' willingness to ignore the cultural norms of Samaria helped pave the way toward a meaningful discussion, but his insight into local custom was no less apparent. The far-reaching scope of Jesus' commission, then, begins with a healthy and growing awareness of local culture.

Third, Jesus' dual promises of his power and presence infer that the realization of his mission will come at significant peril and risk. Effecting spiritual change is inherently challenging in a fallen world. To a person, humans struggle to recreate God's image on earth and waver spiritually as they attempt to dissect the competing philosophies of the day. As stated earlier, humans are naturally sinful and at odds relationally with the perfect, holy God. How do people in the highly advanced, technologically sophisticated twenty-first century respond to the good news of Jesus? How do they respond to the bad news of their own predicament? How can Christian individuals and churches better connect the perfect, holy God with wandering and confused pre-Christians? One answer, among many perhaps, is to join God faithfully in his ongoing mission to seek worshippers in emerging generations who will worship him in spirit and truth.

For the purposes of this paper, the term "emerging generations" will include individuals and couples in their twenties and thirties. Affectionately referred to as "Busters,"² "the 13ers,"³ and more commonly as "Generation X,"⁴ this group often

² George Barna, *Baby Busters: The Disillusioned Generation* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1994), 14-17.

³ William Strauss and Neil Howe, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584-2069* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1991), 317-324.

⁴ The term "Generation X" has been popularized by Douglas Coupland in *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991).

languishes on the fringe of society between the affluence of the Baby Boomers (those born between roughly 1943 and 1960) and the pervasive optimism of the Millennials (those born after 1982).⁵ They have been characterized as less intelligent, more hostile, generally more rebellious than their parents, less productive, more apathetic, and often more incorrigible than their children. Born roughly between 1964 and 1982, Gen Xers grew up in an era of gross apathy from every segment of society. Self-absorbed parents, disintegrating homes, schools with confusing missions, dysfunctional leaders, a movie culture shifting from “General” to “Restricted” ratings, and new public health dangers all collided and left the “latchkey” generation in the wake.⁶ The end product of this societal meltdown is a sizable population of low esteem filled with disinterested, underachieving individuals who today find themselves leading families, raising children, working the job market, and trying to make sense of it all.

It is incumbent upon the Church to provide both a refuge and a launching pad for all segments of Generation X: couples, singles, those who are highly motivated and those who are drifting, the functional and the dysfunctional. The Church must be a place where young adults are accepted and loved into God’s family rather than pushed and hammered into duty-based, external religion. Furthermore, Gen Xers need a Christian community that motivates them to pursue God with the same purpose and resolve with which he pursues them. The Church unknowingly has followed the world’s lead with respect to Generation X; we have allowed their unique needs and unorthodox styles to build barriers around them rather than bridges to them.

⁵ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 36.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 321.

Postmodernism in Contemporary Culture

Contemporary culture is characterized by an increasing lack of genuine purpose. In a postmodern era characterized by technological advancement and rapid economic growth, people have come to value the instantaneous over the deferred. The combined resources of the media, the entertainment industry, and the Internet have teamed to play a significant role in shaping the way many people obtain and process information. As a result, many have resigned their freedom to think critically and have opted for a surrogate relationship with the world around them. This age has been described as an era of no certainty, no closure, and no control.⁷ In this system, truth is negotiable, life frantically moves at a speed that negates accomplishment, and everything is beyond control.

American culture places great importance on tolerance, personal choice, and consumption. As people search for the proverbial key to personal satisfaction, society continues to offer a steady diet of predictable remedies that seldom deliver. Especially noticeable in the younger generations, these market-driven priorities have fueled a pervasive mindset that craves pleasure.

Quentin Schultze states:

To the extent that images themselves provide guidance and meaning, much of popular art exposes adolescents to a continual equation: happiness and consumption for the sake of consumption. This equation takes many forms. Negative images of work, school, and family obligations abound; all are pains to be avoided or endured for the sake of unrestricted pleasure In whatever form, the loud and clear message is that in consumption we live and move and have our being.⁸

⁷ Randy Rowland, "Taking Popular Culture Captive to Communicate the Gospel" (lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, June 19, 2000). This comes from Rowland's specific section entitled "Three Pillars of Postmodernism."

⁸ Quentin Schultze, "Consuming Visions: Popular Art in Consumer Capitalism," in *Dancing in the Dark: Youth, Popular Culture, and the Electronic Media*, ed. Roy Anker (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 144.

From a material perspective, the seemingly positive fruits of the twentieth century have been passed down to successive generations in a hazardous manner. Builders, those born between 1901 and 1924, were the model of integrity, loyalty, and responsibility; they left their children with instant affluence. Boomers, people born between 1943 and 1960, hoped to turn that affluence into greater wealth, prioritized materialism, and worked overtime to provide for their children's bright futures. As a result, both Busters (1961 to 1981) and the Millennials (1982 to 2003) have received inadequate quality, time, and direction from the two most influential persons in their lives: dad and mom. This unsuccessful "passing of the baton" has resulted in a general dysfunction that is well documented.

As one possible solution in a sea of options, the Church is positioned well to respond to the various needs that stem from postmodern ideology. The vast majority of today's daily information is inert; society is enamored with hearing, seeing, and digesting minutia that has little lasting significance and little potential for making a positive difference.⁹ The Christian community has two options. It can respond negatively and move away from the culture, or it can become isolationist. Conversely, the Church can embrace the teachings of Scripture positively, move into the secular culture armed with God's message of truth, and seek reconciliation. It has become popular to bemoan the deficiencies of secular people from the pulpits of churches. Such a message ignores the fact that the secular world is far more effective at being worldly than Christians are at being spiritual. If Christians indisputably lived a gospel that challenged people "to a vision of society radically different from that which controls our public life today,

⁹ Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (Bergenfield, NJ: Viking-Penguin, 1985), 68.

individuals would be spiritually changed.”¹⁰ People are searching for a point of reference through which they can experience genuine peace and fulfillment. While the local church makes its pitch to provide the answer, its own members sometimes dilute it.

Tenets of Postmodernism

Postmodernism subtly yet forcibly has been overcoming its predecessor, modernity, for the last hundred years. Scholars debate its origin, but most agree that postmodernism began gaining momentum in the early 1900s and forged its way into the twenty-first century with little resistance.¹¹ Fueled by the limitations of modernistic thinking and its Enlightenment emphases on science, reason, and inevitable progress, postmodernity countered with a system of “beliefs” that have become well-accepted and widely distributed in Western culture. Intellectually compelling and practically appealing, the core postmodern tenets below disclose both opportunities and obstacles to the Church as it seeks to engage emerging generations in the worship of God.

First, postmodernism denies the existence of absolutes and zealously is enamored with relativism. Ironically, the affirmation that “no truth is absolute” would fit snugly into a postmodern ideology, despite the clear absoluteness of the statement. Relativism maintains that truth, reality, morality, and the like are open for debate and assumes that all vying definitions are equally valid. In other words, what is true for one person may not be true for the next, but both truths are equally true. Objective truth, strangely, is oxymoronic in that all truth is subjective.

¹⁰ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 132.

¹¹ Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 15.

Spiritually, this has led to a rampant pluralism that equalizes all faith systems; distinctions have been minimized. The catalyst for relativism is a fundamental postmodern practice called “deconstruction,” which means pulled apart and rearranged. Since words and ideas constantly shift, according to postmodern thought, there can exist many interpretations of a text or concept and not just one meaning.¹² This creates an odd mix of anxiety and opportunity for followers of Jesus who believe God’s truth is absolute and his Word is authoritative.

Second, postmodernism values complexity over simplicity. As people, cultures, and technologies advance, life accelerates at such a feverish pace that control and stability become more unattainable. The modern mantras that knowledge is good and progress is inevitable have been negated in the increasingly interconnected, electronic labyrinth of contemporary society. There are endless opportunities to connect with others via email, text messaging, and other Internet-driven technologies; but, many remain unfulfilled and disconnected in their core relationships. As the need to be fully accessible has grown, gadgets designed to conserve time and make life simpler have done the exact opposite. The more advanced society becomes, the seemingly less healthy it becomes.

Peter M. Senge explains:

For most American business people the best rate of growth is fast, faster, fastest. Yet, virtually all natural systems, from ecosystems to animals to organizations, have optimal rates of growth. The optimal rate is far less than the fastest possible growth. When growth becomes excessive—as it does in cancer—the system itself will seek to compensate by slowing down; perhaps putting the organization’s survival at risk in the process.¹³

¹² Dan Kimball, *The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 50.

¹³ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Arts and Practices of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 62.

As society becomes more and more complex, those who struggle with change and transition often are bypassed, isolated, or discarded. Other issues compound the struggle as well. The immediacy of information shortens the time required to absorb and adjust to it. Complexity also breeds unpredictability. In modernity, every action has an equal and opposite reaction. However, in postmodernity “each factor, player, condition, issue or option when interconnected, exponentially multiplies the number of outcomes.”¹⁴

Finally, postmodernism rejects the concept of an all-encompassing meta-narrative that permeates every culture and people group. Employing reason and scientific knowledge, modern thinkers wanted to move beyond the myths and religious dogma of premodern people. Instead, they favored a so-called narrative of progress, which viewed the rapid advances in science, technology, and knowledge as precursors to a better world for all human beings. Postmodern theorists, however, contend that the scientific method that launched modernity was rooted in an interpretation of the Christian story, which speaks of a rational God who creates and sustains the universe. At no point, postmoderns assert, did modernists ever completely separate themselves from this prominent narrative.¹⁵

Since postmodernity assumes the impossibility of any central, unifying narrative that impacts humanity, the search for one collection of stories (i.e., the Bible) that can bring the world together is futile. Humans, then, are left to pursue local narratives specific to a limited demographic or geographic context.¹⁶ Coupled with the postmodern

¹⁴ M. Rex. Miller, *The Millennium Matrix: Reclaiming the Past, Reframing the Future of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 7-8.

¹⁵ Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 44-45.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 45.

assumption that people create and interpret their own reality, these smaller narratives are considered equally legitimate and instructive. Ultimately, the propagation of “truth” is reduced to a subjective retelling of the historical, cultural, and religious experiences of a given person or group.

Influences of Postmodernism

The reality of postmodernism creates unique challenges for Christians. Leonard I. Sweet compares the onslaught of postmodernity to a tsunami that bears down on an unsuspecting community. In response to what he describes as the “seismically dangerous postmodern culture,” Sweet says the Church is left with three basic options.¹⁷ The first is denial, or what he labels the “Not Noticing Syndrome,” in which the Church ignores the obvious and continues to live as if nothing has changed. Next, the Church can “hit the eject button,” withdraw from the ensuing tension, and assume a survivalist posture. Preferring isolation over infiltration, the Christian community then excludes those in the postmodern world in favor of its comfortable, predictable existence. Finally, the Church can “hoist the sails” and inhabit the threatening waters of the future, joining God in his ongoing mission to draw people to himself. This third option serves as the approach this discussion seeks to investigate.

Each of the three core tenets of postmodernism presented in the previous section have influenced believers and pre-Christians alike. The tandem of relativism and pluralism has triggered a shift in mindset that radically has altered the “silent” questions people ask about the Church, Christianity, and what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

¹⁷ Leonard I. Sweet, *SoulTsunami: Sink or Swim in the New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 16-22.

Formerly, people were more curious about the veracity of Christianity; the central question was this: “Is Christianity true?” In a postmodern world, where truth is defined by the end-user, the central question now asks, “What use is it?”¹⁸ Postmoderns are far more utilitarian in their thinking; the practical benefit of a product, service, or faith system determines its value.

Likewise, the postmodern attraction to complexity has influenced heavily those in American culture. As family, work, and social systems intertwine and technology becomes more advanced and accessible, the pace and demands of life continue to accelerate. Furthermore, when relationships become more interconnected—via email, television, mobile phones, the Internet—a person’s actions and reactions are cycled back through their lives and amplified, similar to the irritating effect of feedback from an electric guitar player who stands too close to a speaker. The enduring sense for many is that life spins helplessly out of control and painfully close to implosion.¹⁹

Finally, the disappearance of the meta-narrative has created a void for many who naturally wrestle with the concept of a higher power or deity who governs the universe. Paul’s conclusion in Romans affirms this inherent tension: “For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse” (Romans 1:20). Accordingly, the postmodern rejection of a larger, grand story that encompasses the entire human race has fueled a frantic, yet often hidden, search by many

¹⁸ Grenz, *Primer on Postmodernism*, 48.

¹⁹ Miller, *The Millennium Matrix*, 5.

for a tale with which they can identify. Ultimately, postmoderns find themselves in a paradoxical search for a core reality in a world they contend is merely an illusion.

Against the backdrop of pervasive postmodern ideology, the Church either can revolt or reinvent itself to meet the needs of emerging generations. The influence of postmodernity, though undeniably challenging, can serve to extend rather than extinguish the gospel witness. For example, pluralism has enabled Christianity to regain a hearing among spiritual seekers. Whereas modernism sold out to the scientific method and rejected any faith-driven belief system, postmoderns are generally non-committal in their allegiance to one specific “brand” of spirituality and instead prefer a hybrid of several types. Dan Kimball writes:

This is the religious anthem of those growing up in a post-Christian world: “All paths lead to God.” We have lost the overarching story of God and man. What is interesting is that most people in the emerging culture have no problem believing in a “God.” But this “God” is pieced together from a mix of world religions and various personal beliefs.²⁰

Though challenging, this reality creates an incredible opportunity for communities of authentic followers of Christ to effect change. People crave the transformation that God enables in those who know Jesus and its usefulness is unlimited.

With respect to complexity, postmoderns are both weary and suspicious of airtight, formulistic arguments that deny the intricacy of most of their questions and problems. They yearn for a safe place to investigate “faith, not because it has easy answers to the big questions (that is shallow answers to deep questions), but because the faith is the context in which one can explore the mysteries that underlie these

²⁰ Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 73.

questions.”²¹ Churches who adjust their ministry mindsets to embrace both postmoderns and their questions likely will have a steady influx of inquirers.

Finally, the rise of relativism coupled with the supposed collapse of the meta-narrative has prompted an extraordinary search for meaning, purpose, and truth among emerging generations. Instinctually, people desire to adore something; humans were created to worship. Despite the attraction to self-worship and self-actualization (expressed very clearly in the “truth is what I define it to be” diatribe), life continually poses obstacles that cannot be undone or solved by the “self.” Death, natural disasters, the bombing of the world trade center on that fateful day of September 11 in 2001, and the like all validate the limitations of humanity and the desperate necessity of God. Though a challenge, postmodernism can be redeemed in God’s perpetual pursuit of those who will worship him in spirit and truth.

Worship in an Experiential Culture

Lyle E. Schaller relates a story that underscores the experiential opportunities now available to those in emerging generations. Referencing B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore’s seminal work, *The Experience Economy*, Schaller writes:

One example they offer is the farm wife who gathered homegrown commodities (eggs, wheat that had been ground into flour, milk, butter, etc.) and baked a birthday cake in the wood-fired kitchen stove. Her daughter purchased a cake mix at the store, added a few ingredients such as eggs, water, and oil, and baked a birthday cake in the oven of her electric stove. When the granddaughter became a mother, she purchased a service in the form of an already decorated birthday cake in the bakery section of the supermarket. Her younger sister pays a fee to Chuck E. Cheese or the Discovery Zone to provide an exciting and memorable

²¹ Brian D. McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 78.

experience for her eight-year-old. They throw in a birthday cake as part of the package fee.²²

Rapid advances in science and technology combined with the prosperous American economy have accelerated the shift toward the experiential culture detailed above. In today's postmodern society, interactive and participatory experiences not only are preferred but they are expected. People no longer visit museums, ballparks, or shopping malls; they experience them. The era of monotone tour guides and passive visual displays is passé; people are eager to experience truth and knowledge.²³ For postmoderns, it is far better to experience an "experience" than to turn it into another theory or universalize it and proclaim it as all-encompassing truth.²⁴

The implications of an experiential culture weigh heavily on the Church. Spurred by the seeker-sensitive movement and its implementation of video, drama sketches, lighting, and so forth, many congregations slowly have begun the arduous transition toward participatory worship. Nevertheless, there is ample space for broader and deeper improvements. In addition to the auditory and visual senses, postmodern worshippers are engaged effectively through a variety of senses including smell, feel, and taste—namely, the more multi-sensory the experience, the greater and longer the impact. One church that is reaching emerging generations effectively experiments with diverse worship elements such as intentional silence, interactive prayer stations, and offerings which incorporate the release of incense. Describing these practices as a return to vintage forms

²² B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999); quoted in Lyle Schaller, *The New Context for Ministry: Competing for the Charitable Dollar* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 128.

²³ Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 156.

²⁴ McLaren, *The Church on the Other Side*, 164.

of worship rather than new and cutting-edge ones, the leadership of the congregations views these practices as helpful in reaching postmoderns.²⁵ Ultimately, churches that engage contemporary audiences must do so creatively, sensitively, and diversely.

Another implication of an experiential culture is the inherent expectations of Christians and pre-believers in emerging generations. Reared on television, video games, and the Internet, many enter the worship environment as consumers and expect to be fully engaged, even entertained. To accommodate this mindset, churches often are tempted to build worship services around music sets that move from pulsating to morose, preaching that is more human-centered rather than God-honoring, and technological elements that offer more intrigue than depth. Instead of joining God in his ongoing pursuit of humanity and pointing worshippers to Christ, these hollow encounters elevate gifted singers or speakers and disserve those who genuinely seek God. In the end, this approach actually promotes the consumerism that so prevails in the culture instead of deflecting it. The Church, then, must engage postmodern generations intentionally with teachings and experiences that are biblically sound and culturally redeeming.

Shifting from Event-driven to Lifestyle-oriented Worship

One way a church can redeem the experiential bent of contemporary culture is to support the shift from worship as event to worship as lifestyle. For many, worship is something a person dresses up for, attends, and prioritizes each Sunday morning during the eleven o'clock hour. Worship, then, is relegated to a weekly event that is both

²⁵ Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 167-169.

predictable and static; it stands as one of many obligations that comprise a person's already hectic schedule.

Two potentially harmful consequences flow from this approach. First, worship becomes a time-sensitive task similar to buying groceries or taking out the trash. One works each weekday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., runs errands on Saturday, and worships on Sunday. Like all other items on a to-do list, worship simply is checked off when completed. This fosters a compartmentalized, detached spirituality that is both unbiblical and personally defeating. Essentially, God is "allowed" to speak into a person's life on a specific hour on the first day of the week, and the other 167 hours are used for other significant pursuits.

Second, this view of worship cultivates an evaluation mindset that is pervasive in contemporary culture. From restaurants to retail chains to satellite installation services, consumers consistently are asked for feedback; opinion has become one of the most prized commodities in the marketplace. Accordingly, the "customer is always right" business creed has exalted people and their evaluations to a place of unparalleled prominence. When loosed in a congregation, this attitude turns would-be worshippers into seasoned critics who grade worship leaders rather than follow them into God's presence. Instead of gathering with others to magnify God, some attend an event to minimize the "performance" and self-worship dominates.

To counteract this inclination toward event-driven worship, those desiring to engage emerging generations in the worship of God must return to the biblical model that views worship as a lifestyle. Paul succinctly offers his support for this when he writes: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus,

giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Colossians 3:17). Worship, as Paul presents it, is not a real-time event that happens in a specific locale and serves the clock. Rather, worship is giving all of oneself to God, moment by moment, for his glory. He alone is the object and the source of our worship. This requires sacrifice and surrender on the part of the worshipper. In his letter to the Romans, Paul develops this theme when he states:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

True worship, then, is a perpetual and sacrificial act of honoring God and his purposes. It occurs in both the mundane and spectacular episodes of life, and it moves us to magnify his majesty and grace.

Bridging Heart and Head: Worship in Spirit and Truth

Another means by which the Church can refine the experiential cravings of those in contemporary culture is to effectively model worship that captures both the head and heart. Again, Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4 is enlightening.

In response to her inquiry about where and how to worship, John 4:21-24 states:

Jesus declared, “Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.

Jesus affirms that true worship must be both vibrant in the heart and rooted in a true understanding of God; spirit and truth must co-exist. Truth without emotion produces

dead orthodoxy, and emotion without truth produces empty sensationalism that is spiritually shallow. Conversely, true worship flows from people who are deeply emotional and who love deep and sound doctrine. Strong affections for God rooted in truth are central to biblical worship.²⁶

Prayerfully and strategically employed, the dual emphases of spirit and truth will provide a balanced worship environment that engages and challenges those in emerging generations. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the experiential needs of postmodern worshippers can be fulfilled while the truth is affirmed as enduring and absolute in a pluralistic world. Mimicking the example of Jesus in his dialogue with the Samaritan woman, the Church can pursue with passion the opportunity to engage emerging generations in the authentic worship of God.

²⁶ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996), 76.

CHAPTER 2
OBSTACLES TO ENGAGING EMERGING GENERATIONS
IN INDEPENDENT BAPTIST CHURCHES

Making and growing disciples of Jesus Christ is the heartbeat of the biblical witness and the crux of Jesus' final comments to his core followers (Matthew 28:19-20). Few churches, then, overtly oppose joining God's redemptive work of effecting spiritual transformation in people; and, the Great Commission often is reworded in a mission statement as the ultimate reason why a church exists. What increasingly is more challenging, however, is building a consensus about how the Great Commission should be pursued. Methodology sometimes trumps theology and becomes a debilitating source of contention. This is especially true in Independent Baptist contexts.

It is my privilege to serve as pastor of Grace Baptist Church (GBC) in Fort Worth, Texas. Since Grace Baptist is my home church, my relationship with Grace has been relatively consistent throughout my entire life. With the exception of a brief, two-year stint as a child and a five-year seminary ministry elsewhere, I have seen firsthand the day-to-day operation of the church. Also, my family has maintained an active role in Grace for many years. My grandfather served as pastor from 1955 to 1980, and my father provided pivotal leadership as pastor from 1980 to 2004.

Grace Baptist is an Independent Baptist church with loose ties to a small group of churches known as the World Baptist Fellowship (WBF). With a history that claims the

controversial John Franklyn Norris as its founder,¹ the WBF takes great pride in its militant, aggressive, separatist approach and considers its churches to be the last great hope for Christianity as it seeks to stem the tide of humanism, secularism, and popular culture. Accordingly, leading a faith community steeped in Independent Baptist fundamentalism to engage the unique needs of emerging generations creates a compelling study and has become the primary intent of this paper.

The Spiritual Identity of Grace Baptist Church

Started in 1951, Grace Baptist Church began with a responsible, hard-working leadership team that determined to achieve Christ's mission in the world. These respected leaders served with integrity and effectiveness, attracted those who had the necessary spiritual gifts to lead and serve, and set the pace for the future. Over time, the core grew and spurred the overall growth of the church. From a modest group of nineteen charter members,² Grace Baptist has grown to an active membership of eight hundred and a weekly worship attendance of five hundred.³ Today, the church enjoys the fruit of many years of door-to-door outreach, evangelistic meetings (revivals, rallies, and the like), and weekly preaching that has challenged people to accept Christ. By the grace of God, GBC includes many time-tested Christians and a unified group of leaders who

¹ Fiery and enigmatic, Norris was a preacher who widely influenced Independent Baptists in Texas during the first half of the twentieth century. More will be said about him later in this chapter.

² Grace Baptist Church, "Chronological Membership Record" (official church documentation, Fort Worth, TX, January 24, 1951).

³ Kathy Williams, comp., "Weekly Attendance Records" (membership secretary records, Grace Baptist Church, Fort Worth, TX, 2008). All GBC membership information is taken from this source unless otherwise noted.

have positioned the church to achieve positive, Kingdom results well into the twenty-first century.

Doctrinally, Grace Baptist has maintained a steady allegiance to orthodox Christianity and would be considered theologically conservative in virtually every classification. The church routinely errs on the side of caution when presented with more progressive theological positions and adheres to traditional Independent Baptist doctrine. A sampling of the church's beliefs includes a reliance on the Bible as the authoritative Word of God; believing that God exists and is revealed perfectly in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ; receiving the Holy Spirit as an active mover in the life of every true believer; and, a belief that humans are sinners before God. Additionally, those at GBC affirm that salvation is available to all due to the completed work of Christ, including his virgin birth, sinless life, crucifixion, resurrection, and second coming. Genuine conversion is seen as secure, and all at Grace Baptist ultimately understand they will stand before God in judgment. Furthermore, GBC is uneasy with controversial issues like ordaining women, accepting the homosexual lifestyle, speaking in tongues, and abortion.

Currently, Grace Baptist is moving into its sixth decade of ministry and strives to navigate the typical irritations of well-established organizations: change, predictability, past success, stagnation, future expectations, and other such dynamics. Buoyed by the longevity of pastoral leadership and a committed core, the church has been built on a foundation of stability and integrity. Through its half century of ministry, Grace Baptist has maintained a commitment to practice the principles of God's Word in the midst of a rapidly changing society. Consequently, it has not been damaged by doctrinal

controversy, knee-jerking at the latest ministry fad, or lopsided ministry that focuses on one area to the detriment of all others. This sense of strength has been challenged, however, in recent years. The increased mobility of families, the hectic pace of life, a struggle to embrace change, and an attraction with the status quo have combined to slow the growth rate considerably at Grace Baptist and to provide a noticeable sense of urgency about the future.

For all of its past accomplishments, however, the church currently stands at an opportunistic crossroads. The primary challenge facing Grace Baptist is identifying its future options and making a significant choice: to perpetuate and duplicate the success of the past, rethink its current strategy and retool accordingly, or simply do nothing. Years from now, the success or failure of Grace Baptist Church will be linked to one of these three options. Hopefully, as God leads and his people follow, a genuine urgency will develop that calls us to appreciate the past, admit the present, and plan for the future in a way that broadens the Kingdom and spreads the fame of his name.

Core Values of Independent Baptists

Independent Baptists have roots that extend back to the rise of fundamentalism, which achieved prominence after the Civil War. Spurred by an aggressive resistance to modern developments in the physical and social sciences and liberal trends in religion, fundamentalist leaders led the charge to defend and promote the “fundamentals” of the faith.⁴ Independent Baptists adopted a similarly fervent passion for the core tenets of

⁴ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 755.

fundamentalism and gave special consideration to three core values: the inerrancy of the Bible, separatism, and denominational independence.

Independent Baptists are ardent in their defense of the Holy Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God; from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible is the complete and supernaturally inspired record of God's revelation of himself to humankind. It discloses the principles by which God expects humanity to abide and reveals the standards by which God will judge the world in the end. Therefore, it is and will remain until the end of the world the center of all Christian existence and experience and the rule by which all human action, beliefs, and opinions will be measured. Seeking to distance themselves from those who question the Bible's relevance or accuracy, Independent Baptists boldly affirm the infallibility of Scripture and strive to present the timeless truths therein as relevant and applicable today. Accordingly, Grace Baptist esteems the Bible as the ultimate textbook for navigating life and uses it as the primary source of study in both corporate and small group teaching gatherings.

Biblical separatism is another core value of many Independent Baptists. Separatists contend that orthodox Christians should avoid contact with doctrinally impure churches and individuals. Rejecting liberal churches is not enough; true believers should avoid contact with liberals themselves.⁵ Perhaps more than any other issue, separatism has branded Independent Baptists as cold, judgmental, angry types who believe they have somehow cornered the market on authentic spirituality. Sadly, the manner in which some have relayed their convictions to those both inside and outside the Kingdom has

⁵ Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Way: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 403.

completely diluted the truth they profess. In this way, their method has overpowered the message.

While sensitive to the reasoning behind separatism, Grace Baptist consistently has chosen to downplay the harsh tactics that typify aggressive separatists. Engaging and penetrating a culture with the good news of the gospel requires a clear understanding of its societal, historical, and demographic context and a close proximity with the people who comprise it. Accordingly, Grace Baptist has sought to mimic Jesus' methodology of seeing and accepting people where they are and pursuing them with purpose and sensitivity. In his encounters with individuals like the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-42), Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), and Levi (Matthew 9:9-13), Jesus initiated the dialogue with those outside the Kingdom and engaged them in their environment. His ability to foster relationships with sinners in their context often led to repentance and conversion. Grace Baptist will continue to strive to emulate Jesus in both his demeanor and methods

One final distinctive about Independent Baptists is a persistent refusal to form alliances across denominational lines. Aggressively, and sometimes arrogantly, Independent Baptists are committed to denominational exclusivity and isolation. Fueled by the separatist ideology mentioned previously, most Independent Baptists prefer to pool their resources with other like-minded churches that offer safe, familiar relationships. Grace Baptist is more open than some to establishing partnerships with other evangelical churches, but the vision of the ecumenical movement to unite churches from all denominations is something GBC still would struggle to embrace. Influenced by its separatist upbringing, Grace instead prefers to maintain its independent position and remains comfortably isolated from other inter-denominational coalitions. In no way,

however, does the church seek to undermine the efforts of other churches or denominations. Rather, it strives to participate in the expansion of the Kingdom in its own, distinct manner.

The Legacy of Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism in its contextualized Independent Baptist expression has contributed to both the success and struggles of Grace Baptist. Historically, the unbending commitment of Grace's early fundamentalist leaders to biblical authority, for example, provided the church with much-needed stability and continuity. Amid the persistent and often volatile changes that permeate contemporary American culture, fundamentalists continue to return to the biblical witness for wisdom and guidance. It is worth noting that the core leaders who founded Grace Baptist in 1951 required that the King James Version of the Bible be used in all preaching and teaching venues. Though short-sighted from both a contemporary and scholarly perspective, it nonetheless highlights the sober appreciation the founding leaders had for the Holy Scriptures. To this day, Grace Baptist remains committed to preaching and practicing the teachings of the entire Bible.⁶

Another similar contribution of fundamentalism to the Grace Baptist culture is a dogged determination to avoid compromising the truth claims of Scripture, some of which consistently are under attack in American culture. "Hot button" issues like abortion and homosexuality require a clear, exhaustive understanding that is rooted in God's Word. Fundamentalists routinely have consulted the teachings of the Scripture to

⁶ The church is progressively more open to modern translations and currently employs the *Holy Bible: New International Version* in corporate worship due to its scholarship and widespread popularity.

navigate these issues and have formed a legacy of consistency that will serve emerging generations admirably.

Two weaknesses of fundamentalism that have affected Grace Baptist subtly are an overzealous commitment to separatism and a tendency to embrace a top-down leadership style that limits the long-term viability of the church. Bound generally by manmade rules and regulations, separatism implodes in postmodern culture and garners more ridicule than respect from potential Christ-followers. The central issue is not that fundamentalists want to live by many rules that keep them separate from “worldliness,” rather it is their insistence that anyone who wants to be a Christian should live this way.⁷ Though sparse, the strand of separatists that remain at Grace Baptist struggle to embrace the methodologies necessary to reach emerging generations.

A key leader and influencer of Independent Baptists in Texas in the first half of the twentieth century, Norris was a militant fundamentalist. He preached independence and local church autonomy but employed a controlling, manipulative style that allowed little opportunity for outside inspection or accountability. His remarkable run as pastor of First Baptist Church in Fort Worth (located a few miles from Grace Baptist) and leader of the World Baptist Fellowship (of which Grace remains a limited participant) made him a local folk hero and led many young preachers to emulate his style. Sadly, few were able to duplicate Norris’ success.⁸

The unique and controversial style of fundamentalist leaders like Norris impacted many Independent Baptist churches, including GBC. At Grace Baptist, historically the

⁷ Richard J. Mouw, *The Smell of Sawdust: What Evangelicals Can Learn from their Fundamentalist Heritage* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 75.

⁸ McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 763.

pastor has been given far-reaching authority to hire staff, allocate funds, and shape ministry. Essentially, he has enjoyed veto privilege in most of the day-to-day decisions of the church. Though the church never has had a militant, controlling pastor like Norris, the top-down style he employed has fostered a leadership culture that potentially is problematic. If the pastor serves as the sole decision maker and is ultimately responsible for managing the minute details of the church, future growth could be limited.

Two standards consistently must be encouraged to ensure that Grace Baptist effectively reaches and mentors those in emerging generations into humble, mature, servant leaders. First, pastors and staff should embrace a permission-giving, team-based approach to leadership. Traditionally, Grace has been a pastor-led church. During the tenure of my grandfather, Wayne Martin (1955 to 1980), the pastor and deacons comprised the primary decision-making team of the church. This arrangement proved efficient in the formative years but became increasingly restrictive as the church grew. Over time, the collective insight of a relatively small group of men was insufficient to meet the diverse challenges and needs of the church family. Under the leadership of my father, Ronnie Williams (1980 to 2004), the church relocated. It added staff and modified its leadership culture. Deacons transitioned from making unilateral decisions to providing input to the pastoral staff about ministry objectives and assisting with pastoral care. Working under the supervision of the Trustee Board, which both oversaw the finances and served as a personnel committee, Williams built a staff that resembled his ministry vision and philosophy and reported directly to him. As the staff grew, his task of effectively managing various leadership styles and ministries became more challenging. Eventually, the top-down approach that placed Williams as the primary

point person for all ministry-related vision and decisions became burdensome for him and the church. As Grace Baptist continues to adapt its leadership culture to reach emerging generations, the decision-making process must be increasingly decentralized to allow more people to participate in shaping and refining ministry. As the present pastor, I will continue to provide overarching vision and direction; however, the staff, lay leaders, and ministry volunteers must be intricately involved in enhancing their respective areas.

Second, the leadership culture of Grace Baptist must be committed to ruthless authenticity and intentional accountability among the pastor, staff, and lay leadership. The character of Martin and Williams allowed the top-down leadership approach to flourish during the last fifty years, and for this reason GBC remains a pastor-led body that willingly follows the ministry vision and direction the pastor sets. This approach will continue to serve the church well so long as clearly defined expectations and boundaries for leaders at all ages and stages of development are employed. Through one-on-one accountability relationships and routine opportunities for spiritual growth, staff and lay leaders must pursue integrity continually. Unlike their predecessors, those in emerging generations are suspect of churches and their leaders and possess more cynicism than confidence.

Struggles and Issues within the Church

More than halfway through the first decade of the twenty-first century, Grace Baptist struggles to navigate the dicey situation of impacting multiple generations. The congregation genuinely wants to extend its ministry to those in the emerging culture and, at the same time, honor the worship practices and preferences of those in previous generations who helped birth, grow, and stabilize the church. To accomplish both with

precision and excellence, however, presents some compelling challenges. Additionally, the church continues to experience a “passing of the baton” among its core leaders, with the established leaders of the previous generation graciously allowing the emerging leaders to assume control. This also heightens the contrasting styles, visions, and affinities between those stepping in and those stepping aside and creates noticeable tension. Together, these underscore several core issues that affect Grace Baptist and its desire to engage emerging audiences. Such dynamics include generational unity, a transitioning leadership core, and intentional ministry to younger adults.

One delicate issue that permeates the Grace Baptist community is generational unity. Multi-generational congregations have been a hallmark of effective churches for many years. Accordingly, any church that strives to fulfill the Great Commission does so without regard to age, background, race, or social status. Through its history, Grace Baptist has enjoyed a consistent number of families who have multiple generations represented in the church membership. In recent years, however, as people have become more mobile, and close-knit families have grown further apart, loyalty to both the church and to Jesus has become less common in the younger generations. This occurrence has sparked healthy debate within the church and has prompted a variety of possible solutions from each respective group.

Members of the two, older generations at GBC—the Builders and Boomers⁹—have difficulty understanding why the church of yesterday does not connect with today’s younger audiences. These generations reason that if the church met their spiritual needs during their formative years, then it should do the same for their children and

⁹ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 36.

grandchildren as they grow in the faith. Furthermore, members of these groups assume that if the church is not communicating with younger generations, GBC should not shoulder the blame. Instead, they often fault the youngsters and their culture of apathy, irresponsibility, and selfishness for their unfulfilling spiritual experiences.

Conversely, younger generations at Grace Baptist often view their elders as stodgy, out of touch, and uninterested in change. They see the overall agenda of the church being shaped by a core of mature members who recognize the need to connect with younger audiences but who lack the attitude and the aptitude to make it happen successfully. In turn, some in Generation X have become disenchanted with their role in the ministry of the church and fault the entrenched leadership team for its controlling, dominating approach.

GBC must come to terms with its slowly widening generational rift. Those in the emerging generations must look to the elders for the advice and insight that only age and experience can teach. They must not reject their perspective simply due to age or commitment or for certain methods and styles. On the other hand, the more mature members of the church should reserve places at the vision-casting sessions for those in the emerging generation who sincerely desire to reach their peers with the truth. Many younger worshippers long for a distinct spiritual encounter than that of their parents and grandparents, and their approach to God should not be dismissed simply because it is unique or non-traditional. Each generation at Grace must lay aside its agenda and seek unity with the community at large to realize God's mission for the church.

A second issue that challenges the stability and maneuverability of Grace Baptist as it seeks to engage emerging generations is a rapidly transitioning core leadership team.

In recent years, many who have been active in the core leadership group slowly have disengaged from church life. Though verbally committed, their participation and availability has lessened; and, their once-fervent loyalty has begun to diminish. Some who have been diligent to facilitate a weekly Bible study in the past, for example, now are willing to serve only occasionally on a team that secures the campus during services. Others who have been available to serve the church family whenever a need arose have chosen to streamline their service to fit their increasingly hectic schedule. Still others have relinquished their ministry responsibilities entirely and “retired.” While younger leaders have stepped in to fill the gaps, a mentoring void has been created that likely will prolong the maturation of the evolving core leadership team. As GBC continues to pursue emerging generations with the gospel, the core leaders of the church must continue to cultivate a passion and commitment to Christ that is vibrant, genuine, and attractive. It is incumbent, then, that core leaders remain unapologetically devoted to following Christ daily and authentically. Ultimately, these spiritual leaders must mimic Jesus’ servant-leadership model and avoid the tendency to view leaders as position-centered managers of church business.

One final struggle within the Grace Baptist family is the lack of intentional ministry to younger adults. The church has been effective at reaching both the Builder generation of the Great Depression era and their children, the Baby Boomers. One critical audience that has been difficult to reach is young singles and couples in their twenties and thirties. Furthermore, in the past decade (1995 to 2005), the church’s growth has been slanted toward the transfer side of the ledger; most people who join the church are Christians. In an average year, two-thirds of the new members already have

been converted. More specifically, the church has attracted people from other struggling churches who possess conservative beliefs or people moving into the area who are looking for a strong, Bible-based church that can meet the needs of their entire family. Accordingly, in Lee Strobel’s delineation, Grace Baptist is reaching a population of primarily “churched Christians” and “churched non-Christians.”¹⁰ Though reluctant to target a specific segment of society, Grace Baptist consistently has reached a particular type of individual or family. Table 1, “A Decade of New Members (1995-2005),” details these trends by gender, membership status, and age.

Table 1. A Decade of New Members (1995-2005)

	Baptism	Transfer of Letter	Statement of Faith	TOTALS	%
Male	150	152	69	371	46%
Female	152	181	97	430	54%
TOTALS	302	333	166	801	
%	38%	42%	21%		100%
Baptisms by Age (1995-2005)					
	0 to 19 years	20 to 39 years	40 + years	TOTALS	%
Male	98	39	13	150	50%
Female	94	38	20	152	50%
TOTALS	192	77	33	302	
%	64%	25%	11%		100%

From a missional perspective, Grace Baptist effectively reaches youth and children, regardless of gender. In fact, seven of ten people baptized in the past ten years were under twenty years of age. The percentage decreases significantly, however, in the

¹⁰ Lee Strobel, *Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 162-163.

higher age brackets and supports the well-traveled church axiom that contends that most people who convert to Christianity do so by their twentieth birthday. Moreover, in the past decade, only six people between the ages of twenty and thirty-nine years have been baptized into the church each year. These numbers reveal an alarming trend that must be curbed through purposeful, creative ministry that is rooted in God's mission to reach people in every generation.

Historically, GBC has chosen to meet the needs of different generations by offering an age-graded Sunday School; traditional worship services for all ages; and, a slate of Wednesday evening Bible studies that are specific to age, stage, and gender. The Sunday School curriculum is the same for teenagers through senior citizens, and the worship services are geared toward everyone in the third grade and above. Essentially, the church is employing the same approach to minister to an elderly, Christian widow and a thirty-something, unchurched couple with two children. Accordingly, a retooled ministry philosophy that is more sensitive to the unique needs of those who are investigating God at various ages, genders, socioeconomic statuses, and spiritual backgrounds is needed. Ultimately, the vision to design and introduce a contemporary worship service into the worship culture of Grace Baptist is fueled by the growing need to impact emerging generations for Christ.

Presently, the church offers two identical services on Sunday morning that generally would be considered traditional and typical of Baptist churches. The music is a blend of hymns and praise choruses and usually is accompanied by a piano and organ. Fairly predicable in both order and style, the services include the following elements: a call to worship usually sung by the choir, a welcome from the pastor, congregational

music, Scripture reading followed by a pastoral prayer, another set of congregational music, worship through tithes and offerings, special music, a sermon, response, and closing prayer. This continues to be an excellent design for older worshippers or younger worshippers with traditional, Christian heritages. For those in emerging generations from the surrounding culture, however, the structure, routine, and dialect this approach employs can be challenging. An additional contemporary service potentially could offer a more inviting, engaging atmosphere that helps younger worshippers glorify God.

Several reasons support the decision to design and introduce a contemporary worship service to reach emerging generations into the worship culture of Grace Baptist Church. First, the church gradually is phasing in a ministry team that is predominantly from Generation or “Gen” X. In 1998, for example, the pastoral team consisted of one Builder, two Boomers, and a lone Gen X representative. Presently, the full ministry staff includes a Builder, two Boomers, five Gen Xers, and two Millennials¹¹ and the majority of key lay leader positions are now filled by those in the two younger generations. These strategic leadership additions will aid the transition process and help prepare the church for ministry to emerging generations. Second, the natural course of attrition will change the overall makeup of the congregation. Those who helped start the church and kept it afloat during its formative years are now in decline, and their influence is waning. With a median age for new members of thirty-two years, it appears Grace Baptist is ready to add an innovative option to its worship service line-up. Third, the church is blessed with a great range of resources including facilities, stewardship, and people. Together, these support an optimistic outlook for future ministry expansion. The addition of a 33,000-

¹¹ Strauss and Howe, *Generations*, 36.

square-foot education building in 1998, combined with the Sanctuary, Family Center, and eighteen acres of land greatly increases the church's potential to minister to a growing congregation. Finally, Grace should enhance the worship culture through a weekly worship event for emerging generations to stave off eventual extinction. The church must decide whether to defend the traditional structures of yesterday that foster an ingrown, maintenance-driven mentality or reconfigure its worship philosophy, follow the biblical precedent, and practically meet the needs of the people around it.¹²

In an ever-changing, consumer-savvy culture where options abound, Grace Baptist should provide viable ministry alternatives to all generations and avoid adopting a one-size-fits-all approach that promotes elitism and favoritism. To ignore emerging generations for the sake of tradition or preference is to entirely abandon Jesus' ministry philosophy. He specifically came to doctor the spiritually sick and not to pamper the healthy (Mark 2:17). At Grace Baptist, we must strive to understand, serve, and win the varied representatives of emerging generations. They should become the prime target in the viewfinder of the mission of the church: to make and grow disciples of Jesus Christ, who worship God, serve others, and minister his Word. To that end, those in emerging generations have become the present-day equivalent of Paul's desire to "become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

The Pressure of Popular Culture on Church Culture

Bridging the cavernous gap between a God who is in the world on mission and twenty-first-century popular culture is unsettling at best and, at worst, intimidating. An

¹² George Barna, *The Second Coming of the Church* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 130.

intriguing paradox seems to be playing out. On the one hand, current society decries any overt mention of God, blatantly revels in media and entertainment that mock his name, and tolerates pervasive immorality as an inherent American freedom. On the other, people genuinely crave an encounter with the divine that leads to positive change and ultimate contentment. Most Americans admit to not yet having discovered a compelling, defining purpose for their lives; and, millions routinely probe the spiritual domain to facilitate that discovery.¹³ For whatever reason, the truth that God in Christ wants to become that “defining purpose” is lost in methodological arguments that ultimately prevent God’s work from being accomplished.

The fundamentalist mentality that has influenced Grace Baptist historically has taken a narrow, strict approach to penetrating popular culture to impact humanity with God’s story of forgiveness and love. Seeking to avoid spiritual contamination, some zealous fundamentalists believe the Bible affirms aggressive separatism and contend that following Jesus and being culturally sensitive are incompatible.¹⁴ H. Richard Niebuhr classifies such people as adherents of a “Christ against Culture” approach which favors retreating from society to maintain an insulated, albeit loyal, life of purity and self-restraint.¹⁵ Interestingly, there is some merit in the basic tenets of this approach. It supports a radical call to discipleship that lives by the ultimate Christian confession, “Jesus is Lord.” It recognizes the danger of selling out to contemporary ideology and serves as a cultural barometer that holds in check the foundational teachings of Scripture.

¹³ Ibid., 67.

¹⁴ A cherished proof text for a staunch separatist is 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

¹⁵ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), 45-82.

Furthermore, it demands a faith that leads to some type of tangible action. When stretched, however, the separatist mentality comes under justifiable fire. Some contend that this negative form of spirituality is anti-world.¹⁶ Others explain that a “Christ against Culture” philosophy eventually implodes on itself, for “it affirms in words what it denies in action: namely the possibility of sole dependence on Jesus Christ to the exclusion of culture.”¹⁷ It is literally impossible to come to Christ without being a part of culture. Most importantly, Jesus maintained that both he and his followers were sent “into the world” but were “not of the world” (John 17:16-19). Consequently, the extent to which Grace Baptist effectively represents Jesus in the world intricately links to an understanding of how the pressures of popular culture impact the culture of the church.

Specifically, two issues prevalent in the surrounding ministry context of the church are exerting pressure on GBC’s culture: tolerance and consumerism. First, as postmodernism assumes a stronger foothold in popular culture, tolerance has become an increasingly esteemed value. In such an environment, truth claims that seem exclusive, such as Jesus’ contention that he alone provides access to the Father (John 14:6), are quickly discarded in favor of broader, relativistic opinions. No belief is intrinsically more valid than another, and no religion is considered superior. Consequently, each person, faith system, and viewpoint enjoys equal status and authority. This reality presents both an opportunity and an obstacle for Grace Baptist. No longer inhibited by the biases of modernity, Christianity is viewed as “one among many” faith systems in the

¹⁶ Rowland, “Taking Popular Culture Captive to Communicate the Gospel.” This comes from Rowland’s specific section entitled “Two Forms of Spirituality.”

¹⁷ Neibuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 69.

postmodern milieu.¹⁸ Accordingly, in a tolerant culture that values open-mindedness and affirms all truth as equally legitimate, Grace Baptist must strive to communicate the teachings of the Bible in a compelling manner that mimics the love and genuineness of Christ. Conversely, presenting firm biblical convictions amid a culture of rampant tolerance will be interpreted sometimes as harsh and unbending. Jesus' own disciples often struggled to accept his teachings due to their cultural and religious prejudices (Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:18-30; John 4:27). Ultimately, Grace Baptist must present the timeless truths of the Bible carefully and patiently in the midst of a tolerant culture and do so in a loving, uncompromising way.

A second pressure of popular culture that affects Grace Baptist is consumerism. In the last five years, the area within a three-mile radius of the church has exploded with retail shopping centers, apartment complexes, and restaurants. Five years ago, the lone fast-food chain in close proximity to the church was McDonald's. Today, within five blocks of the McDonald's are the following quick service eateries: Arby's, Sonic, Taco Casa, KFC/Pizza Hut, Whataburger, Cici's Pizza, Taco Bueno, and two Subway sandwich shops. During the same time period, a Wal-Mart Supercenter, Walgreen's, CVS, Albertson's, Quick Trip, National Tire and Battery, and Starbuck's have been constructed within walking distance of the aforementioned restaurants. In effect, several leading companies have concluded that the ministry context surrounding GBC is teaming with a diverse assortment of willing consumers.

The wide array of retail and food options in the immediate area and the diverse customers who frequent them underscore the impact of consumerism in popular culture.

¹⁸ Ibid. This comes from Rowland's specific section entitled "Three Pillars of Postmodernism."

Specifically, two core values of a consumer-driven society affect the culture of Grace Baptist: competition and customer service. Companies compete for more customers by reducing prices, extending store hours, and enhancing the quantity and quality of their products. Furthermore, the popular corporate mantra of “the customer is always right” fosters a corporate pledge to meet the expectations of consumers to ensure their complete satisfaction. Both of these values are increasingly more common among those who attend Grace Baptist and must be considered as the church seeks to reach emerging generations. With respect to competition, GBC must resist the temptation to become a purveyor of religious goods and services. The church is not competing for members but seeks to join with Jesus in his redemptive mission to extend his gospel to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). Concerning customer service, Grace Baptist faithfully should serve those both in the church family and in the culture in the name of Christ and passionately call all people to pursue the servant-oriented approach of Jesus (Luke 22:24-27).

Demographic Data of Ministry Context

Grace Baptist enjoys a prime location on the northwest corner of the main traffic loop that circles the greater Fort Worth area. Situated between two rapidly expanding sections of the city, the church is poised to benefit from the influx of young people moving into the area to begin families and secure jobs at companies such as Lockheed-Martin, Radio Shack, and American Airlines. Furthermore, the overall makeup of the church family seems to mimic the immediate ministry context. GBC is comprised of primarily middle-class individuals and families that are fairly conservative in their spiritual beliefs, financial capacities, and values. Roughly 80 percent of the church

family is Anglo with the remaining 20 percent containing a mixture of Hispanics, Asian Americans, and African Americans. Historically, Grace Baptist has been a socioeconomically diverse community in which blue-collar assembly line laborers and white-collar physicians have served and worshipped together. Today, the church continues to attract people of all types and is a virtual microcosm of the surrounding community with respect to age, socioeconomic status, values, and spiritual concerns.

The demographics of the cities nearest Grace Baptist bode well for future growth, especially among those in emerging generations. According to a “First View 2008” survey by the Percept Group, there are 145,774 persons residing within a five-mile radius of the church.¹⁹ This represents an increase of 32,701 people (28.9 percent) since 1990.²⁰ Between 2008 and 2013, the population is projected to increase by 9.2 percent or 13,421 additional persons.²¹ Furthermore, census data lists the following median ages in the strategic cities surrounding the church: Fort Worth, 32.3 years; White Settlement, 33.8 years; Aledo, 33.8 years; and, Tarrant County, 32.3 years.²² Interestingly, the two largest generational groups in the immediate context are Millennials (28 percent) and Generation X (29 percent), who together comprise over half of the population.²³

While these statistics reveal a growing number of people in emerging generations in the surrounding area, the specific needs of the populace necessitate that Grace Baptist

¹⁹ Percept Group, Inc., “First View 2008 Survey” (socioeconomic and demographic community profile, Fort Worth 76108 area, February 2008), 4.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² United States Census Bureau, “Census Data for Tarrant County, Texas,” <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/48439.html> (accessed February 13, 2008).

²³ Percept Group, Inc., “First View 2008 Survey,” 4.

Church intentionally reach them. Anglos represent 61.8 percent of the population, and the middle class is the dominant socioeconomic set.²⁴ The family units are described as “somewhat non-traditional” due to the below-average presence of married couples and two-parent families.²⁵ The stress level of people in the immediate ministry context is “somewhat high” due to community problems, family problems, and anxiety regarding the acquisition of basic needs necessitates like food, housing, and work.²⁶ Typically, people are concerned about issues such as coping with divorce, achieving a fulfilling marriage, and realizing educational objectives.²⁷

From a religious perspective, faith involvement among those in the community is “somewhat high” with 26.5 percent likely to prefer a Baptist denominational affiliation.²⁸ Based upon worship and music tendencies, the overall church style preference is described as “both traditional and contemporary.”²⁹ When looking for a church, the following programs or services are likely to be sought: Bible study and prayer groups, adult theological discussion groups, divorce-recovery groups, and twelve-step programs.³⁰ Overall, programs related to spiritual development are the most desired.³¹ Accordingly, people in the surrounding area seem to value family, education, and faith.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 5.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 6.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

The demographics of the community surrounding the church prompt a genuine sense of optimism and expectancy about the future. People are moving into the community, businesses and parks are under construction, and the aforementioned census data suggests sizable expansion into the twenty-first century for the immediate area. As people move closer and begin searching for spiritual direction, Grace Baptist will be situated solidly in their path. From the inside looking out, God clearly is steering people toward the church. Therefore, it is incumbent upon Grace Baptist Church to consider enhancing its ministry angle to those in emerging generations.

A potential downside to population growth, especially among emerging generations, is the unique needs and problems they bring with them. Grace Baptist traditionally has been a strong, conservative church that has sidestepped doctrinal controversy, high-profile moral mishaps, and financial squabbles. Accordingly, it may prove less tolerant of the open-minded, “anything goes,” financially-strapped young couple who wanders into the church searching for help and solutions. The Grace Baptist family must learn to comfortably serve and love people who bring baggage that challenges its strong tradition. At the intersection of human need and God’s love, the church must stand ready to join God in his ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

PART TWO
FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF WORSHIP

Worship of the one true God that reveals his glory and rejoices wholly in him is the central theme of the biblical witness. From beginning to end, the Scriptures unfold God's inexhaustible majesty, his unceasing commitment to reveal himself, and his pursuit of humans who will worship him in spirit and truth. God's crowning creation, Adam and Eve, were made in his image to reflect his greatness. Moreover, every facet of creation emphasizes God's incomparable worth; the heavens declare the glory of God (Psalm 19:1). The directive of the psalmist succinctly captures the core idea of genuine worship: "Delight yourself in the Lord" (Psalm 37:4). To worship God with a joyful heart and enjoy him forever is why humans were created.¹

Biblical Foundations of Worship

The modern word worship can be traced back to two Old English words: *weorth*, signifying "honor" and "worthiness," and *scipe*, meaning "to create." While people cannot "create" God's honor, since it is innately his, they can design ways to convey his majesty and radiance, however inadequate that may be.² The preeminent handbook for

¹ Piper, *Desiring God*, 84.

² Marva Dawn, *Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 76-77.

the worship of God is the Bible, God's written revelation of himself to humanity. It discloses God's nature, reveals his expectations for genuine worship, and details the various ways humans have sought to worship him throughout history. The Bible uses many different words to denote worship. The primary Hebrew word for worship is *shachah*, which means to "bow down."³ In the New Testament, the word most often translated as "worship" is *proskuneo*, which literally means to "prostrate oneself before" or "do reverence to" a person or deity.⁴ Both words convey a sense of humble devotion and adoration that is essential to the worship of God (Psalm 95:6).

While a more thorough examination of worship in the Old and New Testaments and in the Christian tradition will be presented in the ensuing sections, a general overview of the scriptural truths concerning the worship of God includes certain aspects. First, worship is entirely for God; he is both the subject and the object of true worship.⁵ The psalmist exclaims, "Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods" (Psalm 96:4). Second, worship is a life. In view of God's unparalleled greatness, every breath and step should bring glory to his name. To the Corinthian church, Paul wrote: "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:13). The sum of life should be a praise-fueled response to God. Third, worship completely depends upon God. Apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit, it is impossible to genuinely worship God. Paul describes authentic Christ-followers as those "who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus"

³ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 1980 ed., "shachah."

⁴ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 1979 ed. "proskuneo."

⁵ Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 80.

(Philippians 3:3). Furthermore, Jesus taught that no one could come to him unless his Father drew him (John 6:44). The Trinity, then, actively engages and sustains the worship of God. Finally, worship builds community; true, God-exalting worship unites the Body of Christ. Perhaps the most compelling example of this is the early Church in Acts.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. 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. (Acts 2:42-47)

The daily worship of God ignited an authentic sacrifice of praise from this infant, Christian community. Ultimately, their worship flowed from the doxological reality that “from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen” (Romans 11:36).

The Worship of God in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is replete with examples of God pursuing humans in relationship for his glory and their good. From Adam and Eve to Moses to Abraham to David to the prophets, God consistently engages people and invites them into his presence. Though indescribably transcendent and mysteriously “other,” God chose to reveal himself to people; he desires to be known. Worship, then, could be described broadly as a meeting between God and his people. In this encounter, God becomes present to his people, who respond with praise and thanksgiving. Accordingly, the

worshipper is brought close to the one who gives ultimate meaning and purpose to life and is given strength and confidence to live.⁶

Four pivotal sources in the Old Testament provide clarity into how God reveals himself to people and how they, in turn, respond to his revelation in worship. These include the event at Mount Sinai, the tabernacle and temple, the synagogue,⁷ and the festivals. From these strategic foundations, God established several patterns of interaction that would become prominent in the worship practices of future generations.

In the Exodus, God powerfully delivered his people from Egyptian bondage, led them miraculously across the Red Sea, and then met with them on Mount Sinai in a seminal public gathering. The core details of this episode, which are recorded in Exodus 19 through 24, are extremely significant because they underscore five basic elements that comprise a meeting with God. First, the meeting was instigated by God; he called the people from Egypt and steered them to the mountain. Specifically, God invited Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy elders to worship him from afar (Exodus 24:1). Moses then was instructed to come near to the Lord, while the other leaders and larger Hebrew community remained at a distance (Exodus 24:2). These directives highlight the reality that true worship is initiated by God. Second, the people assembled according to clearly defined roles with each participant aware of personal responsibility. True worship is participatory. Third, the Word of God was proclaimed. Moses told the people the Lord's words and recorded everything the Lord said (Exodus 24:3-4). Worship necessitates a word from God. Fourth, the people responded by hearing, accepting, and

⁶ Robert E. Webber, *Worship Old and New: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 11-12.

⁷ This will be discussed specifically in the following section.

obeying the Word. The worship of God prompts a renewed commitment from worshippers to heed and do God's Word. Fifth, the climax of the meeting was the ratification or sealing of the agreement. God required a blood sacrifice to confirm his relationship with man.⁸ The sacrifice both atoned for the sins of the person and satisfied the righteousness of God. In retrospect, the writer of Hebrews viewed these sacrifices as a precursor to the ultimate and final sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (Hebrews 9:11-10:18).

The tabernacle and the temple underscored the presence of God among his people. God spoke of his people constructing a sanctuary for him, so he could dwell among them (Exodus 25:8). The tabernacle and temple were constant reminders that God was relating to and living in the midst of his people (2 Chronicles 6:1-11). The tabernacle, temple, and their contents were constructed with painstaking precision and had far-reaching significance (Exodus 35:30-40:38; 1 Kings 5-8:21). The spacing of the structures with the outer, inner, and Most Holy place conveyed the necessary distance between worshipper and God (Leviticus 16). The layout of the furniture was intentional, with each piece representing an encounter with God (Exodus 25:10-27:21; 30:1-10, 17-38).⁹ The rituals, most notably the presenting of a sacrifice, were a strategic reminder of the covenant at Sinai and a foreshadowing of the death of Christ (Hebrews 10:1-18). Finally, the temple ministers specifically were chosen and consecrated in an elaborate ceremony which speaks to the serious expectations God has for those who lead others in worship (Exodus 29).

⁸ Ibid., 24-25.

⁹ Ibid., 26-27.

Finally, the festivals of the Old Testament were instrumental in shaping a biblical understanding of worship. Both major and minor festivals were celebrated annually to commemorate special events, giving God's people a sacred sense of time. Of the three most prominent festivals—Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles—two heavily influenced the worship of the early Church. The Passover recounts the story of God's miraculous protection of the firstborn during the climactic tenth plague that ultimately triggered the Exodus. God "passed over" the families who obediently had painted blood over the doorpost of the house. Subsequently, the Passover festival became an annual reminder of God's redemptive work. In the New Testament, Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper during Passover week and underscored his intentions of becoming the Passover lamb who would take away the sins of the world (Luke 22:7-20; 1 Corinthians 5:7). Pentecost, which means "fifty," marked the conclusion of the cycle that began at Passover and included a feast of joy and thanksgiving for the completion of the harvest season.¹⁰ Together the festivals aid in viewing time from God's sacred perspective, memorializing the redemptive activity of God in the past, and informing the worship of God that is rooted in authentic faith.

The Worship Motif of the Synagogue

One of the formative paradigms of Christian worship was the synagogue. Though the origin of synagogue worship is unclear, some historians believe that during the period of the second temple Jews who lived outside Jerusalem began meeting for worship during the hours of temple sacrifice. Others contend the practice began among Jews who were

¹⁰ Ibid., 29-30.

exiles in other countries, perhaps during the captivity in Babylon which began around 600 BC.¹¹ Despite the origin, the Jews' primary motivation for the synagogue was to preserve and extend the Word of God in the context of Jewish community.

Consequently, the synagogue became the religious, educational, and social hub of Jewish life.¹²

Synagogue worship was distinctive and much more streamlined than that of the temple. Whereas temple worship employed sacred rituals and sacred ministry, the synagogue was primarily a service of the Word and prayer that featured a reading of Scripture which often was followed by exposition and public dialogue. There were many types of prayer, psalms, and canticles, all of which were chanted. Though the position of the rabbi, or "teacher," developed in time, the service essentially was congregational. It was a gathering of laypersons; and, the men led the readings, prayers, and open discussion. Furthermore, the service was liturgical in nature. In keeping with the annual cycle of feasts and festivals detailed previously, a regular schedule of Scripture readings, psalms, and prayers were developed to emphasize the various seasons of life with God.¹³

Synagogue worship consisted of three main components: an affirmation of faith, prayer, and the exposition of Scripture. The affirmation of faith included the recitation of the *shema*, which proclaims the unity of God as paramount and details the primary duty of Jewish people: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). Next, the synagogue was a place of prayer.

¹¹ Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing Co., 1993), 141-142.

¹² Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 27.

¹³ Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 142.

The *tefillah*, a series of prayers divided into three sets, was recited in a standing posture and consisted of the following: 1) prayers of praise, giving honor to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and revering him for his faithfulness; 2) thirteen prayers of petition for gifts of repentance, deliverance, wisdom, discernment to interpret the Torah, good health, and the like; and, 3) concluding prayers of thanksgiving to God and a final prayer for peace.¹⁴ The third element specific to synagogue worship was the Torah. Scripture was highly esteemed in Jewish culture, because it contained the very words of God.

According to the *shema*, parents were to discuss the teachings of the Torah faithfully in the flow of daily life (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). Synagogue worship, then, included the public reading of the Scriptures, followed by a sermon that applied the text to the daily life of the people. Referred to as the *derashah*, or “searching” of Torah, the sermon was designed to expound moral and theological instruction that provided the worshippers with comfort and hope in God.¹⁵

The components, order, and reverence of synagogue worship was readily applicable and easily transferable to the early Christian churches of the New Testament world. Fueled by a profound gratitude for God’s redemptive work among their Jewish ancestors, the early Christian communities were motivated to continue the affirmation of faith, offering of prayers, and proclamation of the Word that were central to synagogue gatherings. Gratefully, those core elements still persist in many contemporary contexts and link worshippers from all generations in the glorious worship of God.

¹⁴ Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 27-28.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

Isaiah 6 as a Template for Worship

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah had a radical encounter with God that helps inform the content and progression of genuine worship. Isaiah received a vision and saw the Lord sitting on a throne in all of his holiness and splendor. Circling the throne were seraphim who were calling out the great affirmation of God's character: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (Isaiah 6:3). In the presence of God's radiant perfection, Isaiah was overwhelmed completely and spiritually devastated. There was no arrogant swagger in his voice or sense of superiority or comfort in his response. Rather, Isaiah saw God for who he was—the one true, holy, and righteous God of the universe—and a profound exchange occurred. As Isaiah viewed God with greater clarity, he became more aware of his personal depravity and offered a sobering assessment of himself: "Woe to me! I am ruined! I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty" (Isaiah 6:5). Confronted with the brutal reality of his sinful condition, Isaiah confessed his sin to God; and, God graciously forgave him. God did not respond to Isaiah with ridicule or shame. Instead, through a seraphim and a burning coal, God touched his lips and said, "Your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for" (Isaiah 6:7). God gifted Isaiah with a reconciled relationship.

Isaiah's encounter serves as a model for the authentic worship of God. Grounded in God's revelation of himself to humanity, worship is initiated by God when he discloses his character and nature. His transcendence and otherness require that God make the initial move in the worship sequence. Next, people respond to God's revelation by adoring God, confessing sin, expressing gratitude, praising, and so forth. When he

accurately saw God in his glory, Isaiah more accurately saw himself and his desperate need for God. This is genuine worship: humans responding to God's revelation of himself. Finally, God gifts Isaiah with forgiveness of sin and ultimately ordains him as his spokesperson to his people (Isaiah 6:8-13). Summarily, true worship involves a God-initiated revelation of himself; a spiritual response to that revelation; and, an ensuing interaction between God and humans that fuels reconciliation, transformation, and ministry for the glory of God.

The Worship of God in the New Testament

New Testament worship clearly revolved around the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus' claim that he fulfilled the Old Testament messianic prophecies sparked a vigorous debate between those who recognized him as the Messiah and those who did not (Luke 4:21). Since many of the initial converts to Christianity were drawn from strict Jewish backgrounds, the earliest Christian communities worshipped in continuity with the past and looked like a subset of the larger Jewish community.¹⁶ Even after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the disciples (and the apostle Paul) continued to meet in the synagogue customarily on the Sabbath, giving witness to their faith in the risen Christ as the Jewish Messiah.¹⁷

The foundation of New Testament worship is Jesus' finished work on the cross. As the Sinai event fueled the worship of God in the Old Testament, the advent of Jesus Christ into the world to save sinners is the focal point of New Testament worship. Prior

¹⁶ Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 18-19.

¹⁷ Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 144.

to the incarnation, the angels brought the shepherds good news of great joy that was available for all people: a Savior, who is Christ the Lord, had been born. (Luke 2:10-11). Throughout his life, the numerous Old Testament messianic prophecies that Jesus fulfilled including his birth (Isaiah 7:14; 9:6; Matthew 1:18, 23), ministry (Isaiah 9:1-2; Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 4:12-17; Matthew 21:1-11), and death (Isaiah 53; Matthew 20:28; Mark 15:25-27) inspired growing multitudes to worship him as Lord (Luke 24:36-53). Ultimately, the coming of Jesus to take away the sins of the world prompted passionate celebration, and his subsequent death and resurrection became the central focus of worship throughout the New Testament.

Jesus' attitude toward worship was marked by a deep appreciation for Old Testament worship and a firm conviction that it ultimately pointed to him. Jesus routinely visited the temple and made a habit of dialoguing with the religious leaders and teaching in the temple setting (Luke 4:16). This practice was developed clearly in his youth (Luke 2:46) and continued as a daily, regimented part of his earthly ministry (Luke 19:46). Perhaps more than any other episode, Jesus' angry outburst aimed at the sellers and money changers in the temple revealed his profound reverence for the worship of God (Matthew 21:12-13).

Jesus clearly understood that Old Testament worship practices symbolically alluded to him. The cleansing of the temple, for example, points to the end of the temple sacrifice. By ending this ancient ritual, Jesus presented himself as the one and only sacrifice who rendered all other sacrifices obsolete. Jesus' statement in Matthew 12:6 "that one greater than the temple is here" served to dispel the former belief that God was confined to a particular location (i.e., the tabernacle or temple). In Christ, God was now

readily accessible to any and all. Furthermore, the way he viewed the Passover meal and the specific parallels he drew between the bread and his body and the wine and his blood infused the rite with deeper meaning (Matthew 26:26-28). Jesus effectively saw the Old Testament worship in relationship to his life, death, and resurrection.¹⁸

The study of the worship of God in the New Testament is an arduous and challenging task because it contains no cohesive, detailed statement on worship. Rather, the New Testament provides a scattered array of worship expressions such as hymns, confessions, benedictions, and doxologies.¹⁹ Unlike the highly structured, regimented environment of the temple or synagogue, the New Testament presents a more creative, context-specific approach to worship that allows for growth and innovation.

The Teachings and Example of Paul

Paul either taught or modeled the worship of God in all of his biblical writings but reserved his most extensive comments for the Christians in Corinth. Representative of early Gentile worship, the Corinthian church presented two intriguing issues that Paul thoroughly confronted: the Corinthians' interest in preserving their freedom in worship and their need to learn how to worship. Though not organized in a tight, systematic arrangement, Paul uses a large portion of his first letter to the Corinthians to deal with these two issues.²⁰

Two overarching principles dominate Paul's teaching on worship in this first letter to the Corinthians. Primarily, Paul emphasized the need for order and reverence.

¹⁸ Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 34-35.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

Apparently worship had become chaotic and confusing at times. From the gift of tongues to the correct observance of the Lord's Supper, Paul maintained that everything should be done in an appropriate and orderly way (1 Corinthians 14:41) and thus underscored the intentionality and deliberation of worship. Furthermore, Paul detailed the content of worship and taught that the effective and purposeful use of spiritual gifts is itself an act of worship to God (1 Corinthians 12:1-7).²¹ Among the many facets of biblical worship, Paul mentions revelation, knowledge, prophecy, a word of instruction, praying, singing, and thanksgiving (1 Corinthians 14:6, 26). In another section he lists wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, miraculous powers, prophecy, distinguishing between spirits, speaking in different kinds of tongues, and the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:8-11). By design, Paul's list is not exhaustive; but, it unmistakably demonstrates the variety and beauty of worship. All of these elements are purposeful in worship but Paul seems reluctant to rank them in importance.

The apostle Paul intentionally interspersed various worship elements and principles throughout his epistles. Some of his writings, including letters to churches in Philippi and Corinth, begin with a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the people who have served alongside him in ministry. Hymns of praise, doxologies, and doctrinal expositions are other worship components that are prominent in Paul's teachings (Philippians 2:1-11; Ephesians 1:3-14; Colossians 1:15-20; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Though well-versed and clearly committed to teaching others the importance of worship, Paul's own longing to encounter God in worship may be his most compelling legacy.

²¹ Ibid., 40.

Openly defiant to the person and message of Jesus, Paul was saved by God's grace on his way to persecute Christians and was set apart to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. Accordingly, Paul's life became a perpetual act of devotion to God. Despite the ruthless suffering he encountered, Paul never wavered from rejoicing in the goodness and provision of God. On one notable occasion, Paul and his ministry partner, Silas, were imprisoned for preaching and ministering in the name of Jesus. Around midnight, as they were praying and singing hymns to God, an earthquake rocked the jail, loosing the bonds of all the prisoners. The jailer on duty, certain the full-scale release of prisoners would cost him his life, prepared to commit suicide. Paul interrupted the jailer, initiated a spiritual conversation, and the jailer and his family believed in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:25-34). Even in the most trying circumstances, Paul worshipped God and invited others to do the same.

Worship as the Consummation of Relationship with God

Written in the seventeenth century and considered one of the hallmark doctrinal statements of the Reformation, the Westminster shorter catechism contends "the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."²² Others suggest that a more biblically sensitive rendering of that statement would affirm "the chief end of man is to

²² Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, "Westminster Shorter Catechism," http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC_framemes.html (accessed February 13, 2008).

glorify God *by* enjoying him forever.”²³ Worship is an end in itself, because it is the final end for which humans were created.²⁴

In the Book of Revelation, the apostle John encounters God on the Island of Patmos in a most incredibly unpredictable way. It is a bizarre experience; the language is odd, the symbolism is dramatic, and the entire episode is very surreal. In that exchange, God gifts John with a glimpse into eternity and unveils the fact that things eventually and radically will change. Earth and heaven will fade away, the evil one ultimately will be defeated, and King Jesus will triumph. In the end, God will make all things new (Revelation 22:1-5).

John takes in all of this captivating information and then reveals his humanity with his response.

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!” (Revelation 22:8-9)

God created humans to worship him and to be unsettled until they do. Heaven, consequently, will be a venue teeming with perpetual worship and God will be positioned as the sole object of devotion. In the meantime, people routinely imitate John and bypass God and his majesty on the way to admire something or someone he created. The clear and concise words of the angel must continue to inform those whose names have been written in the Lamb’s book of life (Revelation 21:27). The worship of God is the passion, purpose, and eternal privilege of the redeemed.

²³ Piper, *Desiring God*, 15.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

The Worship of God in the Christian Tradition

The history of Christian worship provides an insightful look at the ever-changing dynamics of the worship of God. From the first through the third centuries, Christians employed the distinctly Jewish worship culture, met in synagogues, and witnessed to their belief in Jesus Christ as the Messiah. The growth of Christianity, however, quickly became insufferable to the Jews; and, Christians were forced to meet in homes for worship. Prominent worship elements in this period included preaching, prophesy, singing, tongues, interpretations, baptism, prayer, and the Lord's Supper. The worship service morphed into a blending of the affirmation of faith, prayers, and the exposition of Scripture of the Jewish tradition and the routine observance of the Lord's Supper.²⁵

A significant paradigm shift occurred in 313 AD when Constantine declared Christianity a tolerable religion and sought to end the persecution of Christians.²⁶ This comprehensive acceptance led to an influx of new converts, and the need arose to build larger facilities to accommodate the growing crowds; worship gradually shifted from homes to public settings. Congregations were established so quickly that it became impossible to train new believers to pastor the churches. Consequently, bishops transferred worship materials to inexperienced leaders. This led to a gradual departure from first-century worship customs and served to impair the depth and vitality of worship.²⁷

Mystery encompasses the worship practices of Christians in the Middle Ages. Forms and symbols of worship became an end rather than a means to worship. The use

²⁵ Hustad, *Jubilate II*, 144-145.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

of Latin steadily widened the gap between the common worshipper and the clergy. Theologically, several questionable practices thwarted the effectiveness of the Church and negatively impacted its reputation with outsiders. Mass became the means of receiving salvation and transubstantiation, the belief that the bread and wine used during the Lord's Supper actually become the body and blood of Jesus, branded the Church as a superstitious institution. Together, these contributed to a continuing ineptitude in worship and lessened the impact of the Church.

Prior to the Reformation, growing issues in the Church continued to plague the worship of God. Rarely taken by the congregation, the Lord's Supper was demoted in prominence with most worshippers only participating once a year, the minimal requirement for Roman Catholics.²⁸ Moreover, the importance of the sermon in the Mass diminished, and Scripture texts were omitted in favor of readings about the lives and legends of the saints.²⁹ These and other errors were of grave concern to the reformers. Rejecting the Mass as a mere repetition of Christ's death and the doctrine of transubstantiation, they believed the Word must be restored to its position of primacy and felt the common language of the worshippers should be used.

The notable reformers Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin each shared the common vision of bringing worship back to the people. Luther, the most conservative of the three, desired to see worship return to the hearts of the people. No longer inaccessible, he aided the pursuit of the commoner to respond to God personally.³⁰ Zwingli, the most liberal of the reformers, rejected the ceremonies of the Catholic Church

²⁸ Ibid., 185.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 186.

and viewed worship as a time for instruction.³¹ He was instrumental in reemphasizing the teaching ministry of the Church. Calvin, the moderate reformer, helped the Church revisit the simple worship practices of the early Church. A staunch Biblicist, he preferred that each component of the worship service (songs, prayers, sermons, and the like) be taken directly from the Scriptures.³² Though differing, these reformers and others like them were used by God to positively enhance the worship of God into the present era.

The evangelical Church is a significant force in Christianity today. Several worship distinctives of evangelical congregations include the following: the acceptance of Scripture, not the traditions of the Church, as authoritative; the belief that grace is received through a personal faith in Jesus Christ and is not a sacramental act; an emphasis on a personal conversion to Christ that leads to spiritual maturation; the conviction to share the gospel with unbelievers to be faithful to the Great Commission; and, the tendency to worship in a non-liturgical, “free” pattern.³³ Evangelicals affirm a sovereign God who is both transcendent and immanent. He is completely “other” and yet remarkably accessible. Accordingly, worship in the evangelical Church often strives to offer a balanced, creative expression that both magnifies God’s glory and fosters communion with him. In doing so, God’s transcendence and immanence are affirmed mutually.

Movement and Trends in Worship

The last hundred years has ushered in monumental changes in every segment of American culture and has led to radical movement in worship practices. The well-

³¹ Ibid., 190.

³² Ibid., 194.

³³ Ibid., 27.

documented shift from modernism to postmodernism has created unique challenges for churches of all sizes and denominations. As society strives to become increasingly more attuned to the unique needs of individuals and families, consumerism continues to dominate the marketplace. Technology makes it easier to communicate with widespread audiences, so people value connectedness and prefer on-demand access. Furthermore, experience has become the decisive measure of the value of a person, thing, or event. These and other cultural changes have spawned several trends in worship designed to capture the spiritual attention of believers and non-believers alike. Specifically, these include the seeker-sensitive service, the praise and worship movement, and a renewed interest in liturgical worship.

Since the 1980s, the seeker-sensitive trend has prompted considerable conversation and debate among pastors and church leaders. Driven to meet the unique needs of the unchurched, seeker churches assume people have dropped from church or shy away due to traditional liturgy and music. Accordingly, seeker churches desire to create a worship environment that presents the gospel in language, music, and art that audiences already know.³⁴ By removing barriers that often are linked to negative worship experiences in a person's past, seeker churches hope to inspire new worshippers to worship God through culturally sensitive means such as contemporary music, drama, practical Bible teaching, and multimedia elements.

Another prominent worship trend in the past several decades is the praise and worship movement. With roots in the Charismatic tradition, the praise and worship style

³⁴ Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 3.

is liturgy in the original sense of the word—namely, the work of the people. This is most clearly demonstrated in two key elements of Charismatic worship: participatory worship music and emotional and physical expression.³⁵ Praise and worship gained increasing popularity in many churches, because it fosters an experiential connection with God that is sometimes missing in more structured, predictable worship settings. Worshippers are encouraged to freely honor the biblical instructions to sing, clap, raise hands in adoration, and even dance to the glory of God. Furthermore, the praise and worship style creates more space for emotional expression and response. Song sets, which often are comprised of contemporary choruses written to God as opposed to traditional hymns written about him, may include impromptu opportunities for silent prayer or reflection. Essentially, proponents contend that through praise and worship, worshippers are ushered more effectively into the presence of God and are challenged to honor and adore him on an intimate and personal level.

One final trend in worship is the renewal of a liturgical approach. The success of the ecumenical movement's mission to unite churches coupled with the growing numbers of Protestants who are discovering their spiritual roots have spurred a return to ancient and authentic worship practices.³⁶ Especially attractive to postmodern worshippers in emerging generations, liturgical worship bridges the gap between twenty-first-century followers of Jesus and ancient disciples through creeds, symbols, and mystery.³⁷ This approach to worship provides needed stability and genuineness to the pursuit of God. For

³⁵ Ibid., 39.

³⁶ Ibid., 72.

³⁷ Kimball, *The Emerging Church*, 149.

those navigating an unstable, inauthentic culture that values relativism and pluralism, this approach proves vitally important.

Baptist Expressions in Worship

Baptist expressions of worship have changed considerably since the early seventeenth century, when Baptists separated from the Church of England to form distinct congregations. Revolving primarily around the exposition of Scripture, the early Baptist worship services were long, often featured several sermons, and contained no music or singing. Interestingly, early Baptists placed great value on spontaneity and audience participation, much like the current praise and worship movement. By the 1670s, some Baptist churches were singing Psalms in worship and a few even employed song texts written by humans, called “hymns,” which were highly controversial because they were not of direct biblical origin.³⁸ Generally, Baptists do not possess a liturgy but have shared with different denominations and do not differ significantly from other free church congregations.³⁹

Specific to the context of this paper, Independent Baptists are typically suspicious of worship trends that might be viewed as comprising or culturally sensitive. As staunch defenders of separatism, most have shunned the use of praise and worship music, multi-sensory experiences in worship, and multimedia elements such PowerPoint or video clips. Independent Baptists maintain that a sermon that flows directly from Scripture should remain the dominant element in the worship service. Consequently, hymns

³⁸ H. Leon McBeth, “Baptist Beginnings,” Baptist History and Heritage Society, <http://www.baptisthistory.org/baptistbeginnings.htm> (accessed January 12, 2008).

³⁹ Robert E. Webber, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship: The Renewal of Sunday Worship*, vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 136.

provide more theological substance than modern choruses, and the cultural influence of television is seen as something to be avoided and not embraced. For this reason, most Independent Baptist churches offer worship services in a postmodern society that are still very modern in their design and feel.

CHAPTER 4

THEOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS THAT INFORM A BIBLICALLY SENSITIVE WORSHIP CULTURE

God desires to recreate himself daily in the lives of people for his glory and their good (2 Corinthians 4:7-18). His plan for humanity includes a comprehensive makeover that inserts his mind, actions, and heart into individuals (Romans 8:1-11). God seeks to replace the idolatrous worship of self inherent in humans with his Christ-centered, others-focused way of life that brings true contentment and freedom (2 Corinthians 5:14-17; Galatians 5:13-14). Ultimately, God says in his redemptive activity that, despite their open rebellion, people are valuable and desirable. As God recreates himself in people, he infuses them with both the privilege and duty to expend their lives in the passionate worship of him.

Effective churches in the twenty-first century must embody a gospel that highlights the finished work of Jesus on the cross, embrace a discipleship that adheres to the call of Christ to deny oneself and follow him, and pursue the worship of God that exalts him as the supreme treasure of all treasures. Amid an increasingly secular society, God's redemptive, transforming work in individuals generally will precede cultural transformation. Biblically, the responsibility lies squarely on the Christian community to foster a culture of worship that serves this process of spiritual devotion and transformation.

The example of Christ in the creation of a biblically sensitive worship culture that engages older and emerging generations is crucial. Simply stated, Jesus' inclusive acceptance of people of every age, stage, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status must remain the standard by which all other ideologies and practices are measured. His dealings with the Samaritan woman (John 4), the invalid beggar at the pool of Bethesda (Luke 5:1-9), children (Matthew 19:13-15), and "sinners" like Levi (Mark 2:13-17) validate his desire to pursue people of all types. Of great comfort is the truth that Christ is not a passive, background figure in this process; he is the ultimate catalyst who continually draws a multiplicity of worshippers to himself. He actively transforms the mindsets, actions, and hearts of people who, in turn, worship him in spirit and truth.

The Worship of God as Central Priority

Among the many noble pursuits of individual Christians and collective believers who comprise a local church, the worship of God must take precedence. The attributes and activity of God, coupled with the pervasive theme of the biblical witness, necessitate the priority of worship. Specifically, Jesus affirmed this truth during his desert encounter with Satan when he quoted the great commandment: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only" (Matthew 4:10). Moreover, since heaven will be teeming with worshippers who endlessly magnify God and his greatness, life on earth is the training ground for worship. Accordingly, prioritizing the worship of God in a church culture that engages varying generations assumes two core convictions: worshipping God and enjoying him forever, for this is why humans were created, and the church as first and foremost a worshipping community.

Primarily, the central purpose of humanity is to worship God and enjoy him forever. “Delight yourself in the Lord” is not a suggestion; it is what God requires of humans (Psalm 37:4). In his beautiful hymn exalting Jesus, and through his radical example of humility and service, Paul states unequivocally that every person will bow a knee in the presence of Jesus and confess him as Lord to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11). Accordingly, worship is not preventable; it is something humans were intended to do. God created humans with a built-in capacity for adoration and a natural longing to release it. This is why first-time fathers who are otherwise insensitive and unemotional talk gibberish to their newborn child moments after delivery. In the presence of that which only can be attributed to God, people spontaneously adore God or his gifts. By design, all humans are intrinsic worshippers.

God in the Psalms is the “all-satisfying Object.”¹ The psalmist instructs, “Rejoice in the Lord and be glad” (Psalm 32:11). God is adored by his people because he is their “exceeding joy” (Psalm 43:4). David contends that in God’s presence is “fullness of joy” and at his right hand are “pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). Worship of anything other than God, then, is deficient and unsatisfying until he becomes its sole object and subject. Fundamentally, worship is a way of reflecting back to God the beauty of his worth. To worship God genuinely is to acknowledge that he alone can satisfy the longing of the heart to be happy. Therefore, true worship is an end in itself, because we honor God by enjoying him forever.²

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1958), 92-93.

² Piper, *Desiring God*, 84-85.

Worship that views God as the central focus is rooted in sacrifice or offerings.³

The writer of Hebrews teaches that through Jesus believers should “continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Hebrews 13:15). In preparing his disciples for ministry, Jesus reminded them, “Freely you have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8). As the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17), God lavishes his people with that which they graciously and willingly return to him in worship. These gifts are both spiritual and material and range from Spirit-grown fruits like faith, love, and peace to tangible matter like finances and clothes. Essentially, true worshippers recognize God as the source of everything and acknowledge his greatness by offering all of themselves to him in praise and adoration.

The practical implications of this first conviction on the formation of a biblically sensitive worship culture are twofold. First, it underscores the essential reality that God alone is the ultimate, all-satisfying source of true happiness. In a hedonistic culture that exalts instant gratification and personal pleasure as a pathway to contentment, the Church consistently must exalt God and his greatness above all else. In the spirit of the angels in the Revelation to John, the Church must affirm the worthiness of “the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise” (Revelation 5:12). In such praise, worship is God-centered, God-inspired, and God-honoring and it must inspire people to magnify him. Søren Kierkegaard’s popular metaphor on worship proposes worshippers on a theater stage performing to God who is

³ Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 80.

the lone member of the audience.⁴ Paradoxically, the God whom worshippers seek to please is the only true source of enduring pleasure.

Furthermore, it informs the purpose of genuine worship: to glorify God. The rampant consumerism of American culture has spawned consumer worshippers. Driven by what can be gained from a worship experience, some come seeking to be “filled” rather than surrendering to the work and will of God; they are amused instead of challenged to follow God more purposefully. Worship becomes more about receiving a blessing than presenting an offering. In an effort to engage unbelievers, churches sometimes choose to employ a worship culture that is more about meeting the felt needs of people than magnifying God. Biblically, however, a person who magnifies God acknowledges him as the one who meets every need (Psalm 34:1-10). In the end, a biblically sensitive worship culture should exalt God as the supreme treasure of all treasures and the one who is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.⁵

The second conviction concerning the worship of God in a church culture that engages varying generations affirms the biblical teaching that the church is first and foremost a worshipping community. In his visionary conversation with Peter, Jesus promised he would construct the Church so that the resources of hell could not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). Later, Jesus gave his disciples the mandate to be his witnesses in their local context and eventually to the end of the world (Acts 1:8). In a similar context, Matthew details Jesus’ encouraging guarantee to his followers that he would be with them to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19-20). Each of these confirm

⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Purity of Heart Is to Will One Thing*, trans. Douglas V. Steere (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1948), 179-181.

⁵ Piper, *Desiring God*, 50.

God's plan to separate unto himself a people who will worship him steadfastly.

Ultimately, Jesus came to transform sinners into authentic worshippers of God who—through conversation, service, and devotion—penetrate the culture with the astonishing truth that God is among us as lover, friend, and Savior.

Essentially, worship is how the Church speaks the truth of God into the world; it reminds Christians and informs unbelievers of the necessity and privilege of knowing God in relationship. When the story of God is proclaimed through preaching or when a song, prayer, or gift resounds in praise to God's glory, Christians relearn and rehearse what it means to be Christian. Worship, then, is the primary responsibility of the Church. Without it, people neither can see nor witness to the God who actively pursues humans in Christ. Christians are unable to realize the skills and vision necessary to be the Church without giving themselves routinely to the worship of God.⁶

The Church as a worshipping community further highlights the fact that worship is something Christians are called to pursue daily. Worship is not primarily a once-a-week gathering of individuals in a familiar venue to endure a repetitious, predictable series of religious exercises. Instead, being the Church—as opposed to merely “going to church”—affirms the biblical teaching that Christians are set apart by Christ to pursue a way of being in the world that glorifies God for the sake of others.⁷ Accordingly, worship is not confined to an hour on Sunday but weaves its way into conversations at school, freeway chats on the commute to work, and decisions at home. In this sense, the

⁶ Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 99.

⁷ Marva Dawn, *A Royal Waste of Time: The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 9.

worship of God becomes an intentional, habitual component of one's life and not simply a scheduled action people perform.

The practical implication of this second conviction on the formation of a biblically sensitive worship culture informs how people view worship and its relation to being the Church in the world. Traditionally, churches in Independent Baptist contexts have been deemed a "success" based on a fairly predictable set of measures: namely, how many people attend, how much money they give, and how many attendees are converted and baptized into the church. Relegated to a set of statistics, a church is considered a "growing" congregation if these key numeric indicators increase and is deemed as "failing," if they do not. A biblically sensitive worship culture places more value on maximizing God, extolling his attributes, and spreading his fame than tabulating the number of worshippers or bank balances. While increasing attendance figures and finances denote a certain level of forward progress, a worship culture that magnifies God fosters a deepening passion among worshippers to become more like Jesus inwardly and habitually. Furthermore, a church culture that reduces the worship of God to a weekly item on a to-do list encourages a consumer mentality that makes worship more about people than God. It also serves to undermine community, because the life that Jesus calls us to live with and among others cannot be nurtured in just one hour each week, especially when the bulk of that hour is spent silently listening or reflecting. A biblically sensitive worship culture proposes worship as something people embody in the world and not simply something they do within the four walls of a building.

Creativity in Worship and Ministry

The opening pages of Scripture radically describe God as one who creates. Genesis 1:1 states: “In the beginning God created.” This proposes a God who entered time and designed an intricately dependent universe that served his purposes. All of creation points to the ingenious work of one who is logical, sovereign, and imaginative. It further reveals its innate dependence on his continued presence. The Bible teaches that God chose to create the world *ex nihilo* and to fill it with created beings, objects, and matter that fuel his pleasure.

Specifically, the creation of the world highlights the activity of God in his most imaginative moment and demonstrates the radical other-worldliness of the Creator. It boldly clarifies that the Creator is radically different from his creation in essence, nature, and character and affirms that he alone is the source of everything that exists. Creation also reveals the seeking quality of God and confirms his desire to live, dwell, and cohabitate in community with his creation. In this sense, creation is seen as the free and gracious gift of a sovereign God, a God-initiated blessing bestowed upon humanity.⁸ Essentially, creation introduces the God who freely loves and gives, openly shares and relates, and purposefully displays his goodness and power.

Creation also exposes the dependent nature of the world. This dependence demands that human beings identify God as the giver, sustainer, and regulator of life. It calls for humankind to acknowledge his preeminence and worship him solely. Furthermore, it leads people to recognize that God was not coerced into creating but

⁸ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 85.

desired to make room for humans and brought them into existence by his own choosing and pleasure.⁹ God created people, because he loves them. John writes: “God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:8b-10).

Accordingly, the love of God revealed in Christ is the catalyst that fuels the lives of those who “no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Corinthians 14-15). This enables man to understand his relationship with God properly and should lead him to respond in dynamic worship—that is, bursting with praise and thanksgiving.

The ongoing creative activity of God also affirms his innate goodness. He, the life he gives, and everything he made are good. It should be acknowledged that the goodness of creation speaks to God’s blessing toward humanity from the beginning of his activity to its completion. He continues to create and transform, and his purposes still are being implemented. In Christ, God identifies his ultimate purpose for creating: to draw humanity lovingly unto himself, liberating his creatures from bondage in this life and beyond.

In his highest creative activity, God made man and woman in his own image (Genesis 1:27). He breathed into them a life-giving, life-sustaining energy and placed them in a culture conducive to community, intimacy, and honor (Genesis 2:7-25). God endowed Adam and Eve with inborn abilities and traits that confirmed his identity in their lives and validated their uniqueness among the created order. One such characteristic is

⁹ Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), 88.

creativity. In his first, self-directed opportunity, Adam named the animals that occupied his new world (Genesis 2:19-20). Essentially, God released his crowning creation into the world to create, and this pattern of human privilege has become a consistent theme in God's master plan for the ages. This stands most notably evident in the endless forms and preferences found in the worship of God.

God's Plan for Creation

The Bible clearly asserts that man was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Accordingly, this affirms that the creature's intended purpose was to enjoy the fellowship of the Creator, coexisting in a communal relationship with him and others. This coexistence is the "basic form" of humanity that requires consistent interaction with God and others.¹⁰ Human beings, then, should live and relate with other humans in an atmosphere of mutual respect and love, seeking always to reproduce at the human level the same unbiased opportunity for relationship that God gives each person on the divine level. Inherent in being human is the freedom to respond to God's gracious gift of life and relationship. As free, intelligent, moral beings created in the image of God, Adam and Eve enjoyed freedom and, consequently, possessed an innate capacity to choose wrong.

The Bible describes God's early encounter with humanity in the Garden of Eden and discloses his intentions for his creation in the world:

The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Genesis 2:15-17)

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pt. 2 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1960), 225-226.

This passage highlights the pre-fall fellowship between the Creator and his supreme creature and boldly validates God's inherent nature as holy, righteous, loving, and true. It depicts the essential characteristic between God and man as relationship. By revealing his sovereignty, God is seen as the provider, sustainer, and gracious father of humanity. In contrast, Adam represents the creature and is viewed as the object of love and the beneficiary of God's grace. This passage also underscores the otherness of the Creator.¹¹ As Creator, God desires relationship with humanity. When his creative work is complete, he focuses on Adam and calls him very good. This elevates humankind above the rest of creation and gives it the responsibility as caregiver and caretaker of God's creation. God also establishes his supreme position with man and delegates the authority of maintaining his creation to man. Furthermore, this text shows that God acts in love and grace toward his creation. Essentially, he is for the creature, working continually to give grace and spread love. Humanity, in turn, recognizes God as the only source for the goodness of life. He alone is worthy to receive glory and honor in worship.

The nature of the sin in Genesis 3 is human denial of the grace God offers in relationship. Sin is essentially the creature's refusal to accept the grace of God and choosing rather to realize personal satisfaction through self-acceptance or self-rejection. As Adam and Eve entertained the serpent's dialogue, they began to question the validity of their Creator and his demands and eventually chose to ignore his intended plan. In the decision to eat the fruit, humanity perverted the good it had been given by God and disrupted the relationship between the Creator and his supreme creation. This disruption of relationship is the basis of the problem that the nature of evil presents creation. In

¹¹ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 84.

contrast to the living, communal, relational God who is faithful and righteous in all of his activity, humanity is sinful and unable to experience the fullness of relationship with God. It is obvious from the passage that they clearly understood what God's original purpose was and what their response as his creatures should be (Genesis 3:1-7). The lure of being equal to God was too much, however, and the requirements for relationship were neglected. In essence, Adam and Eve declined God's grace and desired to exalt themselves above the Creator.

While the actual commission of sin was not essential to their freedom, the ability to make an evil choice was.¹² Certainly, dissatisfaction with the relationship with God was the motivating factor that caused Adam and Eve to err. The serpent craftily offered the creatures something different, something new and unique, a more profitable relationship than the one they presently enjoyed. Interestingly, he offered them something he did not and would not ever possess. Ultimately, he involved humanity in his own personal dissatisfaction. His convincing rebuttal to God's command gave the humans ample reason to forsake God's offer of grace and set the stage for a significant choice. More specifically, his lie prompted the creatures to forsake humility and service in their relationship with the Creator and pursue the exalted status that only God should enjoy.

The end result of this desire to "be like God" had an eternally negative impact on humanity. The refusal of God's grace and the inability to maintain a right relationship with him has manifested itself consistently throughout history in pride, lust, disobedience, lying, and deceit. The basis of such behavior, however, is the creature's desire to be

¹² E. Y. Mullins, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia: Roger Williams Press, 1917), 282-284.

more than the creature. Ultimately, God's offer of grace and the human capacity to maintain a right relationship with him was severely damaged and disrupted in Eden but was reinstated compassionately on the cross of Calvary.

God's Purposes in Creation

God created the earth and its inhabitants for a purpose. The psalmist contends that "the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it" (Psalm 24:1). The preeminent purpose for which God creates is to bring glory to himself. Adopting a messianic approach to the creation doctrine, a conclusion can be drawn that recognizes God's initial act of speaking life into existence as an open, fluid exercise. The ultimate culmination of this view, then, assumes that God through Christ will make his creation the dwelling place of his glory. As the creative God resides in and among his creation, he is making it his own home, "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). Accordingly, he purposes to reveal his glory in creation to manifest his life and nature which fuels the passionate worship of God.

A second purpose of creation centers in God's sovereign authority and ultimate control. In creation, God boldly affirms he is "wholly other"¹³ and distinct from his creation. The central component in this hierarchy is God's freedom to integrate his perfect plan into existence. Out of nothing, God spoke into reality that which only he previously had comprehended. The end result of his work, the world, and everything in it discloses the dependent nature of creation to Creator. Humanity, then, utterly belongs to God; it absolutely relies on him and without him, nothing exists. Paul would argue

¹³ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 28-29.

before the philosophers in Athens that in God “we live and move and have our being”(Acts 17:28). Creation points to a unique display of two of God’s attributes: the freedom of God over the world and the love of God for the world. In both cases, God is the active agent of cause and he alone is sovereign.¹⁴

A third purpose for creation underscores God’s desire to relate to humanity in community and relationship. All of the imaginative activity in Scripture, validated profoundly in the person of Jesus Christ, points to a God who does not exist for himself but for a reality that is distinct from him—namely, the world.¹⁵ It is a genuine expression of God’s love and passion that he would speak into existence an entity that demands his time, attention, and routine maintenance. Creation, then, is not a demonstration of God’s limitless power but a communication of his love.¹⁶ Interestingly, God creates not from force or necessity but from a heart bent toward grace and hope. Through the person of Jesus Christ, God removes the shroud of uncertainty, closes the distance and moves toward humanity with purpose and vision. Creation is grace and an unimaginable integration of the Maker and his making.¹⁷ In essence, the divine entering the realm of time and space introduces a radical shift from exclusion to inclusion. It affirms the central theme of Scripture that though God does not need humanity, he desires it. As God stoops down to lift his creation from its horrible predicament, he reveals his longing for ultimate and forever relationship and his rightful position as the sole object and subject of worship.

¹⁴ Karl Barth, *Credo* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936), 31-32.

¹⁵ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 52.

¹⁶ Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 76.

¹⁷ Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 54.

God on Mission

Even the most casual reading of the gospels confirms that God is on a mission. Through the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, God entered the world to reconcile sinners to himself. Jesus launched his personal mission by saying he “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). The task of the Christian on mission is to balance the object of faith—a mysterious, incomprehensible God—with the situation of faith, a lost humanity in a world of hurt.¹⁸ In this pursuit, the cross of Christ remains the primary focus of attention, the pivotal hinge upon which stability and genuine understanding rests. The cross encounter reveals God as one who suffers, perseveres, and triumphs alongside humanity. He consciously allows himself to become vulnerable to the physical, emotional, and mental abuse that accompanies reality. In doing so, he opens himself up and becomes available to a humanity that desperately desires to live beyond the mysterious. The cross of Christ also provides humanity with the reference point from which to analyze, judge, and comprehend truth. It boldly declares that injustice abounds, evil dominates, and sin has no reverence. More importantly, it serves as a vivid reminder of God’s response to the wicked, vile behavior of humanity and positively identifies Christ as the supreme victor over sin and death. Ultimately, the sacrificial love of God extended at Calvary reveals the God of relationship who sought to make himself known and abruptly concluded humanity’s search for love, liberty, and life.

The wisdom of the cross confirms that God inhabited the world at a verifiable moment in human history and shatters the notion that God is a mythical, amorphous

¹⁸ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 56.

being that has no connection to reality. This wisdom does not argue against those who do not believe in God but rather pushes them to look upon the cross and ponder the God who reveals himself there. Paul affirms that some will consider the cross to be foolishness but through the eyes of faith, the cross is enlivened and empowered and viewed as the ultimate vehicle of righteousness and truth (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). In the cross, wisdom is understood in terms of an all-powerful, all-loving God who voluntarily takes upon himself human likeness and submits himself to the shame and reproach of the cross.¹⁹ Though often recognized as a bitter, painful moment of terrible injustice, the cross of Calvary should be remembered correctly as God's ultimate expression of true wisdom and love.

Through his cross encounter, Jesus maintains a unique relationship with humanity, nature, and history and must be seen as God in the flesh who came to redeem humankind and draw it to himself. He must be recognized as the central element in humanity's religious experience, the cornerstone upon which faith is established and truth is grounded. At Calvary, Jesus exercises his divine prerogative and forgives sins through his shed blood; offers salvation to those who put their trust in him; and, gives grace to the poor, lowly, and outcast. He is the complete fulfillment of the Law, the Lord of the Sabbath, and the ruler of nature and should be considered more than a religious example; he is the object of all humanity's worship. Accordingly, personal experience is an essential element to understand Christ effectively and his centrality as redeeming Lord. The cross discloses God's movement toward humanity and serves as the centerpiece of all Christian expression of the divine. Through the person of Christ, the doctrines of

¹⁹ Ibid., 114-116.

God, salvation, humankind, evil, creation, and providence receive their full understanding and meaning. He is the ultimate expression of who God is, how he works, what he wills, and how he relates to humanity. In the cross, people come to know God as one who refuses to accept the “lostness of his creation” and they are confronted with the undeniable reality that he alone is worthy of adoration and praise.²⁰

Among many others, the plan, purpose, and mission of God in creation underscore three theological convictions that inform the formation of a biblically sensitive worship culture. First, the ingenious creativity of God affirms the creativity of human beings, his highest imaginative work. Paul contends that those in Christ are God’s workmanship; humans are handcrafted originals inspired by the same God who spoke the world and everything in it into existence (Ephesians 2:10). Consequently, God infused varying degrees of his creative prowess into humans which is expressed through countless abilities and gifts. Correctly applied, the creative expressions of people resound to the glory and praise of the Creator God. A worship culture, then, should encourage and expose the creativity of people that flows from the imaginative nature of God.

Second, the reality of sin fosters an alarming form of worship that seeks to exalt humans over God. The opening text of Paul’s letter to the church in Rome describes the downward spiral of this misplaced devotion.

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals

²⁰ Rowland, “Taking Popular Culture Captive to Communicate the Gospel.” This comes from Rowland’s specific section entitled “Barth’s Dance of God.”

and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. (Romans 1:21-25)

Apart from the transforming work of Christ on the cross, humans are tempted to pursue a self-worship that is spiritually fatal and prone to bypass an authentic devotion to God that brings life. Accordingly, a culture of worship intentionally must uphold the cross of Jesus as the strategic symbol of God's reconciling activity, an ongoing reminder that misplaced worship cost the Creator God his son. This is the place where the genuine worship of God explodes.

Finally, the plan, purpose, and mission of God in creation validate the endless means by which God is glorified in the praises of his people. Asaph correctly pinpoints the enduring purpose of humanity when he writes: "We your people, the sheep of your pasture, will praise you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise" (Psalm 79:13). Moreover, this verse supposes an evolutionary vision of worship forms and cultures that intricately connects with the creativity of God. As every generation strives to praise God in a manner unique to its context, the imaginative nature of God is revealed. Though radically different in style, technique, and mode, the unifying theme of God's greatness is nonetheless recounted from generation to generation.

Perhaps the image John encountered best summarizes God's expectation for a culture of worship that truly portrays his majesty. Standing before the Lamb, people from every nation, tribe, people, and language collectively affirm that "salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb" (Revelation 7:9-10). Therefore, worship that honors God is not restricted to a mutually approved set of guidelines.

Conversely, a worship culture that gains God's endorsement will include people and their various worship expressions that are as diverse and unique as their Creator.

A Worship Culture of Adaptability and Accessibility

God's imaginative creativity informs the formation of a biblically sensitive worship culture that values adaptability and accessibility. God's original plan for creation was disrupted tragically by the introduction of sin. As a result, humanity has struggled to recreate God's image on earth and has spawned a culture that struggles to find itself among the competing philosophies of the day. In light of this enduring tension, the worship of God continually will be designed and offered by imperfect people, who fully or in part fail their way toward spiritual understanding. For this reason, grace is extended. Unfortunately, grace is not something people naturally recognize. Jesus himself was the clearest revelation of God, and he was rejected soundly. Furthermore, grace is not a theory found in textbooks or an idea explained in a succinct conversation over lunch. Instead, grace visits people as God reaches out to them in mercy. In the acceptance of and participation in that extension of mercy, people join God in his redemptive plan to draw worshippers to himself.²¹

Adaptability presupposes contextual awareness. Jesus consistently prioritized close, personal contact with people throughout his ministry and methodically addressed their pressing needs. Demonstrating a keen awareness of the established thoughts and trends of his day, Jesus blatantly immersed himself in the lives of people to influence them. Similarly, the Church in postmodern America must honor the example of Christ

²¹ Clapp, *A Peculiar People*, 97.

faithfully, carefully engage its surrounding culture to identify core values and needs, and devise a culture of worship that adapts to both.

A worship culture of adaptability assumes a learning posture within the immediate ministry context that invites open dialogue. This involves the initial act of becoming “unsituated” in order to be an active listener in the culture. Christians first are called to give themselves to God with reckless commitment and certainty. From that source of ultimate strength, their calling moves them into the culture as “priestly” listeners seeking to understand the total needs of their people.²² This engaging communication informs the believer, as he strives to represent the people to God and God to the people. In this dynamic interaction between Creator and creature, the follower of Christ serves as a conduit through which the culture of the divine enters the human culture to transform it completely. At its deepest level, this is immensely incarnational and most effective.

An adaptable worship culture takes seriously the biblical mandate to saturate the world with the gospel. Just prior to his ascension into heaven, Jesus presented his far-reaching vision for those who would follow him. He said, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15). The language in this verse suggests that Christians will infiltrate culture and affect it positively. Interestingly, the preaching of the gospel is juxtaposed with an intentional mission into the culture. Throughout the Bible, a consistent theme of engagement synchronizes with the message. Ultimately, as

²² Rowland, “Taking Popular Culture Captive to Communicate the Gospel.” This comes from Rowland’s specific section entitled “Priestly Listening and Community Reflection.”

the people of God called to bring the peace of God to humanity, it is incumbent upon the Church to be biblically informed and to remain culturally current.

Finally, the worship culture of the twenty-first-century Church must pursue accessibility that places the Word, truth, and community within the grasp of God's people. The Church must convey the truth that God's Word will shake worshippers to the core.²³ The preaching of the Word in worship, then, should be grounded in the Holy Scriptures and flow from the mind of God. Unlike other reflective writings, the Bible is self-validating and boldly claims that every word in it is useful for leading people toward God (2 Timothy 3:16). Using human innovation and abilities, God purposely revealed himself to certain individuals in history, involving them directly in the process of revelation. The lasting result is a profound, reliable biblical witness that serves the community of faith by exposing and exalting Jesus Christ. Without apology or hindrance, it is through the proclamation of this dynamic record that God discloses his being, his purposes, and his ways. While some encounter the beauty and reality of God through creation or a close relationship with a Christ-follower, the communication of the gospel message as detailed in the Holy Scriptures is vital (Romans 10:13-15). Accordingly, the Church fervently must provide access to the Word as a core concern.

Next, a biblically sensitive worship culture will make the truth of God easily accessible. Worship must contain nothing but the truth.²⁴ Each component of a worship service including music, drama, prayer, offering, message, and even décor are means by which God invites, engages, and forms worshippers. Worship elements, consequently,

²³ Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 206.

²⁴ Dawn, *Royal Waste of Time*, 67.

should affirm routinely the glory and greatness of God, the desperate condition of humanity, and the person and work of Jesus to reconcile God and people. While worship never can provide the whole truth, it must never offer untruth or something less than truth.²⁵ Ultimately, the truth directs worshippers to Christ, who alone sets them free (John 8:31-32).

Finally, a culture of worship should make genuine community accessible. The increasingly pluralistic and fragmented American culture has created a relational void for many. Left behind in a society that is incessantly mobile and seemingly out of control, they long to belong, to be deeply entrenched in a group that offers stability and direction in an otherwise chaotic world.²⁶ The Church should be on the forefront of connecting the disenfranchised with a community of Christ-followers who worship God through service, care, and presence. In doing so, the Church obediently responds to Jesus' call to penetrate the darkness of the world with his light and pursue good works that prompt others to glorify God (Matthew 5:16).

²⁵ Ibid., 67-68.

²⁶ Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 163.

CHAPTER 5

THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY IN LEADING AND MANAGING CHANGE

Change is a central thrust of Jesus' mission to redeem humanity. Responding to the critical grumblings of the Pharisees, Jesus explained his reasoning for pursuing sinners in relationship: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). Interestingly, Jesus issued this succinct statement of purpose in the home of Levi, a notoriously greedy tax collector who had deserted his job to become Jesus' disciple. The radical conversion of Levi supports the biblical proposition that Jesus' call to abandon a life of sin and embrace his vision of abundant life was fundamental to his incarnational ministry. Spiritual transformation was inherent in this transaction. Ultimately, Jesus' call to repentance involves an intentional, radical change of mind, direction, or mission.

Change is a difficult and sometimes painful necessity of life and ministry. Whether it be the result of poor choices, a sudden and unforeseen event, or a seismic paradigm shift, change generally creates tension that both disrupts and threatens. True to his character, God is keenly aware of the struggle created by spiritual change and is sensitive to navigating people through it methodically. Specifically, Paul affirms that God's kindness leads us toward repentance (Romans 2:4). As sovereign ruler of the universe, God chooses to nurture people compassionately through spiritual change in a

manner that promotes progressive transformation. Furthermore, Jesus' persistent patience with his core disciples, from their initial doubts to the blatant denials of Peter, reveals his ongoing commitment to the process of change. Spiritual change occurs incrementally and requires a steady supply of God-fueled endurance.

Independent Baptist churches and the fundamentalists who comprise them are especially resistant to change for a variety of reasons. While open to the comfortable enhancements in life that foster convenience and ease (cell phones, keyless entry vehicles, online bill payment, and the like), some at Grace Baptist fear change will upset the established (and generous) core. For this reason, any change that might disturb their spiritual comfort is rejected. For others, the frenetic pace of life in twenty-first-century American culture fosters a mindset that values security and predictability. The Christian community often becomes a place where refuge from the world is available and continuity prevails. Furthermore, many people want to perpetuate the religious expressions most closely associated with a memorable faith encounter like conversion, the death of a spouse, or a cancer diagnosis. During their season of intense spiritual struggle or growth, they become attached to a certain musical genre, preaching style, or worship venue that becomes normative to their faith. When these cherished entities are jeopardized, conflict ensues. Finally, some churches wrestle with competing generational preferences. The music, communication methods, and spiritual heritages of older and emerging worshippers are drastically different. Uniting a church that spans four generations around a common, God-inspired vision proves both challenging and intimidating.

Pursuant to the ministry context of this project, navigating change in an Independent Baptist church is an especially formidable task. Often led by staff and lay leaders who were molded in an era of staunch separatism, many equate worshipping God via contemporary music or multimedia presentations with compromising biblical truth. Moreover, the Independent Baptist church often sees itself as a safe haven from the polluted philosophies of the world, thus isolating its members from contact with unbelievers for fear of contamination. In both instances, spiritual change at the personal and organizational level is slowed and adaptation is minimized. Consequently, leading and managing change in such a climate requires the wisdom of God, leaders who are spiritually sensitive, and Christ-followers who will mimic Jesus' radical openness to change.

God's Role in Affecting Change

God is the first and final affecter of change; he alone is the creator, sustainer, and transformer of life. Interestingly, two core attributes of God are foundational to understanding his role in affecting change: his immutability, or changelessness, and his sovereignty.¹ The immutability of God asserts that he does not change. Quoting the Lord Almighty directly, Malachi writes: "I the Lord do not change" (Malachi 3:6). Furthermore, the author of Hebrews affirms that Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). God is infinitely above humanity and categorically "other." Amid the rampant complexities and anxious speed of life, God's nature, attributes, and standard are unchanging; and, his Word is absolute. God alone is the enduring constant in a world of never-ending change.

¹ Leith Anderson, *Dying for Change* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1998), 11.

The sovereignty of God attests to his ultimate control over everything in the universe; what God wills, he accomplishes. The psalmist asserts this truth:

I know that the Lord is great, that our Lord is greater than all gods. The Lord does whatever pleases him, in the heavens and on the earth, in the seas and all their depths. He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth; he sends lightning with the rain and brings out the wind from his storehouses. (Psalm 135:5-7)

Consequently, nothing happens apart from the plan and will of God. God's sovereignty over the affairs of humanity is not compromised by the reality of evil and is not restricted to the good deeds of humans or the gratifying events of nature. The wind belongs to God, whether it brings comfort or chaos. Accordingly, there is no such thing as a mere coincidence.² In the end, the sovereignty of God brings genuine encouragement to spiritual strugglers and offers enduring hope in a world of perpetual change.

Spiritual conversion highlights the prominent role God assumes in affecting change in the lives of people. The radical transformation of Saul on the road to Damascus provides compelling insight to support this assertion. Headed toward Damascus to persecute people of the Way, Saul encounters God in a bright light and has a life-altering conversation with Jesus. Unable to see, run, or hide, Jesus leads Saul to Damascus where he is pursued by Ananias, a Christ-follower who initially is reluctant to seek out Saul due to his sordid reputation. The Lord relieves Ananias' anxiety by saying, "This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel" (Acts 9:15). From persecutor of Christians to point person in God's plan to redeem Gentiles, Saul miraculously is converted by God to God for God. His spiritual transformation owes itself completely to the redemptive work of God alone.

² Piper, *Desiring God*, 38.

Throughout his New Testament writings, Saul—turned into the apostle Paul—consistently credited the work and will of God as the catalysts for spiritual change. His letter to the church of Ephesus specifically details God’s gift of salvation purchased for humanity through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Paul highlights three core principles that affirm the indispensable activity of God that produces spiritual life. First, apart from the finished work of Christ on the cross, humans are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1). In their natural state, people are sinful, unresponsive to God, and incapable of resuscitating themselves spiritually. Second, even in their spiritual deadness due to sin, God—who is rich in mercy and full of love—made humans alive in Christ and saved them by grace (Ephesians 2:5). In Jesus Christ, God willfully provides humanity with the remedy for their spiritual predicament. Third, God gifts people with faith to receive God’s grace and confess, “Jesus is Lord.” From start to finish, spiritual change is the gracious work of God lavished upon desperately needy humans to the glory of God.

Worship as Change: Romans 12:1-2

All of life should be an unending act of worship aimed at the infinite beauty and greatness of God. “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” was Paul’s climactic command to the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 10:31). Accordingly, the worship of God assumes a posture of humility, an awareness of God’s majesty, and an openness to spiritual change. Essentially, to worship is to pursue and invite spiritual transformation.

Paul discloses the concept of worship as change in his letter to the Romans:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

In view of the mercy of God, Paul urges the Romans to present their bodies to God as an act of genuine worship. Interestingly, he employs the Old Testament image of sacrifice to describe the serious and absolute nature of this decision. Prior to Jesus' death on the cross, worshippers sacrificed animals to atone for sin. Typically, an animal was laid on an altar, sacrificed completely, sometimes eaten by the priest, and discarded. Conversely, the sacrifice Paul pleads for in this text is living, active, and unceasing; it involves honoring God with the members of the body (arms, legs, mind, heart, lungs, hands, tongues, sexual organs, and all parts) for his glory (Romans 6:13). Essentially, Paul calls followers of Christ to pursue continuous worship, which denies oneself and esteems God as infinitely valuable.

Paul succinctly links worship and transformation together in this text. A genuine worshipper who seeks to be a living sacrifice through self-denial and to please God above all else in fact experiences spiritual change. Paul's instructions not to conform to the patterns of this world but to be transformed through renewed thinking underscore this principle. Furthermore, the transformation that accompanies a renewed mind aids in discerning and doing the will of God, which is also an act of worship. True worship, then, involves a change in demeanor so that the tenets and allurements of this world are becoming less desirable and the vision and truth of God become increasingly more recognizable and attractive. Ultimately, Paul teaches that seeking spiritual transformation is spiritual worship. In exalting and honoring God as the all-satisfying treasure, true

worshippers pursue a life of sacrifice that rejects the world and its values in favor of the transforming presence of God in Christ.

The Work of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit of God is involved actively in giving, sustaining, and transforming life. A prominent participant in the creation of the world, the Scriptures affirm that “the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters” (Genesis 1:2). Working in community with the triune God, the Spirit was an active agent in creation. Job contends that if it were God’s “intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust” (Job 34:14-15). Physically, humans are utterly dependent upon the Spirit for life. Furthermore, the New Testament asserts the Holy Spirit’s vital role in spiritual regeneration. In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus outlined the prerequisite of the Spirit in conversion:

I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, “You must be born again.” The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit. (John 3:5-8)

The Spirit fuels the transformation from old to new, from enslavement to the powers of sin and death to a new life in relationship with God and others.³ Essentially, initiation into life with Christ owes to the Spirit of God.

The Spirit also empowers the process of spiritual maturation. Shaped by the inspired Word of God, the Christian life is grounded in the hearing, receiving, and obedient application of God’s truth. Specifically, the Bible announces God’s grace and

³ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 172.

judgment; calls humans to repentance, conversion, and new life; and, highlights the sovereign love of God expressed most supremely in Jesus Christ. The Spirit employs the biblical witness to form and reform spiritual life and to build and strengthen Christ-like character.⁴ After conversion, the Spirit energizes the pursuit of holiness in believers that is central to the Christian experience.⁵ Through the Spirit's efforts, spiritual fruits like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are developed (Galatians 5:22-23). Paul underscores the Spirit's role in sanctification in his second epistle to the church in Corinth: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). It is impossible to grow in faith and develop qualities that reflect the character of God apart from influence and guidance of his Spirit.

Finally, the Spirit of God illuminates the message and ministry of Jesus.

Throughout the New Testament, the Spirit intricately relates to Jesus. At his baptism, the Spirit descends on Jesus and remains on him (John 1:32). Jesus is anointed by the Spirit for the ministry of good news to the poor and liberation to the oppressed (Luke 4:18). During the climactic event of resurrection, Jesus was raised by the Spirit (Romans 1:4). Closely connected in the redemptive work of God, the Spirit essentially makes Christ present to believers; he re-presents Christ.⁶ In doing so, the Spirit enables believers to utter the decisive profession "Jesus is Lord" and activates the presence of Christ in their

⁴ Ibid., 178.

⁵ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 640.

⁶ Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 170-171.

lives. Through the Spirit, Jesus is presently among the Church drawing people into a deeper, more intimate relationship with God.

The Necessity and Inevitability of Change

Change is necessary and inevitable, principally because it originates in the mind and mission of God. Engineered to both change and make history, the local church is God's primary means for accomplishing his eternal purpose in the world. Accordingly, the Church is the most practical expression of his enduring commitment to change, and it should be on the cutting edge of societal transformation. Fundamentally, God's vision for the Church is not to respond feverishly to the rapid changes in culture but to be the catalytic agent of a God-led spiritual revolution the world desperately needs.⁷ Change is inherent to the heart of God and a central thrust of his mission to transform lives.

As the Body of Christ on earth, the Church is faced with an intriguing dilemma when confronted with the need to change. Essentially, two alternatives exist and both invite death: the Church can die as a result of its determined opposition to change or it can die to itself in order to live.⁸ The first option is rooted in a staunch loyalty or attachment to the past, which both denies and resists the inevitability of change. Hoping to perpetuate a beloved tradition or to maintain the status quo, a congregation that chooses this route opens itself to slow, steady decay and eventual death. The inherent challenges and high cost of necessary change are resisted to the bitter end, literally. Like

⁷ Erwin Raphael McManus, *An Unstoppable Force: Daring to Become the Church God Had in Mind* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2001), 82.

⁸ Mike Regele, *Death of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 19.

a human body that finally plays out physically, some churches vehemently defy the need to change and slip into a spiritual coma that breeds impotence and cultural irrelevance.

The second option is a call to follow Jesus and pursue the central thrust of the gospel: life is born of death. Specifically, Jesus challenged his followers to a radically unique way of living that habitually prioritized his will over their own. Jesus offered the core requirements of this life in a conversation with his disciples.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matthew 16:24-26)

Jesus clearly understood that people have a natural propensity for preferring themselves; self-preservation and self-gratification are inherent to the human condition. Accordingly, a true disciple of Christ daily must decide to die to himself and follow Jesus. This is a basic call to change. Consequently, a church that faithfully preaches the gospel and encourages people to experience new life in Christ must develop a healthy attitude toward change. If the crux of the biblical witness is God’s invitation to be transformed by the presence and power of Jesus, then a church should be a fluid community marked by an ongoing and deepening commitment to change.

Change is basic and innate to the Christian life, because it is vital to the development of faith. During his earthly ministry, Jesus continually provided his followers with opportunities to deepen their faith. Peter’s walk across the lake, the feeding of thousands with a small lunch, and the exorcism of a stubborn and evil spirit are a few notable examples of how Jesus grew faith in his disciples. Paul captured the essence of the Christian experience when he said, “The righteous will live by faith”

(Romans 1:17). This could be interpreted accurately to affirm “the righteous thrive in the midst of unpredictable change.”⁹ Throughout the Bible, people routinely are given a God-inspired vision to embrace and pursue that is fraught with risk and uncertainty. From Old Testament stories of Noah (Genesis 6-9), Abraham (Genesis 12), Moses (Exodus 3-4), Rahab (Joshua 2), and David (1 Samuel 17) to the New Testament struggles of Peter (Matthew 14:22-33), Paul (Acts 9:1-19), Stephen (Acts 7), and Thomas (John 20:24-29), God consistently calls people to move toward a preferred future that simultaneously frightens and compels. In each case, faith is indispensable to navigating the change, because without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6). The writer of Hebrews, consequently, devotes an entire chapter to detailing the role of faith in the lives of those God employs in his unfolding plan to redeem humanity (Hebrews 11). A fundamental requirement of following God is leaving security and familiarity to follow God into a chaotic world where he alone is unchanging.¹⁰

The Church is given the intimidating task of representing Jesus to the world, striving to affect spiritual transformation in people for his glory and their good. Accordingly, a methodological tension quickly emerges concerning how best to relate the timeless truth of God in a culture that constantly changes. At issue is what never must change and what always must change. Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well is insightful in sorting out this reality (John 4). Jesus compared the gospel to living water. Water fills containers of all shapes and sizes, without retaining the form of any. The container, then, is immaterial. Though the contents remain the same, the

⁹ McManus, *An Unstoppable Force*, 82.

¹⁰ Ibid.

containers change. Accordingly, the living water of the gospel must be poured into twenty-first-century containers. Jesus said, “Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15). He told the Church what it should do but not specifically how it should do it.¹¹ Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the Church to effectively penetrate the culture with the good news of Christ. To that end, openness to change and the various techniques and methods required to navigate it are both necessary and inevitable.

The Pastor as Change Agent

Everything rises and falls on leadership.¹² Leading and managing change in the local church consequently requires the skillful guidance of a point person who is wholeheartedly committed to God. Biblically, this role is assigned to the pastor. In his correspondence to Timothy, Paul offers this pastoral advice: “Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). Like other leaders, pastors must demonstrate an intense commitment to the values and teachings they espouse: this is how they earn and sustain credibility.¹³ Utterly dependent on the Lord for wisdom and direction, the pastor should pursue and reflect Christ in such a way that others can emulate his life; he ruthlessly must be devoted to ongoing transformation in his own spiritual journey. This is his most significant duty.

¹¹ Sweet, *SoulTsunami*, 72.

¹² John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), introduction.

¹³ James M. Kouzes and Barry T. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 93.

Defining reality and casting vision form a core responsibility of a leader who strives to lead and manage change in an organization; this is especially relevant to the pastor of a local church.¹⁴ A sometimes painful and alarming process, a pastor must remain committed to the routine appraisal of the strengths and growth areas of the church (and those of both himself and the staff as well) to foster a climate that is conducive to change and vision. Values such as transparency, authenticity, and brutal honesty are vital to this evaluation process. To deny the obvious truth concerning how the Body of Christ is progressing in areas of worship, ministry, discipleship, outreach, and the like essentially frustrates the spiritual growth of believers and limits the spiritual influence of the church in the world. Pastors, then, must be secure in their relationship with both Christ and his Church to assess reality accurately and initiate necessary changes.

A pastor who successfully effects change in a local church will be keenly aware of the unique needs, abilities, and passions of those he leads. This requires a pastor who deliberately invests himself in the lives of his parishioners; close proximity to followers is a prerequisite for leading change.¹⁵ If a pastor is isolated from his congregation, he potentially will lose credibility and trust and become an ineffective agent of change. Conversely, a pastor who habitually counsels the needy, rejoices alongside those who celebrate, and listens to dissenters likely will gain both a hearing and a following when he casts vision that requires change. An effective pastor embodies the values and dreams of the people he leads, when he patterns his leadership after the incarnational ministry of Jesus.

¹⁴ Max Depree, *Leadership Is an Art* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1989), 11.

¹⁵ Anderson, *Dying for Change*, 190.

The pastor as change agent further assumes a perspective about change that is both hopeful and centered in Christ. Amid the postmodern malaise of American culture, a pastor must personify the ministry and message of John the Baptist who introduced Jesus as “one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie” (Mark 1:7). Referencing Christ, John’s personal leadership statement was “he must become greater; I must become less” (John 3:30). A pastor who leads others first must follow Jesus and strive to embody his servant-leadership approach that was driven by genuine humility. Jesus was the most effective leader in human history, because he capably defined the real and desperate condition of his followers, intentionally walked among them and bore their struggles, and offered them hope for a new and better reality firmly embedded in the plan and provision of God. Ultimately, a pastor skillfully must follow Jesus’ lead to facilitate personal and corporate transformation in the life of the local church.

The effort of Nehemiah to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem is an excellent biblical example of visionary leadership that entails each of the aforementioned characteristics. Fueled by a transparently honest evaluation of the spiritual condition of his people, Nehemiah became contrite and broken over their struggles (Nehemiah 1:4-11). Next, from this spiritual anguish, God birthed in Nehemiah a vision to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 2:12) that necessitated a risky request to abandon his post as King Artaxerxes’ cupbearer (Nehemiah 2:5). Nehemiah clearly and succinctly cast the vision to rebuild the wall to his fellow laborers, and they quickly endorsed it (Nehemiah 2:16-18). Aware of the unique gifts and abilities of his personnel, Nehemiah divided the monstrous project into smaller tasks and assigned the work accordingly (Nehemiah 3).

Undeterred by opposition (Nehemiah 4:1-14) and an evil conspiracy (Nehemiah 6:1-14), Nehemiah and his crew persevered and finished the wall in fifty-two days (Nehemiah 6:15). Finally, the people gathered to hear the Word of the Lord, acknowledge the obvious empowerment from God to complete the vision, confess their sins to him, and covenant to serve him faithfully (Nehemiah 8-10). Essentially, God employed Nehemiah as his agent of change to inspire and challenge the Jewish people to do something that only could be attributed to God. In so doing, Nehemiah and his people were transformed spiritually and God was glorified.

Leading and Managing Change

The only churches that will thrive in the twenty-first century are those whose leaders have learned to respond to change rather than resist or ignore it.¹⁶ Schaller, a church consultant, identifies three levels of change that affect congregations.¹⁷ He has found that these three levels exist regardless of church size, age, or demographic. In the first level, a congregation strives to continue doing what it always has done, only better. This creates minimal disruption to the church and typically is received well. At the second level, significant changes are made to established ministries; but, the overall objective remains the same. An example of this might include breaking a large group of fifty children led by one adult teacher into five smaller groups of ten, with each facilitated by its own adult leader. While this requires some adjustment, it basically achieves the same goal using a different approach. At the third level, radical changes are implemented

¹⁶ Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser, *Leading the Congregation: Caring for Yourself While Serving Others* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 167.

¹⁷ Lyle E. Schaller, *Strategies for Change* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 91-92.

that deviate from the status quo. Instead of remodeling a rundown campus, for instance, the church decides to relocate. A change of this magnitude prompts significant disruption and probable tension; therefore, it requires prayerful consideration. Facilitating and responding to these various changes necessitate a growing awareness of the culture within and beyond the church walls.

The increasing complexity of American culture has challenged pastoral leadership in unprecedented ways. Every year, thousands of pastors retire early or leave the pastorate completely due to the arduous toll of church ministry. More than ever, pastors need to learn new ways to see themselves, the churches they lead, and the communities they serve. Systems thinking is one discipline that possibly could assist pastors in the struggle to facilitate change. Rather than isolating a specific ministry concern, systems thinking strives to identify an underlying or pervasive issue that informs the presenting problem; it looks at the whole and not just at the parts.¹⁸ For example, instead of focusing on the concentrated minutia of ministry (i.e., a shortage of nursery volunteers), systems thinking would prompt a pastor to investigate the larger issue that is causing the problem (i.e., a church of consumers). This wide-angle approach has the potential to revolutionize the way a church views change, and it underscores Paul's teaching that in the Body of Christ "if one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26-27).

Leading and managing change in a contemporary church context requires a sense of urgency that is grounded in the confidence that God is in complete control. Undoubtedly, significant and permanent change is not possible unless complacency is

¹⁸ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 68-69.

low and urgency is high.¹⁹ Since genuine transformation is often painful and unpleasant, there must be a compelling reason to pursue it. For this reason, Jesus challenges his disciples to shine his light into the darkness of the world through good deeds that highlight the greatness and glory of God (Matthew 5:16). Faithfully expressed, the abundant life Christ brings to those who were spiritually dead in sin provides compelling evidence for unbelievers to consider the claims and cross of Christ. This is a high and noble calling. Thankfully, God offers the Church his resources, wisdom, and Son. Neither the Church nor its leaders are left to fend for themselves. Symbolizing the intimately close relationship he intended with his followers, Jesus said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, it is he that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Accordingly, close proximity to Christ and a close connection with him are vital prerequisites to both foster and sustain a spiritual climate of change. Ultimately, the spiritual transformation of individuals, churches, and cultures is the direct activity of the one who is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

¹⁹ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 162.

PART THREE

STRATEGY

CHAPTER 6

THE COMMUNICATION OF THE VISION

The vision to unite those with enduring spiritual heritages and emerging generations who approach God through postmodern senses in a worship community at Grace Baptist Church that values diversity is rooted in the firm conviction that God still seeks true worshippers, who will worship him in spirit and truth (John 4:23). The vision is not of human origin but comes from God through people to people for his glory and their good. The vision is born in the sovereign mind of God and is transferred to his chosen leader or team according to his timeline and plan. It gains momentum when the leader or team embraces it and then becomes reality when the people of God respond to it.¹ It is imperative, therefore, that the vision be communicated clearly, thoroughly, and regularly.

The primary component of the vision to enhance the worship culture at Grace Baptist Church is the development and implementation of a contemporary worship service designed to reach emerging generations. A genuine test of faith both for those who are satisfied with traditional worship and those who are energized to reach new worshippers, the vision will require a spirit of cooperation and broad support from the

¹ John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders around You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), 28.

entire Grace Baptist family. Consequently, the vision must be shared.² This necessitates an intentional plan to accomplish two primary objectives: to create a climate of acceptance and vision among the core leadership of the church and to convey the vision to the larger church community in a manner that clearly communicates the objective and embraces those who struggle to understand or endorse the vision.

Creating a Climate of Acceptance and Vision

The overall success of the vision to introduce a contemporary service into the worship culture at Grace Baptist directly relates to the manner in which it is communicated and received by the congregation at large. The church family must be strategically informed about its inception and become enthused about its potential. More specifically, the ownership of the vision must be transferred intentionally from me as pastor to the core leadership group to the broader church family to achieve and sustain long-term growth. To that end, several priorities will be employed to foster stability and receptivity for the vision.

A commitment to Spirit-empowered prayer must remain the primary catalyst through which a climate of acceptance and vision is created. Prayer is the channel through which God communicates his vision and the means through which any practical methodologies should be selected. Essentially, a worship culture that is not grounded in prayer is void of power.³ From the earliest planning and strategizing stages, when only a small segment of the church family will be involved, prayer will remain the focal point

² George Barna, *The Power of Vision: How You Can Capture and Apply God's Vision for Your Ministry* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992), 142.

³ Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 58.

that informs the ensuing four stages that are vital to the vision process. First, the will of God must be pursued in every minute detail. His objectives, timeline, personnel, attitude and wisdom should sanction the vision from the outset. Second, the presence of God must be sought in both the communication and reception of the vision. Crucial to its acceptance by the larger Grace community, the vision must flow from God through the core leadership group to the church family in a manner that acknowledges his empowerment. Both in content and demeanor, God's desire to seek worshippers of all generations will be articulated clearly and passionately. Third, God's provision of servant-leaders to fill the numerous positions needed to implement and manage the vision will remain a central prayer concern. From recruiting the Ministry Enhancement Team to assembling ministry teams to conversing with dissenters, God's person for each role is essential. Finally, the overarching rule of God in the lives of the initial leadership group, the broader Grace community, and those who will be impacted through the vision will be pursued via prayer. As various styles, preferences, and other potentially combative issues are discussed, Spirit-enabled unity must prevail. Ultimately, God desires to accomplish immeasurably more than any one person or church community can imagine, so consistent interaction with him through prayer is indispensable to realize his vision (Ephesians 3:20).

Next, the purposeful study and application of the biblical foundations of worship will be employed to inform how the vision is shaped and communicated. The Scripture will be viewed consistently as the chief informant for defining and pursuing the worship of God. This is especially important in an Independent Baptist worship culture, that is

essentially traditional and conservative. More specifically, the teachings and example of Jesus will govern each discussion in the vision-casting process.

The casting and receiving of a vision is a process that matures at a very slow rate. Accordingly, the key to communicating an effective vision is repetition. It will be tempting to mistakenly believe that if a vision is shared once, the target audience will embrace and internalize it.⁴ At Grace Baptist, a more intentional and methodical approach will be taken. The vision to introduce a contemporary service into the worship culture at Grace Baptist was prompted by a God-given desire to reach my generation with the gospel and a sense that the Grace Baptist family was both able and willing to follow my leadership. Due to my longevity at GBC and the fact that my father and grandfather still actively serve in the church, the vision already has gained widespread credibility and support. For this reason, I plan to assemble a core leadership group called the “Ministry Enhancement Team” in early 2008 and begin discussing the vision with them. Through this team, the vision will be relayed to the larger church family. By employing this approach, the vision will gain momentum and standing within GBC. Also, this will foster a sense of teamwork and community among the core leadership group that affords the church family much-needed comfort and security.

Finally, reception of the vision presupposes an understanding of its core intent. The full acceptance of the vision, then, intricately will link to a succinct statement of what is being pursued. Simply put, the vision of Grace Baptist Church includes “enhancing the worship culture by launching a weekly worship event that reaches

⁴ Glen Martin and Gary McIntosh, *The Issachar Factor: Understanding Trends That Confront Your Church and Designing a Strategy for Success* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1993), 65.

emerging generations.” Inspired by God, this vision requires the consensus of the Grace Baptist family and strives to unite the Body of Christ to enlarge the Kingdom of God.

Ministry Enhancement Team

Central to creating a climate of acceptance and vision is the formation of the Ministry Enhancement Team. Comprised of approximately thirty core members of the Grace Baptist family, the team will meet monthly during the first year of the vision communication stage and serve as an initial feedback group to receive, process, and debate the coherence, validity, and relevance of the vision. The team primarily will include staff and lay leaders from a wide range of ages, socioeconomic situations, spiritual heritages, and family backgrounds and above all will consist of those who “pray fervently, think clearly, work hard, and make wise decisions.”⁵ Though far from exhaustive, the conversations, assessments, and recommendations that result from the efforts of this team will help relay the vision to the larger church family effectively. Using their broad influence among the church membership, these spiritually sensitive individuals will strive to explain the purpose and methodology of the vision in small group settings and one on one with those holding concerns.

The initial focus of the first six months of Ministry Enhancement Team gatherings will center on the biblical foundations of worship, including a survey of the various expressions of worship found in the Scriptures, and a brief look at the evolution of worship to meet the needs of successive generations. As the pastor, I will lead and employ an interactive, discussion-based approach. Together we will explore the specific

⁵ Anderson, *Dying for Change*, 204.

implications of texts such as Isaiah 6, John 4, and Romans 12:1-2 as applied to the worship of God in postmodern culture. The basic goals of these gatherings will provide the group with a historical perspective of worship, affirm the key role of the Scriptures in the formation of a worship culture to reach people of all ages, and specifically establish Jesus as the ultimate example of how to worship God effectively through intentional ministry to various audiences. Accordingly, a concerted effort will be made to examine key episodes in Jesus' ministry to observe how he connected with people and to learn how to emulate his lifestyle of worship.

After six months of intensive, biblically centered conversation on worship, the ensuing three months will be given to an overview of the demographic context surrounding Grace Baptist Church and the uniqueness of its Independent Baptist tradition. Using available census data and projections from demographic sources, the explosive population growth will be detailed and the need to reach emerging generations will be discussed.⁶ Also, a brief history of the church and its distinctively fundamental heritage will be provided. This likely will stimulate some healthy dialogue about how best to communicate the vision to those who are uncomfortable with more contemporary expressions of worship and the people who prefer them.

During the final three months of the first year of the vision communication stage, the vision to enhance the worship culture of Grace Baptist by launching a weekly worship event that reaches emerging generations will be unpacked. Though general in scope, an outline of how the service might look, what it will do to the Sunday schedule, and how the church family might respond to the changes will be presented. Extended

⁶ Census data will be similar to that presented in Part One of this project.

opportunities for questions and answers will dominate these gatherings as the team processes the positive and negative implications of the vision. From a pastoral perspective, this will be a strategic phase of communicating the vision that will require God-given sensitivity and wisdom. Ultimately, the long-term acceptance and momentum of the vision will be impacted greatly by how the Ministry Enhancement Team navigates these sessions.

To gain a clearer understanding of what God can do through Grace Baptist Church and its vision to reach emerging generations, the Ministry Enhancement Team will take a closer look at one church that is realizing a similar dream successfully. Specifically, the team will travel together to College Avenue Baptist Church in San Diego, California. With an influence spanning 108 years, College Avenue boasts a rich history of local and global ministry. Located in the heart of San Diego, the church is six blocks from San Diego State University and its ever-changing demographic that includes thirty thousand college students.⁷ Also, the congregation stands twelve blocks away from a multicultural population of eighty thousand people, who represent thirty-six language groups.⁸ To serve the unique needs of their rapidly growing intergenerational audience, College Avenue has organized its ministry around the following four worship services: the Heritage service, designed for Builders and traditional and formal with respect to style; the Celebration service, which targets the Boomer crowd, meets in the gym, and features a live band, drama, vocal team, and multimedia; the Flood service, which ministers to Generation X, meets Sunday night, and uses a large visual-effect

⁷ Kurt Gruber, "Four Categories of Worship at College Avenue Baptist Church," invitational lecture in Richard V. Peace, "The Ministry of Evangelism" (lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, October 19, 2001).

⁸ Ibid.

screen to punctuate a darkened worship environment; and, a Hispanic service designed to reach the ever-increasing Latino community. Presenting the philosophy that “every generation has its own worship voice,” College Avenue seeks to avoid the stylistic controversies that cripple many churches and offers a balanced ministry that meets the unique needs of every generation.⁹

Studying both the successes and pitfalls of College Avenue Baptist, the Ministry Enhancement Team will be able to learn and apply the principles necessary to design a service that attracts and reaches emerging generations. Preferably, on-site evaluations of College Avenue would be integrated into the training process and will include interviews and dialogue with staff members and worshippers. Essentially, this will provide a live, up-close experience that simulates the vision Grace Baptist strives to pursue. Furthermore, observing the successful integration of a comparable idea into the ministry of a traditional church both can alleviate concern and energize the team around the vision God has for Grace Baptist. Ultimately, the goal will be to contextualize the gospel in West Fort Worth in the same manner in which Jesus reached his audience in the first century and with the same impact that a church like College Avenue Baptist is effecting in its own twenty-first-century locale.

Leadership Brainstorm Sessions

After a full year of conversations with the Ministry Enhancement Team, the second year will commence with the casting of the vision (primarily by me as pastor and a few of the Ministry Enhancement team members) to a second tier of lay leaders via four

⁹ Ibid.

monthly brainstorming sessions. The vision primarily will be communicated by me. Essentially, forty to fifty influential and devoted members who are engaged actively in ministry will be invited to hear, process, and respond to the proposed vision. A distilled version of the content used in the Ministry Enhancement Team gatherings will be presented and ample opportunity for feedback will be provided in the first three sessions. During the fourth session, this larger group will participate in a weekend prayer retreat to seek God's blessing in the communication of the vision to the larger church family.

There are three primary goals for these initial sessions. First, the vision hopefully will receive a more thorough critique. Analyzed by a larger and more diverse group, the strengths and weaknesses of the vision likely will be expanded and refined, which will aid in its eventual release to the larger church body. Second, these sessions probably will inspire a core group of influencers to embrace the vision. No longer relegated to a select few, the vision will gain further credibility and momentum due to the strategic influence of the larger group. Third, the sessions will provide a venue for creating five ministry teams that will play a pivotal role in the implementation of the vision. From these brainstorming gatherings, the vision essentially will begin transitioning from conceptual image to tangible reality.

The five teams mentioned above will comprise the ministry backbone that will support the vision. Designed to achieve Rick Warren's purpose-driven model, each of these teams will focus on worship, ministry, outreach, fellowship, or discipleship.¹⁰ Initially, five individuals or "coaches" will be selected from the Ministry Enhancement Team to recruit teams of eight to ten "players" from the second tier of leaders. The coach

¹⁰ Warren., *The Purpose Driven Church*, 103-106.

will emphasize the vision to his team continually and work to build a group that is compatible with respect to age, personality, availability, interest, and so forth.

Additionally, each player will be encouraged to take a gift assessment test to determine his ministry strengths and growth areas.¹¹ Though a perfect match is not required, each person who serves on a particular team should be gifted spiritually to do so.

Setting Goals and the Timeline

Crucial to the success of the vision is a detailed plan highlighting when each of various components will be introduced. As mentioned previously, the overarching factor that will inform everything from personnel decisions to publicity options is prayer. God's mind and his purpose will cast the deciding vote in every phase of the project. Under his supervision, the following timeline and accompanying goals will be pursued in the planning and implementation phases of the vision.

The first year of communicating the vision will be given to creating and informing a Ministry Enhancement Team, as earlier detailed. During these critical twelve months, the primary goal will be establishing the veracity of the vision through this team of key spiritual leaders. The team will undergo a rigorous series of training sessions on the biblical foundations of worship, the spiritual heritage of Grace Baptist Church, and core worship texts in the Bible including Isaiah 6, John 4, and Romans 12:1-2.¹² To gain greater insight into the vision, this team also will take a field trip to visit a local church that has implemented a similar concept successfully into its worship culture.

¹¹ The spiritual gift assessment will be taken from Bruce L. Bugbee, *Discover Your Spiritual Gifts the Network Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005). Bugbee is the executive minister of the western region of the Reformed Church in America, based in Irvine, California.

¹² Presented and detailed earlier in Part Two of this paper.

Communicating the vision in the second year will flow from the Ministry Enhancement Team through a larger leadership group and eventually to the entire Grace Baptist family. The first four months of the second year will include monthly leadership brainstorming sessions designed to inform more people of the vision and gain greater insight into it. During these sessions, specific teams will be created that will provide the practical, hands-on ministry of the vision. The fourth brainstorming session will be given to prayer for the imminent relaying of the vision to the larger church body.

In May of the second year, the entire church family will receive the vision through a month-long sermon series on themes like worship, culture, and change.¹³ The goal is to faithfully articulate the vision to enhance the worship culture by launching a weekly worship event that reaches emerging generations. Through various creative elements—including sermons, music, testimonies, video, and drama, the need for pursuing the vision—will be broadcast extensively. Also, each Sunday evening during May will be given to “town hall” meetings to provide those with concerns or questions an opportunity to gain more information. The message from the services earlier in the day will be reviewed and an extended time for questions and answers will ensue.

Throughout the summer prior to implementing the vision, promotion will become a top priority. The publicity strategy will focus on two fronts: fringe churchgoers who attend sporadically and unbelievers in the surrounding community. To inform the neighboring area and notify the extended Grace Baptist family of the service, multiple advertising strategies will be analyzed. Direct mail, web publicity, door hangers, newspaper advertisements, and billboards are all options that might help communicate

¹³ Details regarding this sermon series will be discussed at length later in this chapter.

the vision. Above all, the core leaders and their respective team members will be asked to pray specifically that God would create opportunities for them personally to invite friends or family to visit the service.

The final four months leading up to the initial launch will be given to devising the specific format and structure of the worship event. Each of the five ministry teams, which to this point will have been working alone, will come together and begin crafting the first full month of services. During these months, the ministry teams will attend Fellowship Church in Grapevine, Texas to gain more insight into how to minister effectively to emerging generations.

Led by senior pastor Ed Young, Fellowship Church has enjoyed remarkable growth since it began in the summer of 1989. From a core group of 150 that met in a rented office complex, the church has grown to minister to over fifteen thousand people each weekend in its state-of-the-art worship center. Each of their weekend worship services are “high energy,” “life-changing,” and accompanied by “excellent programs for children from birth through 6th grade.”¹⁴ Located just forty-five minutes east of Grace Baptist, Fellowship Church will provide a close, intriguing model of effective ministry to emerging generations.

Offering a wide array of opportunities that are attractive to emerging generations, Fellowship Church has developed a prominent reputation for its innovative, people-sensitive ministry. Consequently, it will serve as a great learning laboratory for the ministry teams that will design the contemporary service at Grace Baptist. During a preliminary visit to Fellowship Church to study its approach, the following observations

¹⁴ Fellowship Church, “Welcome,” <http://www.fellowshipchurch.com/welcome?FCW=qfrcvp2s2ehnv8bb7jre1poa02> (accessed February 10, 2008).

were made. First, people are a high priority at Fellowship Church. They are welcomed, encouraged, and accepted. The church is a positive, energetic place that serves as a great entry point for spiritual seekers. Second, the congregation that gathers at Fellowship clearly exists for those who do not attend it. Adopting Warren's "Purpose Driven" philosophy, the services are designed to attract those who have given up on God or traditional churches.¹⁵ Third, Fellowship Church is led by strong, innovative leaders who are willing to take risks. Young is incredibly gifted and has surrounded himself with people who are in touch with popular culture and who share his vision for twenty-first-century ministry. Fourth, Fellowship Church honors the unique needs of those who are investigating the claims of Christ. Accordingly, worshippers are given ample opportunity to experience the service without being pressured or confronted. From the parking lot to the worship center, the entire campus is warm, friendly, and inviting. Finally, Fellowship clearly understands a key question asked by many in emerging generations: "Can I belong here?" Without hesitation, Fellowship Church feels like a place to belong and become. From the people to the music to the message to the facilities, the church is vibrant, exciting, and attractive. It is an excellent example of what Jesus can do through people who are firmly committed to the worship of God via creative, cutting-edge methodologies.

The purpose of a "field trip" is to help strengthen the relationships among the team members and pinpoint real-world worship ideas to discuss and imitate. Another important part of this period will be the development of a long-range plan for the new service that will include worship themes for the first full year, key dates for promotion,

¹⁵ Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 193.

and the launch of a small-group Bible study, and a discipleship component that will begin approximately six months after the new service has been launched.

The final month prior to implementation will be reserved for extended prayer sessions, fine-tuning the various worship components, and doing trial runs of the service to locate potential problem areas. The excitement and anticipation of the new event, coupled with the Christmas emphasis, should create a wave of momentum heading into the initial service on the first Sunday of the New Year. Prayer will remain the central priority. Finally, the first weekend of the year will climax a two-year journey to “enhance the worship culture by launching a weekly worship event that reaches emerging generations.”

Casting Vision to the Broader Church Community

Casting the vision to the broader Grace Baptist family will require God-directed precision, compassion, and patience. While some general comments will be made from the pulpit throughout the year of Ministry Enhancement Team gatherings, the clear presentation of the vision only will come after an obvious consensus has been reached among the core leadership group. By design, the process will be lengthened to allow the Ministry Enhancement Team ample opportunity to sift through the limitations of the vision, slowly embrace the totality of it, and help clarify it for the extended Grace Baptist community.

Once the Ministry Enhancement Team and the second tier leadership group have embraced the vision, the process of communicating it to the entire church family will begin. Central to this is a sermon series in May on worship, culture, and change. The

series will include a condensed version of the material covered in the initial leadership gatherings and will highlight the incredible opportunity to reach the rapidly growing Westside of Fort Worth with the gospel. The fundamental emphasis of this phase of the communication of the vision is the conviction that God is calling the Grace Baptist family together to fulfill his purposes of reaching emerging generations. Ultimately, the vision is from God and for God; he alone is the Creator, sustainer, and unifier of the vision.

Since all God-inspired visions involve people, understanding what fuels and hinders vision casting is vital to effectively moving the vision from a small group to the larger church community. As the vision unfolds at Grace Baptist, there likely will be noticeable disparity in the way individuals receive and interpret the vision. Some will focus on the potential problems that such a challenge might create, others will immediately be in favor of moving forward, and others will remain neutral until more information is gathered. Accordingly, competent leaders carefully must identify the detractors and the dreamers and determine who will serve and who will stall the expansion of the vision. In the end, a thorough knowledge of the church family is a necessary prerequisite to determine how to communicate the vision effectively.

It will be essential to cast the vision in multiple ways. This will include sermons, web technology, audio/visual media presentations, bulletins, email, and one-on-one conversations. It has been recommended that a vision be communicated consistently a minimum of five different ways until it is reached.¹⁶ Accordingly, the vision will be explained by showing video interviews of people who illustrate the vision, sharing the story of College Avenue Baptist Church and the Ministry Enhancement Team's on-site

¹⁶ Martin and McIntosh, *The Issachar Factor*, 65.

visit, writing emails or articles in the bulletin concerning the progress of the vision, and personally visiting members of the church to share the vision and answer questions about it.¹⁷ Whether through the pastor, staff, or lay leadership, the vision will be communicated in an upbeat, energetic, and positive manner. Most importantly, the church family will sense a passionate commitment to the vision from the leadership team and be drawn to their collective confidence in God to empower it.

Finally, casting a vision to the larger Grace Baptist family will require patience. When the vision initially is presented to the church family, some on the Ministry Enhancement Team will have been praying over and processing the vision for more than sixteen months. Accordingly, those who become convicted firmly of its potential must be willing to give those who are reluctant to embrace the vision significant time and sensitivity. Unfortunately, those who are driven by a vision often struggle to understand those who do not endorse it readily. Though it will be tempting to push the vision forward regardless of its overall reception, those casting the vision instead will rely on the Spirit for wisdom, patience, endurance, and wide-ranging approval.

Sermon Series on Worship, Culture, and Change

The month of May in the second year of the vision communication process is critically important, because it includes casting the vision to the entire Grace Baptist congregation. To help the church fully understand, embrace, and support the vision, a four-week sermon series, called “Worship, Culture, and Change,” will be led by me as the senior pastor. Drawn from core texts like Isaiah 6, John 4, Romans 12:1-2, and 1

¹⁷ Ibid.

Corinthians 9, the messages will aim to realize four objectives: provide a biblical understanding of worship, note how Jesus engaged potential worshippers in his culture, highlight the need for Christians to be transformed by God continually and sacrificially, and detail the role of the Church in shaping the culture. Furthermore, how each of these four texts informs the vision to enhance the worship culture by launching a weekly worship event that reaches emerging generations also will be considered.

The first sermon will emanate from Isaiah 6 and propose this text as a core template for worship. Striving to present God as the subject and object of worship, the teaching will affirm that worship is fundamentally about magnifying the greatness and glory of God and not fulfilling the preferences of worshippers. Moreover, it will contend that genuine worship focuses singularly on the glory and greatness God which, in turn, exposes the desperate need of the worshipper. The proper posture of worship, then, is humility. This will serve as the foundational piece for communicating the vision to enhance the worship culture at Grace Baptist.

John 4 will serve as the core text for the second sermon, which will unpack Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman and his teachings on worship. Special attention will be given to the social, gender, cultural, and religious barriers Jesus bypassed in his dialogue with the woman. The reality that Jesus knew the woman's story, accepted her despite her sordid past, and offered her the living water of the gospel will inform how the Grace Baptist family should see and engage unbelievers. More importantly, the liberating principle that, in Christ, God seeks people like the Samaritan woman as worshippers who will worship him in Spirit and truth will be presented.

The third message, developed from Romans 12:1-2, will disclose the pivotal principle that true worship fuels spiritual change. In worshipping God, people sacrificially present themselves to him to be transformed in their thinking. This, in turn, enables the worshipper to discern and pursue God's will. The necessity and inevitability of change also will be framed within the spiritual, cultural, and Independent Baptist contexts pertinent to the church. Finally, the specific changes to the worship culture and what they can produce will be unpacked.

The final message will flow from Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church and describe the ongoing need to spiritually influence people through creative and diverse means. In striving to practice the "all things to all people" principle (1 Corinthians 9:22), this message will attempt to outline what it means to contextualize the gospel in the community surrounding Grace Baptist. Accordingly, both demographic analyses and future projections for the area will be provided to support the need to enhance the worship culture of the church. Ultimately, this sermon will call the Grace Baptist family to do whatever is necessary to enhance the worship culture of the church to impact future worshippers with the gospel.

Town Hall Meetings

Each Sunday evening during the vision-casting sermon series, the entire church family will be invited to a town hall meeting to discuss further the message presented earlier that day. Designed to be informal, conversational, and open-ended, the content of these gatherings primarily will be dictated by those in the audience. The meeting will begin with an extended prayer session, include a brief introductory statement from the

pastor, and segue into a time for questions from those in attendance. While as the pastor I will respond to the bulk of the inquiries, both those on the Ministry Enhancement Team and in the second-tier leadership group will be encouraged to provide additional input. To pinpoint issues that need clarification or further discussion, several individuals will take extensive notes during the meetings.

The town hall gatherings will serve several important purposes. First, the meetings will provide a safe venue for people who do not accept or understand the vision to be heard. For some, the answer provided in the session will move them closer toward embracing the vision. For others, the answer will create more questions. Still others will bolster their opposition to the vision through the gatherings. In each situation, however, the opportunity to ask a question and wrestle with the answer will foster an environment of openness and authenticity. Second, the meetings likely will uncover issues and pitfalls that have not been detected previously. The Lord undoubtedly will give greater depth and meaning to the vision through the collective input of the larger church body. Furthermore, as the vision is enhanced through the mutual evaluation of a larger group, many will begin to own the vision for themselves. Finally, the town hall gatherings will help identify those who will be slow to embrace the vision and those who may seek to stir dissension. Through blatant comments, disconcerting body language, or eerie silence, some will reveal their complete rejection of the vision. These individuals need and deserve ample doses of grace and patience along with some intentional, prayer-initiated conversations with those in leadership.

Embracing Dissenters and Critics

No matter how effectively or carefully the vision is communicated, some people simply will not buy into it. For reasons that run the gamut from the sincere to the absurd, some individuals passionately will refuse to embrace the vision. Some will reason it too difficult to accomplish. Others might become overwhelmed and lose sight of the enabling power of God to achieve his plan through people. Still others will feel disconnected from the larger church community and respond negatively to something that requires full participation.¹⁸ Thankfully, most will reject the vision in relative obscurity, keeping their opinions to themselves and a few confidants. Others, however, will go public with their disapproval and seek to sow discord among the church family. These individuals necessitate God-enabled discernment and intentional, compassionate leadership as the vision process unfolds.

Essentially, there are four different levels at which people see a vision.¹⁹ On one plane, some people never see it. These individuals simply wander and never struggle to view it long enough or in depth enough to form a solid opinion. On the second level, some people see it but never pursue it on their own. These are followers. On the third level, some people see it and pursue it. Such people are considered achievers. On the fourth level, achievers see the vision, pursue it, and help others to see it as well. These people are the leaders. While the great majority of those at Grace Baptist Church probably will be followers, achievers, or leaders, some will wander away from the vision and potentially encourage others to join them. These wanderers will need personal

¹⁸ Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 228-230.

¹⁹ Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, 126-127.

attention and an opportunity to vent their frustrations to those in leadership. Accordingly, as the pastor, I—along with other leaders who can relate to dissenters with tact and grace—will pursue one-on-one conversations with them to gain greater insight into their struggles. Even if no initial progress is made, the face-to-face interaction and loving kindness extended to those who are strongly opposed eventually may lead them to reconsider both their attitude and their stance.

CHAPTER 7

PRACTICAL ENHANCEMENTS TO THE WORSHIP CULTURE

This chapter will detail several of the creative approaches that will be employed to enhance the worship culture of Grace Baptist Church. This will stem from biblical foundations of worship woven consistently into sermon messages, a Bible study series, and churchwide communiqués. From a sermon series on Old Testament worship practices to a small group gathering to examine the impact of contemporary worship trends on the church, a heightened awareness of what worship is and how it has evolved will benefit the entire Grace family greatly.

Second, the addition of a professionally trained worship leader to the church staff will provide strategic guidance in this critical area.¹ The ideal person for this position will possess a healthy understanding of biblical worship, knowledge of historical worship trends and issues, and a passion to inspire worshippers of all generations to glorify God. Charged with challenging the entire church family to pursue the genuine worship of God, this individual will play a pivotal role in shaping the worship culture at Grace Baptist.

Third, a concerted effort to identify and appreciate the various worship needs and experience of those in the church family will serve to enhance the worship culture.

¹ A professionally trained worship leader is someone who has attended a seminary or similar institution that combines musical and theological education in its worship ministries program. Also, this person preferably would have some practical experience in leading a worship ministry that employs both traditional and contemporary styles.

Throughout history, God has drawn worshippers to himself from each generation through creative and relevant means. Rather than pit one style of music against another or compare the preachers of the past to their contemporary counterparts, the Grace Baptist family must learn to celebrate the diversity of its four representative generations. Through interviews and personal testimonies, the worship experiences of older and younger Grace family members routinely will be highlighted and honored. For example, to demonstrate the distinct worship “bents” of each generation a Grace family containing all four generations will be interviewed. The differences in the worship preferences of the great-grandparents and their great-grandchildren will be both enlightening and energizing. This also will stimulate an ongoing effort to create unique worship approaches for each successive generation.

Fourth, an ongoing study of the demographics of the surrounding community will help tailor the worship culture of the church to meet the needs of those in its immediate context. Growth projections suggest that the Westside of Fort Worth will continue to attract young families well into the next decade. Accordingly, the worship culture of the church must be shaped to accommodate their needs.

Finally, Grace Baptist will move forward with the aforementioned vision to augment the worship culture by launching a weekly worship event that reaches those in the emerging generations. This will require God’s supernatural empowering and the collective wisdom and resources of the larger church family to accomplish. It is a bold and aggressive decision that potentially will enhance the worship culture at Grace Baptist for generations to come.

Designing and Introducing a Contemporary Worship Service

The design and introduction of the contemporary worship service into the worship culture at Grace Baptist will require the combined gifts of the pastoral staff and Ministry Enhancement Team. During the final three months of the initial year of planning, I will lead the Ministry Enhancement Team in a series of brainstorming conversations about the format, structure, and style of the service and generate discussion regarding every conceivable element that might comprise it. A sample of the topics to be explored include service length, venue, music styles, worship components, use of multimedia, communication approaches, and potential themes for a message series. From start to finish, the service will be dissected and debated; and, using insights gained during these discussions, a service will be shaped to fit both the Grace Baptist Church family and the surrounding ministry context.

Two core questions will be considered during these sessions that will inform the design of each contemporary service at Grace Baptist. Rather than disputing the merits of one song over another or which film clip to insert into a message, each service and every worship element included therein will be evaluated in light of these two questions: “Does this honor God?” and “Does this assist emerging generations in the authentic worship of God?” Essentially, the contemporary services will be designed to affirm the central reality that God is be honored and worshipped above all else. This truth will inform every aspect of the service including message themes, music selection, room décor, lighting settings, multimedia presentations, and length.

Outside resources, including those from skilled practitioners who effectively are ministering to emerging generations, also will be studied and employed in the

development of the service.² Moreover, the design of the contemporary service at GBC will be greatly enhanced through on-site visits to churches that are reaching emerging generations. As detailed earlier, the Ministry Enhancement Team will travel to College Avenue Baptist Church in San Diego, California to observe their four-service format. Also, members of the team will visit other churches in the immediate Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex that offer contemporary services—including McKinney Memorial Bible Church,³ Gateway Church,⁴ and Northwood Community Church⁵—and will describe their experiences to the larger team. The information gained from these nearby churches will provide insight that is contextually relevant to Grace Baptist and enhance the ideas from which the contemporary service can be designed.

An Overview of the Worship Service

The overarching vision to enhance the worship culture at Grace Baptist intricately ties to the design and introduction of a contemporary service. Employing relevant music, practical teaching, various media, and multi-sensory worship experiences, the service will be designed to engage worshippers in a context and dialect that are readily accessible and understandable. Led by a younger wave of church leaders, the service will add

² These will include Kimball's *The Emerging Church* and McLaren's *The Church on the Other Side*.

³ See McKinney Church, <http://www.mckinneychurch.com/> (accessed February 27, 2008) for more information.

⁴ See Gateway Church, <http://gatewaypeople.com/> (accessed February 27, 2008) for more information.

⁵ See Northwood Church, <http://www.northwoodchurch.org> (accessed February 27, 2008) for more information.

immediate value to the overall ministry of the church and compliment the current worship environment that effectively ministers to those in established generations.

Though varied and unpredictable in sequence, the contemporary service will feature several core worship elements that will be utilized weekly. First, the firm conviction that the Bible is the inspired revelation of God to humanity will support the habitual use of Scripture. Each sermon will be grounded in the truth of God as revealed in the Old and New Testaments. Accordingly, the Bible will be read unashamedly, studied, and applied carefully to life in every contemporary service. Next, God-directed prayer will be the catalyst through which worshippers will come into the presence of God in the contemporary service. Prayers of confession, repentance, thanksgiving, praise, adoration, and the like will be taught, modeled, and encouraged. Also, open-ended opportunities to reflect silently and seek God through prayer will be provided weekly. Music will be another common element in the contemporary worship service. Led by a worship leader, band, and a team of musically gifted vocalists, the songs will be thoroughly biblical in content and stylistically similar to music prevalent in popular culture. Multiple genres will be presented, and the music will be drawn from a wide range of sources including the Psalms, sacred hymns, and contemporary praise and worship songs. Ultimately, these three core elements will form a stable foundation upon which a contemporary service to reach emerging generations can be built.

Every contemporary service will strive to esteem the following six values: the holiness of God, authenticity, relevance, mystery, engagement, and creativity. Reverence for God, his Word, and his redemptive mission to seek worshippers who will worship him in Spirit and truth continually will inform the purposes and themes of the

contemporary service. A flippant or casual approach to the worship of God, accordingly, will not be tolerated. Moreover, the service consistently will strive to debunk the myth that contemporary worship is primarily shallow and person-centered. God is both the subject and object of worship, and he will remain the focal point of every worship gathering. As Isaiah experienced in his vision, the revelation of God and his holiness leaves a worshipper grappling with his desperate need, confessing his sin, and seeking the refuge of God's forgiveness (Isaiah 6:1-7). The contemporary service faithfully will exalt God in all of his glory, power, and holiness.

Second, genuine worship that acknowledges the greatness of God also will encourage an attitude of authenticity and transparency. Again, Isaiah's vision is informative. When Isaiah encountered the radiance and holiness of God in worship, he saw the enormity of his sin and he acknowledged his transgressions (Isaiah 6:1-5). The beauty of God underscored the ugliness of himself. Accordingly, in both content and presentation, the contemporary service will strive to magnify the perfection of God and foster a response to his holiness that is both genuine and accurate. Through confessional preaching, open repentance of sin, and personal testimonies that depict the struggles of following Christ, the service consistently will provide a venue for candid spiritual reflection.

Third, relevance will be a prominent value in the design and execution of the service. Through story, music, and media, the service will illustrate the timeless truths of the Bible in a manner that connects with contemporary audiences. Examples of this will include training children "in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4), investing financially in the Kingdom of God (Matthew 6:19-21, 24), and managing anger

and interpersonal conflict via biblical reconciliation (Matthew 5:21-26). Furthermore, practical, take-home applications of biblical teachings will affirm the enduring value of the Scriptures in everyday life. Fourth, the contemporary service will promote the undeniable mystery of God. The nature of God and his will are infinitely perplexing. Moreover, the deep questions and struggles people face often do not have airtight, succinct solutions. Consequently, the contemporary service will be a safe place to wrestle with the issues of life (i.e., pain and suffering, injustice, evil, and death) and God's purpose in them.

Fifth, worshippers will be encouraged to engage and fully participate in the worship of God. In the praise and worship of God through music, individuals will have freedom to express devotion to him via raised hands, kneeling, and personal expression. Sermons often will include opportunities for feedback and insight from the audience, and multi-sensory experiences will be inserted to foster a participatory approach to the worship of God. Finally, creativity will be indispensable in planning and presenting the contemporary service. Employing the diverse gifts of the Grace Baptist family, the service will be a weekly reminder of the imaginative abilities of God. Furthermore, it will cultivate in the church body an appreciation for the arts and provide a ministry outlet for those whom God has gifted to sing, play, paint, dance, speak, and so forth. Each contemporary service will uncover a beautiful mosaic that highlights the incredible creativity of God.

Expectations and Responsibilities

To plan, launch, and sustain a weekly service event of this magnitude requires personnel that are reliable, servant-oriented, committed, and motivated to do whatever is

required to accomplish the vision. It is highly possible that some potential leaders and team members will be more curious about the service than committed to it. Accordingly, a clearly defined leadership covenant will be developed before any personnel are recruited in order to identify those who will not endorse the core values and expectations of the team. Created by the core staff in conjunction with a group of spiritual leaders that include deacons, trustees, and Bible study leaders, the covenant will provide a framework for holding those leading the service accountable. Generally, each person who serves will be expected to attend services and rehearsals weekly, develop and maintain a weekly accountability relationship with another team member, and actively pursue relationships with unbelievers in their sphere of influence. Through passionate commitment, hopefully a response will be provided to critics who contend that contemporary ministry is far too convenience-driven to attract true followers.

The brunt of the responsibility for launching the new service will rest on the five key “coaches” who will lead the worship team, creativity team, hospitality team, outreach team, and discipleship team respectively. As the senior pastor, I will serve as the coach for the worship team in the formative stages and prayerfully will select the other four coaches, who will serve alongside. These individuals will possess the following characteristics: a commitment to the vision to reach emerging generations; a history with the Grace Baptist family that confirms their love for God, passion for others, and ability to influence and lead people; a cooperative attitude that places the overarching vision above their personal interests; a desire to grow in their relationship with God; and, an openness to change that fosters an innovative approach to reaching emerging generations with the gospel.

Each of the core leaders will have clearly defined areas of responsibility; no one area will dominate or receive preferred status among the other worship components. The ultimate objective is to glorify Christ by leading people to worship him. Accordingly, each team will have the following expectations. First, the worship team will provide the overall themes for the message series and serve as the point team that gives general guidance to the other teams. In the initial year, each series will last one month and focus on a particular area of concern to emerging generations. The worship team will ensure that the messages are biblically based, engaging, and readily applicable. They also will design the structure for the service each week. Those recruited to serve on the worship team will be people of prayer who demonstrate a spiritual walk that is vibrant and growing. Second, the creativity team will be responsible for enhancing the feel and impact of the service through music, drama, multimedia, and other innovative components. Led by a gifted individual who is biblically sensitive and well-read in popular culture, this team will insert pertinent art and media into the service that support the overall theme. Individuals who serve on this team will be able to dissect the culture skillfully; relate to the needs, tastes, and styles of emerging generations; and, use innovation to enhance the worship theme.

The third and fourth expectations deal primarily with GBC's relationship with the external world. A hospitality team will serve God by providing worshippers a warm, welcoming first impression. The coach of this team and those he recruits will be service-oriented, upbeat, positive, and friendly and will possess strong people skills. The hospitality crew will oversee various ministry areas and include parking attendants, greeters, refreshment servers, nursery caregivers, and ushers. The basic goal of this team

is to create a safe, comfortable, and energizing worship environment. Additionally, there will be an outreach team, who will develop and implement a plan to invite guests to the service and then follow up with newcomers who attend. The coach of this team will have the gift of evangelism and be able to motivate others to invite their neighbors, co-workers, classmates, and others they know to attend the services. Those who serve on the outreach team will be outgoing self-starters, who enjoy the challenge of meeting people and developing new relationships. The responsibilities of the outreach team will include publicity, organizing community events to attract newcomers, contacting repeat guests, and counseling individuals who desire to know more about God.

Finally, the discipleship team will lead the follow-up Bible study component of the contemporary service. The goal is to reinforce what is being taught at the weekly service and to allow for more dialogue and investigation of a biblical passage or topic. During the week, a variety of small groups will meet in homes or at the church to study the Bible in a more casual, intimate setting. The coach of this team will have the spiritual gift of teaching and be comfortable leading small group discussions that invite participation and response. Those who serve on the discipleship team should be well-grounded in the Scriptures, committed to the core beliefs of the church, and familiar with postmodern values and perspectives. The actual implementation of the discipleship component of the ministry will begin six months after the initial service launch.

Even with the most seasoned and committed personnel, the contemporary service will return no eternal dividends unless God is the primary catalyst and audience. He alone must have supremacy, and his discretion should be authoritative (Colossians 1:18).

All decisions concerning staff and leadership must be bathed in prayer and subject to his divine endorsement. Ultimately, he will be the key interviewer and final decision maker.

Potential Strengths and Weaknesses

Every methodology used to enhance the worship culture of a church is riddled with advantages and drawbacks. As Grace Baptist navigates the various vision and planning stages necessary to launch the initial worship event, it will be important to evaluate every aspect of the vision. Often, a church's greatest strength, if overemphasized or taken for granted, can become its most glaring weakness. As the Grace Baptist family seeks to enhance its worship culture through a contemporary service to reach emerging generations, it must do so with diligence and temperance.

The style of the new service will be a source of immediate discussion. As mentioned previously, Grace Baptist currently offers two identical services each Sunday morning that include Scripture reading, a public prayer altar, blended worship, and a biblically based message. The structure of the service is fairly conventional, and the sermon is typically a monologue. Accordingly, the church has a growing segment of its population that would be open to a more dynamic, expressive worship experience. The vision of a service that includes contemporary praise choruses led by a live band and worship team in a more relaxed worship setting would be well-received among this group.

Stylistic changes also could prove a point of possible contention. Many Grace members have enjoyed and preferred a traditional approach to worship that is relatively consistent. In their thinking, the notion that younger audiences might not dress

acceptably, appreciate the great hymns of the faith, and listen closely to a thirty-minute sermon is both disappointing and offensive. They find much of the modern music, media, art, and communication techniques to be incompatible with proper worship. If given the time, space, and information to foster an environment of trust, however, the process of bridging the gap between those who crave new worship experiences and those who ruthlessly defend their traditions will be both beneficial and enlightening for the entire church family.

A third area that simultaneously will benefit the new worship service and provide significant challenges is leadership. The key leaders God has called to launch this new worship event are young, energetic, optimistic individuals who sincerely desire to execute God's plan for the church. Thankfully, most were reared in conservative, Christian families and possess a great appreciation for the past and a great hope for the future. Above all, their ultimate desire is to win their generation for Christ. They are driven by the core conviction that emerging generations essentially have been ignored and forgotten by most churches. Accordingly, they want to learn to communicate the gospel to younger audiences in terms and in settings which they can appreciate.

Conversely, the age, inexperience, and idealism of these young leaders will be an issue of concern among those who struggle with the methods necessary to reach emerging generations. These leaders likely will recruit like-minded people to lead this new service: inexperienced idealists who believe an updated version of church will reach younger audiences. It is imperative, then, that wiser and more seasoned leaders—who see the need to reach future generations for Christ—walk alongside the young leaders to offer counsel, vision, and encouragement. Rather than working against one another and

wasting time and energy on internal conflict, they must identify the principles on which they agree and stand together. This will be achieved through a two-way mentoring program (via one-on-one relationships and/or small groups) in which elder leaders will impart spiritual guidance and practical life experience to younger leaders and, in turn, younger leaders will share their passion and plan to impact their generation for Christ. This likely will foster an environment of trust, optimism, and cooperation among all generations that must remain a top priority if the vision is to glorify God.

Titanic in Worship: A Sample Service

The following is a representative sample of what a contemporary service at Grace Baptist might look like. The service begins with the band playing an energetic praise song called *My God Reigns*,⁶ which affirms the core truth that God is in ultimate control. As the lead worshipper sings the lyrics, people will be invited to sing, clap, or simply observe. After the opening song, briefly I will greet the congregation. This welcome segment is designed to engage the audience informally, genuinely acknowledge the gift of their presence, and set the tone for the service. Following the welcome, the worship leader, band, and vocal team will lead the audience in the worship of God through music. The set will feature songs that highlight the greatness of God (*Let Everything That Has Breath*⁷ and *Alle*⁸). Additionally, it will proclaim the profound need of humanity for the

⁶ Darrell Evans, "My God Reigns," in *You Are I AM*, Vertical Music, CD, 1998, CCLI Song #2183824.

⁷ Matt Redman, "Let Everything That Has Breath," in *The Heart of Worship*, rel. Worship Together, March 22, 1999, CCLI Song #2430979.

⁸ Ross King and Chris Tomlin, "Alle," in *Authentic*, by Chris Tomlin, 1997, CCLI Song #2247320.

grace of God (*In Need*⁹). The final song, called *The Wonderful Cross*,¹⁰ is an updated version of Isaac Watts and Lowell Mason's weighty hymn, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*.¹¹ Through this song, worshippers will be presented with the central reality of the Christian faith: the grace of God is demonstrated most powerfully in the cross of Christ.

After the music, I lead the audience in reading the story of the rich young man in Matthew 19:16-30, the central text of the sermon. A brief explanation of the story precedes the reading to help people center their attention. After the passage has been read, an open time of reflective prayer allows people to meditate on the text; offer prayers of confession, thanksgiving, adoration; or, simply consider Christ. I conclude this portion of the service with a prayer asking God to reveal himself to the worshippers through the Scriptures. After the prayer, the message is presented.

A clip from *Titanic* is used in the message to provide a compelling contemporary illustration of the young man in Matthew 19. Due to its enormous popularity, most of the audience will have seen the film and be well-acquainted with the plot: the unsinkable ship sinks. The reason *Titanic* has been hugely successful, however, is the plot within the plot. Director James Cameron masterfully weaves into the movie the romance between Rose—a seventeen-year-old girl engaged to a rich, arrogant aristocrat—and Jack, a freelance artist, drifting through life with no real purpose or drive. Though outwardly exquisite, Rose is miserable inside. She has all that money can afford and she wants desperately to experience that which money cannot buy: happiness, security, intimacy,

⁹ Ross King, "In Need," in *Authentic*, by Chris Tomlin, 1996, CCLI Song #2431435.

¹⁰ Chris Tomlin, Isaac Watts, J. D. Walt, Jesse Reeves, Lowell Mason, "The Wonderful Cross," in *The Noise We Make*, CD, Sixsteps Records, 2001, CCLI Song #3148435.

¹¹ Isaac Watts and Lowell Mason, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, 1707, CCLI Song #27893.

and hope. Jack accidentally walks into her life and offers her these things and more. Even against incredible odds and in the face of impending death, the bond that Rose and Jack enjoyed was genuinely gratifying.

Several themes are presented in *Titanic* that invite healthy, spiritual reflection. The class struggle between the wealthy aristocrats in first class and the commoners on the decks below is intriguing. Also, the varying responses to the threat of death highlights the selfishness of some and the selflessness of others. The most compelling theme, however, centers in the dissatisfaction Rose experiences in the midst of her seemingly extravagant lifestyle. The clip shown details a conversation between Rose and Jack, in which she confides in him that her life is not what it appears to be. Her jewelry, long-flowing gowns, and sophisticated demeanor cannot mask her misery. In desperation, she says, “I feel like I’m in a crowded room yelling at the top of my lungs and no one hears me.”¹²

This clip serves as a springboard into the sermon on the rich, young ruler in Matthew 19, who came to Jesus looking for something that would give substance and purpose to his life. In the presentation of the message, a comparison can be made between Rose’s anguishing cry and the fascinating question of the young man, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16). Both Rose and the young man were trapped in a cycle of endless doubt. Both knew that their impressive credentials were not satisfying their basic human needs for love and acceptance. Furthermore, they both responded to the void by seeking help. However, unlike Rose,

¹² *Titanic*, directed and produced by James Cameron, Paramount Pictures and Twentieth Century Fox, 1997.

who gave her love to the one who loved her first, the rich and young ruler could not spare his fortune to pursue his faith. Throughout the sermon, the central theme will be reiterated: a maturing spiritual life centers in one's ability to choose God above all else.

After the message, a brief time of quiet reflection ensues. Accompanied by music, this can give worshippers an opportunity to respond to the message in a way of their choosing. Following the time of reflection, an offering is taken. As the offering is being received, the worship team and band lead worshippers in another verse of *Let Everything That Has Breath*. Inspired by Psalm 150:6, this provides a lasting reminder that God is to be praised by everything and in everything. The service ends with a prayer of blessing and a dismissal.

Worship Renewal in Older Generations

Grace Baptist Church is privileged to have a seasoned group of older worshippers, who faithfully glorify God through their lives. Though some do not understand completely or even agree with the vision to launch a contemporary service, they are committed nonetheless to supporting any change that engages more people in the worship of God. Furthermore, many increasingly are more open to varying worship practices and styles so long as they are woven carefully and prayerfully into the traditional services. To improve the overall worship culture at Grace Baptist Church, several practical enhancements can be made to foster renewal in older generations as well.

First, a focus group will be organized among those who prefer traditional worship in a similar way that the Ministry Enhancement Team was gathered to address the needs of the emerging generation. The primary goal of this second group will be to offer

insightful feedback and perspective concerning the traditional worship services and how they can be enhanced. These conversations likely will generate some very creative ideas for assisting older generations in the worship of God. Furthermore, they will help reduce the generational differences between those who prefer traditional worship and the pastoral staff, which is considerably young. Working together, the pastors and focus group participants can share ideas and strategies for enhancing the worship of God in older generations.

Another practical way to initiate worship renewal in older generations is through gradually blending the diverse worship expressions represented in the church family. Interestingly, the Grace Baptist community warmly has received a Ugandan children's choir to lead the church in worship. Though radically different in style and content, the church family thoroughly enjoyed their presentation and gained a greater appreciation for the creativity and diversity of the Body of Christ. In a similar way, Grace Baptist will intentionally strive to view the worship preferences of all generations as a unique gift from God for the purpose of building up the church. A children's choir will sing in the traditional service, for example, or the youth band will play. In both cases, the groups will present music that ministers to older generations and essentially create a relational bridge between the two generations.

One final way to encourage worship renewal in older generations is through Spirit-led teaching and conversations that flow from biblical worship principles and practices. Each generation is prone to gravitate toward a certain style of music, preaching, or service and claim them as appropriate. Over time, a resistance to other styles and methods develops, and newer approaches are dismissed as intolerable. To

encourage a broader appreciation for various types of worship, a biblical understanding of worship constantly will be presented. Through sermons, focus group dialogue, and one-on-one conversations, worship will be taught as the response of a uniquely gifted and created human being to the glory and greatness of God. The multiplicity of the human race affirms God's propensity for diversity; he loves to be worshipped in unique ways by people from every tribe, tongue, and generation. The Grace Baptist family, then, will learn to recognize and honor this reality among its own.

Retooling Worship Approaches in Youth and Children's Ministries

One final means of enhancing the worship culture at Grace Baptist Church is the thoughtful retooling of the worship approaches in the youth and children's ministries. Experiencing the authentic, uninhibited worship of God by youth and children is one of the more invigorating joys of life. If that is true at a human level, then God must be infinitely overjoyed to be worshipped by teenagers and youngsters. Accordingly, Grace Baptist will prioritize both training and releasing youth and children to worship God authentically and passionately.

Two simple and practical modifications in the youth and children's ministries will enhance the worship culture at Grace Baptist Church greatly. First, a steady move away from disconnected worship experiences and toward family worship will be pursued. It is increasingly more common among churches to divide families based on age and affinity and to tailor the worship experience to fit each person. While practical in the short term, one long-term implication is potentially hazardous: it further isolates generations in the worship of God. The goal of each generation must be to embrace the worship styles and

preferences of its successors and thus create continuity in the worship of God. Families, then, will learn to worship God together. Though age-sensitive worship environments are useful and necessary, they never should replace corporate worship. To that end, Grace Baptist will encourage families to come together in the worship of God.

The second practical enhancement involves using the abilities of youth and children in the various worship gatherings of the church. Both the youth and children's ministries contain multiple students who are learning to play instruments, sing in the choir, act, dance, draw, and develop other God-given gifts. Specifically, the youth have a band that leads worship at their midweek Bible Study, and the children's ministry is developing a drama team to augment the Sunday morning ministry. In both cases, these groups will be encouraged to use their talents in the corporate worship services of the church in both the traditional and contemporary settings. This will serve to further unify the generations in the worship of God and significantly enhance the worship culture of Grace Baptist Church.

CHAPTER 8

STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINING AND ENHANCING THE WORSHIP CULTURE

The worship culture at Grace Baptist Church will require ongoing modification and evaluation to sustain growth. Since the momentum of launching a contemporary service to reach emerging generations potentially will climax in the ensuing months following implementation, an intentional effort to reinforce the vision and gauge its progress will be needed. Led by me, the staff, and the core leadership group, this will involve continued sensitivity to those who are unsure of the vision, consistent support for those who are helping pursue it, and attentive encouragement for those who are uninvolved. Ultimately, the durability of the vision to enhance the worship culture at Grace Baptist will relate directly to its adaptability; the church family and the vision must remain receptive to frequent review and adjustment.

Two primary tools will be employed to measure and improve the worship culture at Grace Baptist Church: goals and assessment. Both the short- and long-term goals outlined in the ensuing sections will provide a framework for determining the overall effectiveness of the vision. Though more general than precise, the goals will produce healthy dialogue among the core leadership team and larger church family and aid the fluidity and ongoing innovation of the vision. The routine assessment of the vision will stimulate further conversation that will lead to improvements. Powerfully candid in

nature, the evaluation component of the vision will include a wide array of perspectives from those who lead, attend, and even avoid the contemporary service. Together, the establishment of predetermined goals coupled with the collective input of those impacted by the vision certainly will enhance the worship culture of Grace Baptist Church.

Short- and Long-term Goals

The initial energy created by the launch of the contemporary service will attract a great amount of interest and initiate the pursuit of several short-term goals. First, widespread acceptance and reception of the vision is the most obvious goal in the early weeks after launch. After months of prayer, planning, and vision casting, a positive response from those who lead, experience, and scrutinize the service is crucial to sustain momentum. The transition of the vision from mental image to actual reality undoubtedly will generate a variety of responses ranging from excitement to shock. Some who feared the worst will be pleasantly surprised. Others who were initially supportive will be utterly disappointed. Still others will be passionately reenergized in their devotion to God and his Church. Consequently, the key to realizing the initial objective of acceptance and reception is cultivating a sense of identification with the vision among the church family. For those who respond favorably, this will come quickly. They will connect naturally with the content and intent of the service and likely will begin promoting it. On the other hand, those who struggle early on might require a sensitive retelling of the biblical support and cultural necessity of it. Hopefully, as more people experience the transforming activity of God through the weekly services, the larger Grace family will come together to accept and embrace the vision.

A second goal to be pursued initially is the clear and consistent communication of the progress of the vision to the Grace Baptist family. As stated earlier, some people will be reluctant to affirm the preliminary success of the vision. One way to potentially neutralize the pessimistic feedback is to highlight how and where God is working. Through video testimonies, live interviews, or message illustrations, the stories of those whom God is impacting through the service will be shared. This will accomplish three main purposes. First, it will remind the church body of the centrality of God in the pursuit and realization of the vision. Second, it will create additional momentum and support for the vision. Third, it will encourage people who struggle with the vision to consider supporting it. While increased attendance or lively music might generate temporary excitement for the necessity of the contemporary service, the most compelling evidence is the move of God witnessed in transformed lives. Most practically, the clear and consistent communication of the vision's progress will motivate people across the church family to join God in his redemptive mission of drawing people into a relationship with himself through Jesus Christ.

A heightened commitment to the renewal of worship among older worshippers in the traditional service will be another short-term goal. In some sense, many in the traditional service will feel disconnected by the introduction of a contemporary service into the worship culture of the church. They might feel that the need for a contemporary service invalidates the need for a traditional service. Some oddly may be disheartened if their unchurched children or grandchildren suddenly develop an interest in the contemporary service, a further rejection of their preferred worship tradition; or, they might conclude that the focus and attention required to launch the new service will render

the traditional service unimportant or even unnecessary. To prevent these and other reactions, the enhancements aimed at older generations will be employed in conjunction with start of the new service. Members of the focus group for the traditional service will be assembled in the months preceding the contemporary service launch and will begin implementing the suggested improvements along the same New Year timeline. In publicizing the new contemporary service, the enhanced traditional service also will be fully promoted. Furthermore, the contemporary service will feature worship elements of the traditional service and vice versa to foster a cooperative, unified mindset among the church family. The addition of the contemporary service designed to reach emerging generations paradoxically will stimulate worship renewal in every generation represented in the Grace Baptist family.

A final short-term goal for enhancing the worship culture will be to sustain the momentum of the contemporary service and the passion of those who serve God and others through it. Visionary momentum is seemingly easier to gain than sustain. The newness and innovation of the contemporary service will create natural momentum. Attaching the words “new” and “different” to something typically attracts attention. Accordingly, the contemporary service likely will be buoyed by a strong team of servant leaders and a wave of curious attendees in the early months. As the freshness dissipates, however, it will be necessary to recast the vision by revisiting the biblical foundations of worship, the ministry of Jesus, and Paul’s challenge to be a living sacrifice in Romans 12:1-2. Moreover, everyone who helps to realize the vision on a weekly basis, from the core leadership team to the parking lot attendants to the video technicians, will need consistent and creative affirmation that God is working in and through them. In the end,

as the stories of transformed lives are highlighted, the momentum for the vision and the passion to pursue it will increase.

While the short-term goals primarily will focus on transition issues related to the vision and its broad acceptance among the Grace Baptist family, several long-term goals will be pursued to fortify the worship culture of the church for years to come. First, the continuous shift from self-centered, style-driven worship to the authentic worship of God will be sought with greater intensity. The rampant consumerism of American culture continues to nudge many twenty-first-century churches toward an options-based approach to God and worship. Similar to a food court at a shopping mall, spiritual consumers invade a church campus looking for a diverse collection of religious services. Taken to its extreme, this fosters an environment in which worshippers evaluate sermons, grade musicians, or compare churches rather than encounter the power and presence of God. The long-term objective of Grace Baptist Church, conversely, is to mature into a unified community of Christ-followers who gather for one supreme purpose: to honor and glorify God and his greatness. Though determined to tailor the worship venues and services to the specific needs of each generation, the church ultimately must gather to magnify God. As God is exalted and encountered in worship, his holiness and perfection accentuate the collective insufficiencies of humanity, thus affirming the core biblical reality that he alone is worthy to be worshipped (Deuteronomy 6:13).

The second long-term goal will be to cultivate among the Grace Baptist family a continuing commitment to spiritual transformation. Since the worship of God involves a fundamental recognition of human depravity in light of the glory and greatness of God, worship should stimulate an openness to change in the heart and mind of the worshipper.

Paul affirms that spiritual worship includes the routine presentation of oneself to God in an act of holy sacrifice which fuels a disdain for the ideologies of the world and an ongoing transformation of the mind (Romans 12:1-2). Accordingly, worship that does not lead to change is impotent and irrelevant. The worship culture of Grace Baptist Church, then, will prioritize spiritual transformation as normative for maturing followers of Christ. Moving beyond the surface-level changes required in initiating the new service (i.e., contemporary music, video screens, scheduling, and so forth), worshippers will be challenged regularly to follow God by denying themselves and humbly serving others. Furthermore, a shift in what constitutes spiritual change hopefully will ensue. Sometimes confined to outward acts like attending services or singing in the choir, transformation will be rooted in the inward cultivation of spiritual fruits such as compassion, generosity, and patience. Essentially, Grace Baptist Church will strive to develop a worship culture in which worshippers continually are becoming more authentic and intentional in their devotion to Christ.

A growing appreciation for the diversity of people and their God-given gifts is a third long-term goal of the enhanced worship culture at Grace Baptist Church. The infinite creativity of God, on display in both nature and the assorted abilities of individuals, underscores his radical commitment to uniqueness. By design, the Church is a reflection of the endless imagination of its Creator and comprises a diverse mixture of creatures young and old, seasoned and immature, black and white, and traditional and contemporary. The more diverse the body grows, the more heaven-like it becomes. At Grace Baptist, a wide array of gifts, styles, and personalities will be employed in both the traditional and contemporary worship of God; and, each person and talent will be highly

cherished. Rather than preferring those who sing a certain genre over those who play another, for example, the biblical precedent of valuing every member as equally significant to the body of GBC believers will be applied (1 Corinthians 12:14-26). Consequently, three practical applications of this text will emerge among the Grace Baptist family: worshippers will begin to see others in the body and their abilities as gifts from God and not as threats; worshippers will develop a healthy respect for the God-arranged gift mixture of the congregation, which bolsters the community and viability of the body; and, in using its diverse gifts to magnify the Lord, the church will reflect the creativity and originality of God in a beautiful way.

Finally, one other long-term goal for sustaining and enhancing the worship culture of the church will involve imitating the lifestyle of worship of Jesus Christ. Specifically informed by John 4 and the Lord's conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well, worshippers who comprise Grace Baptist must come to view worship not as a singular event at a certain location but as a habitual act of devotion to God wherever he leads them. The corporate worship of God on Sunday, therefore, ignites the ongoing and personal worship of God by individuals throughout the week. In giving the woman the living water of the gospel and joining the Father in his pursuit of true worshippers, Jesus was worshipping God. Likewise, Grace Baptist must both gather to worship and dismiss to worship. Through acts of service, a small group Bible Study, a lunchtime conversation with a colleague, the rearing of children, or a monetary donation to a struggling neighbor, the church family will learn to engage routinely in the worship of God far beyond the refuge of the church facility. This missional approach of being the Body of Christ, as

opposed to meeting on Sundays to “do” church, mimics the ministry model of Jesus and brings glory to the Father.

Assessment Tools

Since the actual realization of the vision to enhance the worship culture at Grace Baptist Church is yet ahead, a thorough analysis of its effectiveness is not presently feasible. However, a plan to critique, update, and rethink the vision on a scheduled basis is discussed here. The following built-in checkpoints will be used to evaluate the vision from its earliest preparation onward. First, weekly planning and evaluation sessions will be mandatory for staff and core lay leaders of both the traditional and contemporary services. These gatherings will be driven by prayer and will include a systematic review of the previous service, a discussion of ideas for upcoming services and possible worship elements to enhance them, promotional suggestions, and conversations about how the vision is being processed by the broader church family.

Second, a monthly feedback session including church staff, core lay leaders, extended lay personnel, and helpers who are serving in both services will be incorporated into the ministry schedule to facilitate unity and momentum among the extended leadership group. Preferably near the first of the month, this session will accomplish four main objectives: update the larger group on how God has used them in the previous month to transform lives as well as reveal specific themes and plans; review of needs for upcoming services; inspire and encourage the group for excellence and commitment; and, unify the team by praying for God’s wisdom in meeting the spiritual needs and opportunities he is creating. The atmosphere for this larger leadership gathering will be

upbeat and optimistic and will serve as a momentum-building opportunity for the entire ministry team.

Third, a concerted effort will be made to encourage feedback from people across the Grace Baptist family concerning the various enhancements introduced into the worship culture of the church. From input cards in random services to suggestion boxes in the church foyer to a “click-to-suggest” button on the ministry website, opportunities to enhance the worship culture through feedback will be provided continually. It will be a top priority for the staff, core leadership teams, and lay servants to synchronize with the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of those to whom they minister each weekend.

Fourth, those charged with leading the services (i.e., pastor, worship leader, drama director, and so forth) will invite open and transparent evaluation of their leadership from those closest to them. Through wide-ranging yet detailed topics on a questionnaire and quarterly one-on-one conversations with key followers, the leaders will receive invaluable insight into how they are being heard, accepted, and followed. This will help us develop in our leadership and subsequently influence the direction of the church. Finally, the most compelling assessment tool employed in enhancing the worship culture at Grace Baptist Church is the discerning move of God through the Holy Spirit. Through consistent reflection in the Scriptures, concentrated prayer dialogue, and the insightful counsel of godly leaders, the will and priorities of God will be sought. Above all, the Spirit-informed, prayer-saturated appraisal of the ministry at Grace Baptist will determine how the vision is shaped and altered.

The overall endorsement of the worship culture enhancements will be considered from several angles. An increasing commitment among the church family to move away

from human-sensitive tradition and embrace the genuine worship of God will indicate maturity. Moreover, worship that inspires people to minister to those both within and beyond the church family also will serve as a positive step in the right direction. With respect to attendance figures, more individuals participating in both the traditional and contemporary services during the initial year also will denote a certain amount of progress and collective ownership of the ministry. The ultimate measure of spiritual transformation, however, will be a steady flow of individuals who are called out from the world to worship Jesus as Lord, imitate him in their lives, and pursue a love relationship with him and others (Ephesians 5:1-2). Central to the vision to enhance the worship culture of Grace Baptist Church is the ongoing development and maturation of Christ-followers. While attempting to educate older generations and engage emerging generations in the worship of God, the church must not lose sight of realizing Jesus' vision to reach the community and, ultimately, the world with his gospel (Matthew 28:18-20). To move individuals toward a genuine faith encounter with God that produces a lifelong passion to grow in Christ must remain the fundamental objective.

CONCLUSION

Everything exists by God and for God; his glory is the central purpose of all things (Romans 11:36). The genuine worship of God is predicated on the core reality that he alone is worthy to be glorified, magnified, and adored. Throughout history, God consistently has revealed his glory through his imaginative work in nature. A close encounter with Mount Ranier or a visit to the Grand Canyon easily confirms the psalmist's assessment that "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Psalm 19:1). These vast and stunning creations of God reflect his glory and not that of man. Though mute and inanimate, Mount Rainer and the Grand Canyon still communicate. They continually point those who are amazed at their enormity and beauty to acknowledge the enormous beauty of the one who made them, for he alone is awesome, powerful, and infinitely amazing.

God created humans, his crowning creation, to glorify him in a way similar to the masterpieces of nature. Through words, attitudes, actions, motivations, and choices, humans either highlight the greatness of God or themselves. Tragically, many invest the totality of their lives in the latter. Consumed with the exaltation of self, they never see or admit the truth that in God "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Like the atheist who peers over the Grand Canyon and entirely rejects the existence of its sculptor, people are prone to be surrounded by the vastness of God and his gifts and yet

never acknowledge either. Claiming to be wise, they sadly exchange the glory of God for that which appears satisfying and invite the sobering wrath of God (Romans 1:18-23).

People are inherently incapable and disinterested in glorifying God. Left alone, humans pursue self-worship indefinitely and ultimately incur an isolated environment void of God and full of eternal anguish. Miraculously, God enters history in the person of Jesus Christ to rescue humans from themselves. His purposeful death and subsequent resurrection validate his commitment to glorify himself in people who reflect his greatness through transformed lives. Throughout his earthy ministry, Jesus continually called people from a life of self-exaltation and eventual spiritual demise to something eternally better, greater, and holier. Tax collectors, prostitutes, fisherman, adulteresses, those with physical and emotional disabilities, and the like were liberated from the bondage of self-centeredness and gifted with new life in Christ. Jesus came to join his father in the redemptive mission of drawing true worshippers to himself.

The Church is a God-assembled community of Christ-followers who exist to glorify God. Unified by the transforming work of Jesus on the cross, the local church is commissioned to take the gospel to the ends of the world, in order to make and nurture disciples of Jesus who worship God in Spirit and truth (Matthew 28:18-20). Furthermore, the Church is called to represent Christ effectively in the world (Acts 1:8). The progression of these two biblical objectives is rooted fundamentally in the worship culture of the Church. As people consistently are challenged to treasure and adore Christ above all else, they gradually become more open and impassioned to participate in God's relentless pursuit of true worshippers. Like the Samaritan woman who implored her neighbors to meet the man who knew everything about her and yet still offered her the

living water of the gospel, a genuine encounter with Jesus Christ satisfies one thirst and creates another.

Grace Baptist Church continually will strive to be a community of genuine Christ-followers who authentically worship God in Spirit and truth. Flanked by a strong, biblically sensitive heritage in the past and a future teeming with untapped potential, the church is situated on the cusp of intense renewal in worship and ministry. Older generations are in place to provide the depth and maturity needed to solidify a foundation for spiritual growth. A young leadership team is primed to lead and engage the growing population of emerging generations that comprise the surrounding ministry area. Tangible resources—like facilities, money, time, and energy—are abundantly on hand as the Lord purposely has arranged. Combined, these offer compelling evidence that God is ready to unfold his strategy to create a worship culture at Grace Baptist Church that engages older and emerging generation in the worship of God.

To effectively navigate the implementation of the strategy detailed in the preceding chapters, several final observations can be drawn. First, the vision to merge emerging generations reared in postmodern culture with an established community of seasoned Independent Baptists is bold and aggressive. Essentially, it involves a shift from self-centered ministry to a ministry to serve others under the direct supervision of the Holy Spirit. The core leadership team is consciously aware of an inherent issue in all forms of worship to become unbalanced, specifically with respect to vertical and horizontal emphases. Vertically, it is possible to become so consumed with the personal worship of God that one neglects the needs and perceptions of others. On the other hand, some people become so committed to making inroads with unbelievers that standards are

compromised and the genuine worship of God is hindered. To educate older generations and engage emerging generations, Grace Baptist prayerfully must seek to foster a worship culture that honors God and serves people.

Worship is rooted in sacrifice. The writer of Hebrews says to “continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God” (Hebrews 13:5). To successfully enhance the worship culture at Grace Baptist will require a persistent willingness among the church family to forfeit personal preferences and conveniences for the sake of the larger vision. Naturally, Jesus perfectly exemplifies a life of humble sacrifice. Writing to the church in Philippi, Paul challenges the church to possess the mind of Christ. Specifically, he says:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:3-11)

Notably, worship and sacrifice are connected intricately in this text. God’s exaltation of Christ to a place where every human will worship him flows from a life of profound humility and unfathomable sacrifice. The sincere worship of God presupposes humble sacrifice. Accordingly, in its collective effort to create a worship culture that reaches older and emerging generations, the Grace Baptist family must strive to emulate Christ and his selfless pursuit of God’s glory that made his sacrifice on the cross a joy (Hebrews 12:2).

Finally, the strategy for creating a worship culture that engages older and emerging generations at Grace Baptist Church is about God, through God, and for God. From start to finish, the vision to pursue the authentic worship of God ironically is inspired, fueled, and realized by him. As such, the entire Grace Baptist family must look continually to him for wisdom and leadership. While human ingenuity and modern technology are helpful, they are simply instruments in the plan of God. He must oversee vision-casting conversations, inform sermons, intersect lives, and transform people into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. Without a doubt, the task is infinitely larger and more challenging than any individual or group could ever possibly imagine or achieve. Initiated in the mind and heart of God, the vision to revolutionize the worship culture at Grace Baptist Church will be pursued for the glory of God.

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