

Please **HONOR** the copyright of
these documents by not
retransmitting or making any
additional copies in any form

(Except for private personal use).

We appreciate your respectful
cooperation.

Theological Research Exchange Network
(TREN)

P.O. Box 30183
Portland, Oregon 97294
USA

Website: www.tren.com

E-mail: rwjones@tren.com

Phone# 1-800-334-8736

ATTENTION CATALOGING LIBRARIANS

TREN ID#

Online Computer Library Center (OCLC)

MARC Record #

FAITH JOURNEY: A STRATEGY FOR NURTURING DISCIPLESHIP
AT LENAPE VALLEY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A TRAINING MANUAL
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

W. DOUGLAS HOOD, JR.
FEBRUARY 2011

ABSTRACT

Faith Journey: A Strategy for Nurturing Discipleship at Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church

W. Douglas Hood, Jr.

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2011

The purpose of this paper, with attached training manual, is to offer a personalized approach to growth in Christian discipleship for adults of the Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church through the development of a personal growth plan around five faith practices: worship regularly, pray daily, learn and apply God's Word, participate in a ministry, and give financially to the ministry of the church.

Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church, located in New Britain, Pennsylvania, sees its spiritual vitality diminished by the absence of a clear pathway for spiritual growth. Growing into true disciples committed to the missional character of the church has captivated the church's current leadership, and direction for accomplishing this is being sought. This paper's strategy is expected to result in self-reproducing disciples of Jesus Christ.

The paper includes three major parts. The first part addresses the contextual factors of the church, resulting in a nominal practice and experience of the Christian faith. Three chapters examine the context for ministry, the symptoms of the discipleship deficit, an assessment of underlying causes, and the consequences to congregational health and vitality.

The second part, divided into four chapters, provides a theological foundation for the local church to locate the center of its activity in raising up self-reproducing disciples

of Jesus Christ. This part examines the missional impulse of the Scriptures and the call to form disciples through spiritual disciplines. It also illuminates learning goals, pedagogy, learning design, implementation, and assessment of the adult formation program.

The third section (appendix) contains the training and resource manual used by participants in the personalized approach to Christian discipleship. This manual consists of eight small-group-based experiences that precede the development of a personal growth plan for discipleship growth. An assessment tool identifies for participants both present strengths and opportunities for growth in personal discipleship. Three points of engagement shape the process of discipleship growth, recognizing the value of time alone, time in community, and time sharing with others.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD

Words: 347

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
INTRODUCTION	1
PART ONE: THE CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE FOR DISCIPLESHIP GROWTH	
CHAPTER	
1. COMMUNITY ANALYSIS, HISTORY, PROFILE, AND OPPORTUNITIES OF LENAPE VALLEY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH	7
2. SYMPTOMS OF THE DISCIPLESHIP DEFICIT	12
3. UNDERLYING CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF DISCIPLESHIP DEFICIT	24
PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS AND PATHWAY FOR DISCIPLESHIP GROWTH	
4. THE CHURCH AND ITS MISSION	35
5. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR FORMING DISCIPLES THROUGH FAITH PRACTICES	44
6. LEARNING GOALS AND PEDAGOGY OF THE TRAINING MANUAL	60
7. IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE CURRICULUM	73
APPENDIX	
TRAINING MANUAL	89
FOREWORD	90
TRAINING MANUAL CONTENTS.....	91
APPRECIATION	92
INTRODUCING THE 14-WEEK JOURNEY	94

SESSION

1. ENTERING INTO COMMUNITY	101
2. UNDERSTANDING DISCIPLESHIP	109
3. FAITHPRACTICE: WORSHIP REGULARLY	118
4. FAITHPRACTICE: PRAY DAILY.....	126
5. FAITHPRACTICE: LEARN AND APPLY GOD’S WORD.....	134
6. FAITHPRACTICE: PARTICIPATE IN A MINISTRY.....	142
7. FAITHPRACTICE: GIVE FINANCIALLY TO THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH	150
8. CHARTING THE JOURNEY	158
BIBLIOGRAPHY	176

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Missional Church Team for their leadership, prayers, and support throughout this project. Karen Greer, Nancy Strickland, Karen Emery, Kathy Johnson, you are people of faith with eyes for God's vision and hearts for moving the church outward and forward toward God's purposes.

Raymond Greer has been a pastor's pastor for me for eleven years, loving me, praying for and with me, and challenging me to greater effectiveness in the practice of ministry.

Marcia Telthorster and Jay Brodish have been professional coaches during my ministry in this faith community. Their insights, prayers, and encouragement have sustained me, particularly in times when I grew weary.

Jay and Sue Brodish, you have affirmed and enabled my continuing ministry in this place at considerable personal sacrifice, for which I am deeply grateful.

Laura Cooney, as always, was a tremendous support with her administrative assistance and help in protecting my preparation time for this project. More, she has been a trusted friend and partner in ministry, whose wise and trusted counsel has strengthened my ministry.

Most importantly, I deeply appreciate my family, my wife, Grace, and children, Nathanael and Rachael, who gave up time with me that I may commit energy and time to bring this project to completion. Each of you has made our life together a joyful place.

INTRODUCTION

Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church, located in New Britain, Pennsylvania, is a forty-seven-year-old congregation that has found the spiritual vitality of its youth diminished by the absence of a clear pathway for spiritual growth. Energy, time, and money are primarily allocated to take care of the church and meet the needs of its members. Absent in most members is a view to a larger purpose for ministry, which has resulted in the lack of a transforming experience of God. Growing into true disciples committed to the missional character of the church has captivated the current leadership of the church, and direction for accomplishing this is being sought.

The purpose of this paper with attached training manual is to offer a multi-faceted program that has as its aim spiritual transformation. A standardized approach to spiritual transformation, a “one-size-fits-all,” has been eschewed in favor of a personalized one through the development of a personal growth plan. This plan will be developed from a personal assessment of five faith practices and the degree to which they are operative in the participant’s faith journey. The five faith practices that will be assessed, or measured, for this approach to personal discipleship growth are: Worship Regularly, Pray Daily, Learn and Apply God’s Word, Participate in a Ministry, and Give Financially to the Ministry of the Church. The anticipated outcome for participants is authentic growth in Christian discipleship that results in self-reproducing disciples of Jesus Christ.

The paper will include three major sections. The first section will address the contextual factors of the Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church resulting in a nominal practice and experience of the Christian faith. Three chapters will examine the context for ministry, the symptoms of the discipleship deficit, an assessment of underlying causes, and the consequences to congregational health and vitality. Chapter 1 will provide an analysis of the communities of Central Bucks, Pennsylvania, where the church's ministry is located, along with the church's history, profile, and opportunities for ministry development.

Chapter 2 will present the four primary symptoms evident in the Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church that suggest a discipleship deficit among the larger membership. Clarity of the symptoms is required before a strategy can be developed to positively grow self-reproducing disciples of Jesus Christ. The preferred future is one where a paradigm shift occurs: members becoming caught up in the notion that they "are the church" rather than the current sense that they "belong to a church."

Chapter 3 will provide an assessment of the underlying causes of the present discipleship deficit. Barriers to growing self-reproducing disciples cannot be dismantled until they are named. Once the barriers are named, a strategy may be developed for breaking through barriers and reconnecting with God's design for the church. Additionally, the chapter will examine the consequences to the church when an intentional strategy of birthing self-reproducing disciples is absent.

The paper's second section, divided into four chapters, will provide a clear and credible theological foundation for the call of the local church to locate the center of all church activity in its missional character of raising-up self-reproducing disciples of Jesus

Christ who participate in the expansion of God's kingdom. Two chapters will examine the missional impulse of the Scriptures and the call to forming disciples through spiritual disciplines. The third and fourth chapters will illuminate learning goals, pedagogical matters, the learning design, implementation, and assessment of the adult formation program.

Chapter 4 addresses the missional character of the church as defined in Holy Scripture. The articulation of such a missional theology is a response to a church that has lost its biblical moorings and has drifted into a practice of ministry that is internally focused, resulting in a loss of the thrill and adventure of the Christian life. Fresh attention to Scripture and a theological inquiry of God's design and purpose for the church offers the promise of a sustained movement back to God's agenda and the recovery of an authentic understanding of what it means to know God.

Chapter 5 offers a fresh examination of the life of a disciple. Christian discipleship is not merely the mental consent to believe in Jesus Christ. Rather, it is the decision to reorient one's life around the life practices of Jesus. Three points of engagement will provide the structure for the faith practices in one's life: time alone, to work a personal growth plan and experience silence and solitude; time in community for the purposes of support, encouragement, and accountability; and time sharing with others the personal experiences of growth.

Chapter 6 presents a process for effecting transformation in the lives of people. Developed by Richard Peace, "A Paradigm to Guide Transformation,"¹ will provide the

¹ Richard Peace, "Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World" (seminar notebook, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2008).

contours for the development of the training manual. Learning goals will be identified, along with the development of a learning template and a consideration of anticipated outcomes.

Chapter 7 covers the learning design, implementation, assessment, and follow-up of the training manual. A spiritual formation program that has the capacity to meaningfully respond to the identified issues confronting the membership of the church and empower ordinary people to live extraordinary lives must meet two criteria: it must be simple to grasp and execute and be organic, meaning that the multiplication of disciples would be a natural process.

Each training manual session will have its own cognitive, affective, and psychomotor objectives. The design of the sessions will take into account the fact that people effectively learn in distinct ways with different dominant senses. Learning experiences will be designed to accommodate all learners. An approach to implementation will be examined that is specific in scope and envisions the possibility of organic growth throughout the church. Methods for follow-up and evaluation will complete this chapter.

The appendix is the training manual – a small group resource, in eight sessions, that presents five faith practices of Christian discipleship and offers a pathway for growing as a disciple of Jesus. The first session presents small groups as the optimal context for spiritual formation and invites participants to sign a faith community covenant. The second session examines a convergence of wisdom about discipleship and invites participants to think deeply about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. The third session through the seventh closely examine each of the five faith practices

identified for this process of spiritual transformation, with particular attention given to what each faith practice looks like in a disciple's journey of growth. The final session will provide the opportunity for participants to assess the faith practice that is underdeveloped in their own faith journey and receive guidance for the development of a personal growth plan. Three points of engagement will be presented for sustaining the personal journey of growth and offering transparency to the process, inviting others to participation—the organic growth principal.²

Though not always evident in churches, God has purposed every community of faith to penetrate the nations for Jesus Christ, calling persons to become apprentices of Jesus. Faithfulness to this larger purpose will require an intentional process of discipling church members that each may grow spiritually and engage in vibrant, dynamic ministry. As author and news reporter Christine Wicker once said, “The result will be a church of such power that all the gods of modernity can never match.”³

² Neil Cole, *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 59.

³ Christine Wicker, *The Fall of the Evangelical Nation: The Surprising Crisis inside the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 3.

PART ONE

THE CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE
FOR DISCIPLESHIP GROWTH

CHAPTER 1

COMMUNITY ANALYSIS, HISTORY, PROFILE, AND OPPORTUNITIES OF LENAPE VALLEY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

This chapter will provide an analysis of the Central Bucks, Pennsylvania, communities where the church seeks to provide a Christian presence and witness, highlighting particular factors that directly impact the challenge of leading believers personally and practically into a transformative experience with the risen Christ. It will include the practical realities of life in the cultural location of the congregation, the community issues that emerge from those realities, and what the faith preferences of this region suggest for developing a strategy for spiritual growth. These considerations will be followed by a brief history of the Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church, a profile or identification of some key parameters of the congregation, and identification of opportunities for ministry development.

Lifestyle in Central Bucks County

The communities of Doylestown, New Britain, and Chalfont are located in central Bucks County, an affluent suburb of Philadelphia. For many years, the area was a rural farming community that, in the past thirty years, has seen rapid residential and commercial development. Residents are primarily upper middle class, white professionals with a healthy presence of the very rich in large multi-million dollar homes. Of those who are churched, the majority are Roman Catholic. Roman Catholic churches are continually

being planted to keep pace with the growth,¹ and older churches seem to have unlimited resources for continued expansion and renovation. According to a recent demographic study,² those residents who self-identify as Protestants are primarily Presbyterian.

A strong entrepreneurial ethos is present in central Bucks County, and success seems to be measured by the community in which one lives, the cars that are driven, and the memberships in country clubs that continue to be developed. Involvement with children's education appears to be strong with an equal passion for all things athletic.³ All this also brings the unmistakable presence of sheer exhaustion by most that make their homes here.

Outside pressures that confront the population are economic, largely the result of living beyond appropriate means, drug abuse by children who seem to have very comfortable lives without a strong purpose, the struggle to understand how to achieve a fulfilling marriage, and aging parent care. Pleasure is found in athletic events, dining in fashionable restaurants, and weekends in the mountains or at the New Jersey Shore. The

¹ For example, Mary, Mother of the Redeemer Roman Catholic Church, located in Chalfont 4 miles from Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church, completed major renovation, expansion of seating to 1200, and addition of a private elementary school. Work was completed four years ago. Groundbreaking was held for Our Lady of Guadalupe Roman Catholic Church, a new church in Buckingham Township, ten miles from Lenape Valley. Its seating capacity will be three thousand.

² Percept Group, Inc. (www.perceptgroup.com) First View, 2009 Study Area Definition, 2.0 mile radius of Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church, New Britain, PA.

³ Central Bucks School District is served by three high schools: Central Bucks West, Central Bucks East, and Central Bucks South. All have state ranked sport teams with particular excellence in football. Central Bucks West has won the state title for football three times in the past nine years. Central Bucks School District is the third largest school district in the state, behind Philadelphia and Pittsburgh School Districts. In terms of country clubs, Doylestown Country Club, the oldest, completed significant renovations five years ago. Pinecrest Country Club, located three miles from the church, completed renovations two years ago, and the newest club, located in Buckingham Township—Jericho National—is only three years old.

deepest needs, though, not always realized at a conscious level, are finding life direction and spiritual growth.

Overall, the faith involvement level and preference for historic Christian religious affiliations is high though the fastest racial/ethnic growth is among Asians who are bringing a variety of East Asian religious expressions and practice. Worship, music, and architectural style preferences in the area favor the traditional, and the church programming of choice leans toward recreational above both spiritual development and missional impact in the community. This is mostly likely the result of lives that are lived at a rapid pace, and church programming is viewed as that place for slowing down for rest and leisure.

History and Characteristics of Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church

In 1958, the strategy committee of the Philadelphia Presbytery, aware of the potential growth of the suburbs, encouraged the purchase of six acres of land in the New Britain Borough. During the summer of 1960, the leadership of the Doylestown Presbyterian Church encouraged all who lived in the Chalfont-New Britain area to pioneer the planting of a new church. In the fall of 1961, Jack Heinsohn was called as organizing pastor. On March 25, 1962, the congregation of Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church was formally organized with 120 members.

During the forty-seven years since the birth of Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church, the congregation has been served by only three senior pastors. This has generated a high level of trust in clergy within the congregation. Growth in membership and worship attendance has required expansion and renewal of the church facilities on three occasions to remain a vibrant force for God in the community. Additionally, the

first associate pastor was called in July of 1986 to staff the growing ministry demands. A total of three different pastors have served in that position to the present day.

The Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church is the second largest Presbyterian Church in the area of five to seven churches, depending upon how one would draw the circle. Yet, we are only slightly shy of six hundred members; the largest church, with nearly two thousand members, is just five miles away. The larger church, Doylestown Presbyterian Church, is located in the center of the most prominent township of central Bucks and is widely considered the “country club” church. Accordingly, the church membership is rich with car dealers, attorneys, medical professionals, and owners and CEOs of many larges businesses located throughout southeastern Pennsylvania.

Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church has less affluence, though certainly the majority of the members would be considered comfortable by many standards of success. A handful of the membership would be equal with the most affluent located at Doylestown Presbyterian Church, and several dozen members are at the opposite end of the economic scale with modest incomes. Though the church is not small, nearly six hundred members and two pastors, the dominant self-image is that we are a small congregation. Our location, only five miles from its two-thousand-member parent that birthed the church forty-six years ago, may be the primary reason for this inaccurate perception.

Members of the church largely mirror the community with few exceptions: upper middle class people who work hard and seem to be in a permanent state of exhaustion. Stewardship development among the membership has historically been poor. The primary contributing factor may be the high cost of living in the region and the cultural

pressures to project the image of prosperity through lifestyle. A recent capital campaign directed by an outside consultant was successful beyond expectations and seems to have been the turning point for the poor stewardship culture.

Exhaustion and the lack of stewardship development – both absent in the early years of the church - are markers that the spiritual vitality of the church's youth has been diminished. Energy, time, and money are primarily allocated to take care of the church and meet the needs of its members. Absent in most members is a view to a larger purpose for ministry, which has resulted in the lack of a transforming experience of God. Growing into true disciples committed to the missional character of the church is not an identified priority for the majority of the membership.

CHAPTER 2

SYMPTOMS OF THE DISCIPLESHIP DEFICIT

In an engaging and insightful book *Creative Spirituality: The Way of the Heart*, Robert Wuthnow identifies some of the criticism that has been voiced in recent years about spirituality in the broader culture. One of the most recurrent criticisms is that too many Americans shop around for spiritual cues, rather than settling into communities of faith where they can learn discipline or serve others. Spiritual seeking draws criticism because it seems to reflect a shallow consumerist mentality.¹

Against this consumerist mentality, Holy Scripture, the Bible, announces that an authentic relationship with God is rooted in a personal engagement in all that God is doing in the world. It is an announcement from personal gratification to participation in God's activity; from an inward spirituality to an outward commitment to disciple the nations. Quick routes to personal gratification may be an easier course to navigate, but it is a pilgrimage that is unknown in Scripture and one that fails to encounter the deep mysteries of faith.

This failure to navigate the deeper waters of faith leaves people standing on the shore of God's promises, rarely encountering God in a fashion that results in transformation. Discouragement settles in, and those who claim to follow Christ wonder if there is not something more. Greg Ogden, one who has thought deeply about

¹ Robert Wuthnow, *Creative Spirituality: The Way of the Heart* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 269.

discipleship in the American church, says that there appears to be a general lack of comprehension among many who claim Jesus as savior regarding the implications of following him as Lord.²

This lack of comprehension comes into focus at Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church in the incongruity between the number who identify themselves as members of the church and the lack of spiritual vitality and energy evident in the congregation. The long-term effectiveness of any strategy for nurturing discipleship in the local church is measured by individual lives experiencing change as fully devoted followers of Christ. Development of such a strategy requires clarity of the symptoms of the current discipleship deficit among the larger membership. Most prevalent of the symptoms at Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church are four: the disproportionately large number of church members who are passive recipients of ministry, the small number of church members invested in spiritual growth as evidenced by participation in small groups and discipling groups, the lack of personal witness to unbelievers, and the small average annual financial commitment per member. Consequently, an outsider looking in on the church will observe many of the ministries flowing inward and the absence of any concerted attention to discipling the world. Before examining the causes and consequences of the discipleship deficit at Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church, this chapter will explore briefly each of the four symptoms.

² Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2003), 22.

Large Number of Members Who Are Passive Recipients of Ministry

Several years ago, I began to steadily gain weight. Along with the weight gain was the loss of energy and sense of well-being. During a visit with the doctor, I was told that, left uncorrected, my steady weight gain could eventually result in heart disease and an early death. The pathway back to optimal health and vitality was diet and exercise. Either diet or exercise alone would be insufficient. Both would be required, and both would require discipline.

Spiritual health requires the same. The diet that sustains spiritual health is God's Word. The exercise is our active involvement in the missional activity of God—our participation in the work of ministry. Both are vital to sustaining a sturdy, sound, and attractive faith. Neither can be neglected.

Often, there is a mistaken notion in churches that pastors are paid to do the work of ministry for the local church. That is about as foolish as paying someone to diet and exercise on your behalf. Nor is it biblical. The fourth chapter of Ephesians provides God's pathway to spiritual maturity and health: church members are to share in the work of ministry, and the job of the pastor is to equip them for that work.

Someone once said that new Christians begin their faith journey with a faith in Jesus. As they take responsibility for their spiritual growth and maturity, they move to another place. They continue their faith journey with the faith of Jesus. The difference is significant. The New Testament picture of the church is an every-member ministry that results in the latter: followers who have the faith of Jesus. Such a faith requires a value shift in the dominant culture of the mainline Protestant American Church: one from church membership that comes with privileges to one of active participation in the

expansion of God's Kingdom. Glenn McDonald, author of *The Disciple Making Church*, explains it this way: "I can no longer agree with my culture that my life is my own, that my time is a personal possession, and that others exist for my benefit. I cannot affirm the multitude of ads that declare, 'I'm worth it,' 'I deserve it,' and 'This I do for me.'"³

Ministry that is shaped and directed by the Bible is not one of paid clergy who are set apart for the purposes of meeting the needs of the local faith community. Scripture's reoccurring image for ministry is the equipping and mobilization of ordinary people for participation in the extraordinary work of God in the world. The apostle Paul speaks of such ordinary people when he writes, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). Here Paul is employing the image of the church as the body of Christ. All believers have been given particular gifts for ministry, and, when placed into the practice of ministry, each member functionally behaves as a body part that contributes to the health and function of the whole. Pastor and author Michael W. Foss says in his book *Power Surge* that "...all the power the church will ever need comes from people – people who have learned to live 'in Christ' by living lives of disciplined discipleship."⁴

Though the image of all believers participating in ministry is pervasive throughout Scripture, the reality of the local church is far different. What is customary, and particularly descriptive of Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church, is that there is a relatively small percentage of people who are actively exercising spiritual gifts to

³ Glenn McDonald, *The Disciple Making Church: From Dry Bones to Spiritual Vitality* (Grand Haven, MI: Faith Walk Publishing, 2004), 230.

⁴ Michael W. Foss, *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 4.

advance the work of ministry. The 80/20 rule seems to be a formidable barrier to overcome. Giving patterns of many churches demonstrate that 20 percent of the congregation gives 80 percent of the income. On examination of the active participation of members in some form of ministry, the ratio remains similar. The 80 percent not actively involved in ministry have adopted a consumer mentality, evaluating the work of the 20 percent and questioning if that 20 percent is adequately meeting the felt needs of the 80 percent. Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City writes that the process of mobilizing members into ministers “starts by articulating clearly and regularly a theology of ‘every-member ministry’ From the pulpit, in the classes, by word of mouth, it must be communicated that every layperson is a minister and that ministry is finding needs and meeting them in the goal of the spread of the kingship of Christ.”⁵

Small Number of Members Invested in Spiritual Growth

Once an engagement of marriage is announced between a U.S. citizen and a non-citizen seeking to remain in the U.S., an immigration officer is assigned to the couple. The purpose, of course, is to investigate the legitimacy of the relationship. Does love truly exist between the couple, or is this a relationship of convenience for the non-citizen, a relationship solely for the purposes of avoiding deportation?

Hollywood has produced several movies that demonstrate how the process works. The couple are separated and individually quizzed about their knowledge of the other. Some of the questions are fairly basic, such as identifying the fiancée’s favorite fragrance

⁵ Eric Swanson, *Ten Paradigm Shifts toward Community Transformation*, White Paper (Dallas: Leadership Network, www.leadnet.org), 6.

or color. Others go deeper. The idea is that those in a legitimate relationship really know one another.

Many claim to love Jesus. Yet, what some would call love is really a relationship of convenience. It is convenient to belong to the church where my spouse worships, it is convenient to easily accommodate my parents' desires, or, perhaps, it is advantageous to business to be well-connected through the local church. Such a connection to the church, or Jesus, is not really about love.

Jesus never settles for assurances that we love him. Nearly every encounter with Jesus is one in which Jesus pushes for a very specific understanding of what it means to love him. The expression of a beautiful sentiment of love has no value for Jesus. What Jesus does value is whether you have paid attention to him; to all that he taught. More, Jesus is interested in whether you have reoriented your life to his. Authentic love knows no less.

The reality is that only a very small percentage of believers in the church have made any conscious effort to reorient their lives to that of Jesus or have a plan for doing so. Simple numbers tell the story at Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church. In a congregation of nearly six hundred members, there is one adult Sunday school class of approximately thirty students. Additionally, there are five small groups with a total of approximately forty-five participants, some of whom have been counted in the adult Sunday school program. Consequently, the members' spiritual lives often languish at the level where they left them as children in Sunday school. They may have realized maturity socially or professionally, but, spiritually, many are largely adolescent. Christ's call to

follow him has not been recognized, and little progress is made in the religious life. The church is populated with underachievers in becoming Christlike.

Lack of Personal Witness to Unbelievers

The Scriptures are replete with stories of persons, having experienced the grace and power of Jesus Christ in their lives, spontaneously and without regard for decorum announcing the good news publicly. They bubble enthusiastically about their encounter with Jesus and the impact that the encounter has had on their life. Such a witness is not informed by training in personal evangelism technique, nor does it flow from a sense of obligation or duty. Their experience of Jesus resulted in changed lives, and the result was a real passion to tell others about it.

The reality for many churches today is an intimidated membership, who shrink from personal witness. Excuses are many. Arguments for religious tolerance, abhorrence for claims of absolute truth, and others mask the root cause—the absence of a vibrant spirituality. The witness of Scripture suggests that persons deeply engaged in the life and activity of Jesus simply cannot restrain themselves from personal witness to unbelievers. Yet, there simply is little evidence that members enthusiastically share their faith with others. Absent is conversation among members that such sharing is a natural part of their lives, and few members bring visitors to worship or ministry opportunities at the church. Lacking is the confidence and motivation to share the gospel story with others. Greg Ogden writes, “In this atmosphere of intimidation, we must ask ourselves what we have to offer. Do we truly believe that we have something that is so vital and personally life

giving that we have something to give away? Another way to look at this might be do we want someone else to have the same fulfilling relationship with God that we do?”⁶

Small Average Annual Financial Commitment per Member

Several years ago, a man grabbed me following the worship service and said, “I need more God next year so I’m going to give more money to the church.” There was a long line of people behind him wishing to speak to me so I quickly responded, “Go directly to the Fellowship Hall and have some coffee. I need to speak to you about what you said.” His smile indicated that he knew he had disturbed me by his comment.

I have a strong dislike for bad theology—any thought that simply is not supported by the Bible. The notion that God is more accessible to those who give the most dollars to the church is bad theology. There simply was not any way I would allow this man’s comment to go unchallenged.

When I caught up with him, he simply said, “I got you, didn’t I?” It was clear that he had baited me and I had taken the bait. What he said was bad theology and he knew it. I waited for an explanation.

“Understand,” he said, “my greatest treasure in life is my wife and children.” He continued that, in pursuit of a promotion at work and greater earnings, he gave nearly all of himself to his company. In the past year, his wife and children saw little of him. At first, they missed him. Eventually they came to accept an absent husband and father. It was this—his family no longer expecting more of him—that unsettled him. “No more,” he said. “I’m missing out on what has the greatest value to me.”

⁶ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 36.

The explanation I was sought presented itself. He reasoned that if he were to have more of his family he would have to give more of himself to them. “The same is true for God, don’t you think, pastor?” He was hungry for God and the past year of grasping for success had made him weary. He needed more God. “I’m going to care more about God this year. God is going to get more of me this year—more prayers, more worship, and more of my financial resources. I’m not missing out anymore.” Perhaps this is what the apostle Paul means when he writes to the church in Ephesus, “being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph. 3:17).⁷ And that is not such bad theology.

Unfortunately, many in churches today lack such a theology of stewardship. Further, Aubrey Malphurs observes that the area where most pastors feel least prepared to lead their churches is stewardship.⁸ Yet, in a world that is absorbed with money, stewardship and generosity are the test of theology in our lifestyles as Christians. Accordingly, Brian Kluth, president of the Christian Stewardship Association, concludes, “Every checkbook is a theological document. It tells you where your treasure is—and thus where your heart is.”⁹

In the absence of a theologically sound approach to stewardship, the annual rallying cry for many churches is usually one of “meeting the budget.” A more ambitious goal of increasing the missional presence and impact in the community receives nary a glance. Anthony B. Robinson expresses this better than anyone, “This diminished sense

⁷ All Scripture quotations will be taken from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

⁸ Aubrey Malphurs and Steve Stroope, *Money Matters in Church: A Practical Guide for Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 13.

⁹ Brian Kluth, quoted in Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Characteristics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 199.

of vision is among the surest signs that the church has ceased to be anything resembling a movement. It has become, instead, a settled institution.”¹⁰ Additionally, “making the budget” is not likely to capture the imagination of those not already committed to the institution.

What is required is leaders who participate in a paradigm shift from “making the budget” to asking the right questions, the bigger picture questions. These questions move from how to pay the staff and meet expenses to “What is our purpose as a church at this time and in this place, and what kind of financial resources do we need to fulfill that purpose?” As Anthony Robinson observes, “We are challenged to break the pattern of letting the budget take on a reified status and instead seek to allow God’s Spirit to direct what is possible, and then seek the resources to accomplish it.”¹¹

Of course, this is to make stewardship a spiritual issue—the manner in which it is addressed in Scriptures. If church leaders do not seek answers to the larger questions, their leadership is exercised as if God did not exist. On the other hand, if leaders ask the larger questions and seek the resources to advance the mission, both the asking and the seeking draw the church deeply into a process of faith formation. Asking the larger questions and then seeking the resources recovers for the church the understanding that our own strength to honor a God-inspired, God-driven purpose is not sufficient, that our own resources are not enough. We recover our need for God. We give ourselves a chance to depend on God.

¹⁰ Anthony B. Robinson, *Transforming Congregational Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 100.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

Churches that fail to ask the faith question often enough rarely dare anything great for God, and the budgeting process loses its potential for being a vital force for generating a spiritually formative opportunity. Robinson suggests that churches need to “punch holes” in the artificial barriers that are often erected between “the spiritual life” and the “business life” of the church. The capacity of the church to ask substantive faith questions, to articulate what God calls the church to be and do, is critical for a congregation’s self-understanding as well as its ability to appeal to more than institutional insiders.

Money is a matter that is central to the spiritual life. What money means and what it symbolizes for us is demonstrated in our generosity. This became most poignant for the leaders of Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church last year in the midst of a professionally directed capital campaign to renovate and enlarge the church facilities. A close examination of giving patterns revealed that an annual gift of \$3,600 placed the giver in the top 15 percent of givers in the congregation. The professional consultant working with the church leaders indicated that, in his considerable years working with Presbyterian USA churches, he has never before found that number to be lower than \$6,000. It was clearly apparent to him that there existed a spiritual deficit in the church.

Greg Ogden is helpful here in his assertion that it is only as believers soberly assess the way things are that they can have any hope of getting to the way things were designed to be.¹² Yet, the church has hope because Jesus is the Lord of the church who desires its health and has purposed its future. That future demands a careful diagnosis of the current malaise of the church and an intentional strategy for restoring health.

¹² Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 38.

Jerry L. Schmalenberger writes that, in the movie *Out of Africa*, Denys says that map makers, when they got to the edge where they knew nothing, would write: “beyond this place there be demons and dragons.” Many of our people live in that world of demons and dragons, and we can bring security and peace.¹³ The remainder of this paper advances this hopeful vision for the future of Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church.

¹³ Jerry L. Schmalenberger, *Called to Witness* (Lima, Ohio: C.S.S. Publishing Co., Inc., 1993), 22.

CHAPTER 3

UNDERLYING CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF DISCIPLESHIP DEFICIT

The church's challenge is to discover the path forward to honor the purpose for which Christ designed the church—to make disciples of all nations. Such a challenge begins with an assessment of the underlying causes of the present disciple-making deficit. Barriers to disciple-making cannot be dismantled until they are named. Once they are named, a strategy may be identified for breaking the barriers and reconnecting with God's design for the church. Greg Ogden, in his work *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, has identified eight common causes for the discipleship deficit in many congregations.¹ Of the eight, three are identified as the primary factors for the disciple-making deficit at Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church.

Pastors Diverted from Primary Calling

Greg Ogden argues persuasively that a primary cause for the low estate of discipleship in many churches is that pastors have been diverted from their primary calling to “equip the saints for the work of ministry.”² Though the New Testament does not provide an extended job description for pastors and elders, Ephesians 4:12 is clear that leaders have been assigned the task of preparing ordinary believers, referred to as

¹ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 40-57.

² *Ibid.*, 40.

saints, for their place of service in the body of Christ. The whole people of God are the ministers while the paid staff is called to disciple, equip, and lead the people in ministry.

One role, suggests Ogden, has consumed pastors more than any other responsibility: pastoral care.³ Ogden says that assigning care-giving to the professionals has had a disastrous impact on people's ability to grow up to adulthood in the faith. When pastors are expected by their congregations to be the primary care providers, pastors are turned into responders rather than leaders. Paul D. Borden articulates it well, "...pastors must turn over much of the ministry to the laity. Pastors of healthy, growing congregations have a whole new set of tasks. If these pastors are still expected to visit all who are sick, meet with all who are hurting and needy, and go to every meeting, they will have no time to do what they should be doing."⁴ Additionally, people continue in a dependent relationship with the pastor, rather than maturing into partners in the larger mission of the church.

Ten years ago, at the beginning of my ministry at Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church, the church was very pastor centered. There was an almost universal assumption that the pastor would be the primary caregiver of the church. The assumption was so deeply embedded that it was not even articulated. Primary among pastoral duties would be visitation and care for those in the hospital and the homebound. Availability for counseling and sensitivity to other needs that arose within the membership would trump any attention to building small discipling groups, equipping leaders, and providing visionary leadership. The difficulty, of course, for my new ministry was that, if I hoped to

³ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 41.

⁴ Paul D. Borden, *Direct Hit: Aiming Real Leaders at the Mission Field* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 119.

gain any credibility as the new pastor, I would have to give attention to pastoral care. Yet, argues Borden, a congregation that seeks to recover disciple-making and authentic participation in the ongoing mission of God in the world requires that the pastor's job description be reframed. "The pastor's new role centers around leadership rather than chaplaincy, and the pastor should take up this new role as diligently as possible."⁵ Borden continues that the members of the congregation must begin to have different expectations of who does ministry and how it will be accomplished. He notes,

The pastor is now expected to lead the congregation. First and foremost, the pastor is the congregation's spiritual leader. It is the pastor who stands as God's representative each weekend, communicating clearly and relevantly God's mind from God's Word to the congregation. It is the pastor who calls the people to prayer, fasting, humility, and acts of compassion when appropriate. It is the pastor who has that special word from God in times of individual, congregational, or national crisis. It is the pastor who models, speaks, and motivates others to implement the mission and fulfill the vision. It is the pastor who (with biblical and theological support) reminds the people that the new ways of acting are a result of the congregation again joining God's mission for the Church. It is the pastor, along with those responsible for worship, who plans creative, relevant, interesting, and meaningful worship services. The pastor then vigorously critiques or evaluates those services to meet the deep needs of believers and potential new disciples alike. The pastor finds authority for other acts of leadership as a result of serving as the ordained, spiritual leader of the congregation.⁶

It is this new role for the pastor that not only honors the biblical vision of shared ministry among the members of the church, particularly the ministry of care, but empowers pastors as the keeper of the mission and caster of the vision.

There is another difficulty when a congregation expects the pastor to be the primary care giver: inadequate pastoral care for the needs of the church. A pastor or pastoral staff simply cannot sufficiently address all the care needs of a congregation. This

⁵ Borden, *Direct Hit*, 117.

⁶ Ibid.

contributes to a congregation's discipleship deficit. Bill Hull persuasively argues that, without good pastoral care, a congregation cannot be a discipling church.⁷

Pastoral care provides a foundation of life in the community of Christ that makes training and outreach possible (1 Thessalonians 2: 7-12). Uncared-for people tend to become antagonistic and project their hurts on leadership. As a result, an adversarial relationship develops between church leaders and the congregation. On the other hand, when leaders create a loving and accepting environment, people can willingly drop many minor points of difference and work together.⁸

Framed this way, it becomes clear that effective pastoral care, administered by members with appropriate gifts, is a significant part of developing people toward maturity in Christ.

Reducing the Christian Life

A second cause of the low estate of discipleship at Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church is that the Christian life has been reduced to the eternal benefits we believers get from Jesus, rather than living one's life as a student of Jesus. Church membership is offered primarily as an insurance policy for eternal life and the enjoyment of certain membership privileges in this life. The call to obedience to the teachings of Jesus and participation in accountability relationships has been largely absent. As Ogden succinctly states it, "Reducing the Christian life to embracing the gift of forgiveness has made obedience to Jesus in daily life an irrelevance."⁹

There is shared responsibility for this current climate, by both the church leadership and members. Leadership shoulder the responsibility when membership

⁷ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1990), 47.

⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁹ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 47.

processes are identified that make it easy to become part of the church. Cloaked under the noble sounding but thin case for being “user-friendly,” leaders change the biblical requirements for following Christ, reducing expectations to a low threshold, simply for the sake of adding members to the rolls. If the church is going to raise up self-reproducing disciples committed to the missional activity of God in the world, its leaders will have to repent of behaviors that serve only to maintain an institution but neglect calling people to obedience to Christ and responsibility for maturing into Christlikeness. Bill Hull states it best,

High commitment is not user-friendly! By definition, user-friendly means that learning a skill or reaching a goal is easy the first time and every time. Nothing worthy of honor works that way. You can’t cram ten years of experience into a seminar. The notion that a person can mature by taking the fast track is as absurd as trying to eat a year’s worth of food in thirty days. The user-friendly approach says that becoming spiritual is like a salad bar. You walk by and take what looks good to you. Being spiritual then becomes what you think is getting your needs met. Such a microwave mentality destroys discipleship.¹⁰

Church members must also take responsibility for the reducing of the Christian life in their own faith journey. Many church people have become comfortable with being cared for and being the center of attention when decisions are made by the leaders. Pervasive in the church is a consumer mentality that has created, in the thinking and writing of Michael W. Foss, a membership model of church affiliation that carries with it privileges. This model contrasts with the biblical vision of the church as a center of discipleship and mission: the discipleship model.¹¹ Foss continues,

With the member as the focal point, the role of the clergy is to meet the spiritual needs of the members, keep the members happy, and generally do ministry in

¹⁰ Bill Hull, *Building High Commitment in a Low-Commitment World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1995), 72.

¹¹ Foss, *Power Surge*, 5.

ways that make as few waves as possible. If the members' perceived needs are adequately met, if they are happy with the services provided by the professional staff, and if conflict is avoided or minimized, then the membership can be counted on to do their part. Their part, of course, is to pay their 'dues,' to keep the offering flowing that pays the bills, salaries, and costs of ministry.¹²

Additionally, an inadequate view of denominational theology may be partly to blame. In member churches of the larger Reformed body of the Christian Church, justification by faith alone for salvation is taught as an essential tenet. Emphasis on this truth in the preaching and teaching ministry of the church has resulted in the neglect of other claims of Scripture, particularly the call to daily obedience to all Christ taught and the exercise of spiritual gifts for ministry. This neglect often results in a loss of a captivating and compelling sense of a spiritual life that is energized by intentional faith formation and growth.

No Clear Pathway to Spiritual Maturity

The absence of a clear pathway to spiritual maturity is a third cause for the discipleship deficit in the congregation. Though complacency does mark the majority of the current membership, there are present some who want to claim more from their faith. Lacking is an adequate understanding of what a life transformed by Christ looks like and a clear pathway toward such a life.

The absence of such a pathway may be attributed to a dependence upon traditional educational programs without some sense of how these programs contribute to a larger, easy-to-grasp process for spiritual maturity. The unfortunate results are members who have an impressive grasp of the Bible and theology, but little ability to assimilate

¹² Foss, *Power Surge*, 16.

that knowledge in following Christ with genuine intimacy. Simply, some desire a pilgrimage into the heart and life of God but have little understanding of how to proceed.

Dallas Willard argues for the necessity of a curriculum for Christlikeness in his book, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. Willard states that there is now lacking in most churches today a serious and expectant intention to bring Jesus' people into obedience and abundance through training. "That would be discipleship as he gave it to us."¹³ The consequence to the church may be felt in multiple ways, two that will be addressed briefly here. First is a prevailing myth that authentic discipleship is hard. Jesus himself said, "For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30). I believe there are several reasons for this misconception: the mistaken notion that discipleship is about getting it right always, never stumbling in one's faith; the mistaken notion that discipleship is only what we do by our own strength; and the mistaken notion that discipleship robs life of wonder, adventure, and excitement.

That is not discipleship. That is the description of a Pharisee, and Pharisees irritated Jesus. Discipleship is the voluntary submission to the Lordship of Christ that results in the decision to learn from Christ, follow His example, and participate in the expansion of God's kingdom. Becoming a holy people is the hard work of the Holy Spirit within us. We need only to grant the Holy Spirit access to our lives by becoming imitators of Jesus' life. The failure of the church to offer a curriculum for learning to imitate Jesus' life results in the myth that such a life is difficult and only achieved by "super" Christians.

¹³ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

A second consequence of the failure to provide a curriculum for Christlikeness is a corrupted theology of the church. Without the opportunity to discover what Christ demands of those who profess faith, and without a pathway, or curriculum, for realizing one's new identity in Christ, the church member develops a culturally shaped view of the church. That view asserts that the church, like any other institution, exists for the sake of the individual; it exists to meet the felt needs of the believer. The product of this theological bent is believers turned in on themselves, continually measuring the effectiveness of the church by how well it has served the individual. The consequence to the church is poignantly raised by the late David H. C. Read of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City. He shared in a sermon, "Christians might sing: 'Like a mighty army moves the Church of God' but in many places it is truer to sing, 'Like a solid fixture sits the Church of God – unwilling to change to meet a changing culture.'"¹⁴ Read continues in that sermon that the Church of Jesus Christ is never more alive than when she confronts the changing scene without a yearning for days that are past. This, of course, requires believers more committed to the agenda of Christ than their own.

Identifying these three underlying causes of the disciple-making deficit does not imply that there are not others. Greg Ogden identifies five additional causes that may be present in churches.¹⁵ Yet, efforts at change must be manageable. Ten years of ministry and reflection as the senior pastor of Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church have shown me

¹⁴ David H. C. Read, "Church of the Real or Museum of the Trivial?" sermon given at Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York, in *Virginia Woolf Meets Charlie Brown*, a book of sermons by Read (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1968), 180.

¹⁵ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 40-57.

that these are the most significant barriers to be removed and, consequently, merit the highest priority for attention.

Consequences of Discipleship Deficit to Congregational Vitality

Dallas Willard suggests in his book *Renovation of the Heart* that what characterizes most of our local congregations, whether large or small in size, is simple distraction.¹⁶ Willard contends that, as the church has become disconnected from its primary purpose of making disciples, it has become preoccupied, or distracted, by details that are of little importance. Quoting another great church leader, Leith Anderson, Willard shares,

While the New Testament speaks often about churches, it is surprisingly silent about many matters that we associate with church structure and life. There is no mention of architecture, pulpits, length of typical sermons, rules for having a Sunday school. Little is said about style of music, order of worship, or times of church gatherings. There were no Bibles, denominations, camps, pastor's conferences, or board meeting minutes. Those who strive to be New Testament churches must seek to live its principals and absolutes, not reproduce the details.

The principals and absolutes of the New Testament church are captured in Jesus' Great Commission of Matthew's Gospel, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you."¹⁷

Simply, the church is to make followers of Jesus through baptism (principal number one), multiply disciples through immersing followers in the teachings of Jesus (principal number two), and, finally, hold followers accountable for obedience to all Jesus taught, that lives might be transformed (principal number three).

¹⁶ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 235.

¹⁷ Ibid.

A church that is driven, or distracted, by the details rather than these three biblical principals will make little or no progress in the spiritual formation of those in regular attendance. Worse, fear grows when purpose is lacking, resulting in anger and bickering within the body of Christ. Such a community of faith will bear little resemblance to the Christ who called it into existence.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS AND PATHWAY
FOR DISCIPLESHIP GROWTH

CHAPTER 4

THE CHURCH AND ITS MISSION

The central task of a theology for disciple-making in the local congregation is to provide a clear and credible account for the call to locate the center of all church activity in its missional character as defined in Holy Scripture. The account will foster and illuminate responsible alignment of church structures and values for a practice of ministry that advances God's activity in the world. The advancement of such a theology is a response to a church that has lost its biblical moorings and has drifted into a practice of ministry that is internally focused, resulting in a loss of the thrill and adventure of the Christian life. Fresh attention to Scripture and a theological inquiry of God's design and purpose for the church offers the promise of a sustained movement back to God's agenda and the recovery of an authentic understanding of what it means to know God.

Any inquiry into the mission of God implicitly suggests that something can be known of God, the character of God, and God's intents and purposes for all God created. Historically, the church has said that such knowledge, though necessarily limited, is informed by God's own words, the Holy Scriptures. The limit of this theological foundation for disciple-making in the local congregation does not permit an exhaustive examination of Scripture, capturing every nuance that speaks to God's character and God's purposes in creation. This brief examination of Scripture is offered for reflection in

the hope that here will be a starting point for a continuing conversation on the nature and activity of God, particularly God's intention for the community of faith, the church.

God's Mission in the Old Testament

Christopher J. H. Wright argues persuasively that Genesis 12:1-3 is a pivotal text for Israel, the book of Genesis and indeed for the whole Bible.¹ "Now the Lord said to Abram, 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed'" (Gen. 12:1-3). This text moves God's narrative forward from the preceding eleven chapters, which record God's dealing with all nations (sometimes called "primeval history"), into the patriarchal narratives that lead to the emergence of Israel as a distinct nation. So important are these three verses in Genesis (Gen. 12:1-3) that they occur, with some minor variations of phraseology, five times in the book (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4-5; 28:14). This, argues Wright, clearly indicates that God's promise to Abraham was ultimately for the purpose of blessing humanity: "Blessing for the nations is the bottom line, textually and theologically, of God's promise to Abraham."²

Israel did not always understand this or accept it. The story of Israel, as recorded in the Old Testament, is one of a people who struggled for centuries to make sense of what had happened to them over their long history of engagement with God. Covenants

¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 194.

² Ibid.

God had made with their ancestors seemed distant, and promises unfulfilled. Tensions, ambiguities, and, at times, disbelief marked a people who repeatedly found themselves in exile from their land. God's return to His people in triumph, as the prophets had promised (Isa. 52:8; Ezek. 43:1-2, 4-5, 7; Hag. 2:6-9), appeared to be yet another unfulfilled hope. Finding themselves repeatedly torn between competing allegiances—idolatrous choices to satisfy their own interests and desires and God's exclusive and all-encompassing claim upon them—Israel returned again and again to God's Word for a pathway forward. Martin Copenhaver, Anthony Robinson, and William Willimon write, "Israel's very identity as a people was threatened, so they read and listened to stories to remind them of who they were and where their true home was."³

Over centuries of struggle, both for survival in a harsh environment and with self-identity as a people, Israel came to know history, contends Brownson et al., not as simply one disconnected event after another but as an inexplicable but wonderfully woven tapestry of God's mighty acts advancing them forward for realizing God's purposes for all creation: that every nation may acknowledge God's claim to sovereignty over all the world.⁴ Moreover, as the purposes of God unfolded in Israel's shared history, Israel received glimpses, time and again, that they had been chosen specifically for this purpose. God's call to Israel to be a holy nation, precious in God's sight, was not an honor and privilege to be held tightly to their corporate chest. They were the instrument of choice in God's hands for the recovery of all creation, once lost as a result of sin. Israel

³ James V. Brownson, et al., *Storm Front: The Good News of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 14.

⁴ See the extensive discussion in Brownson, et al., *Storm Front*, 14-20.

was birthed by God and given a history to share in God's mission in a fallen world, their history becoming caught-up in God's grand narrative of redemption.

Jesus and the Mission of God

Brownson advances the argument that God's call to Israel to be a holy nation and a priestly people (Exod. 19:6) sets the communal and historical context out of which the gospel emerges. "It is this story, recounted in the scriptures, that informs Jesus' proclamation to his fellow Israelites, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news'" (Mark 1:15).⁵ Paul confirms this relationship in a statement addressed to Gentile believers: "So then, remember that you Gentiles by birth...were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:11-13). The church, by virtue of its inclusion into the covenants of Israel through Christ's passion and resurrection, also shares in God's purpose for summoning Abraham and Sarah in the first place: to bless all the families of the earth. Such is God's will and purpose, states Wright, such is the mission of God, "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Hab 2:14).⁶ That summary of God's intention is again captured in Revelation 5:9 with the image of persons gathered from every tribe and nation, language and culture to

⁵ Brownson et al., *Storm Front*, 20.

⁶ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 122.

be its living members, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of a world that, even in its violence and rebellion, God has never stopped cherishing.⁷

The notion of calling and separating apart a people for God's saving purposes is evident in the life and ministry of Jesus. Mark's Gospel announces, "And he (Jesus) appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, to be with him, and to be sent out to proclaim the message, and to have authority to cast out demons" (Mark 3: 14, 15 New Revised Standard Translation). This text documents continuity from the calling of Abram's people, the nation of Israel, in Genesis 12 to the formation of the church. As James V. Brownson, Inagrace T. Dietterich, Barry A. Harvey, and Charles C. West, working collaboratively, state it, "Israel's existence as an in-between people is taken up by Jesus and his followers."⁸ The twelve, as with Israel, are to be the core of the people God sends into the world. Yet, two additional insights of God's plan are provided in this text that are not evident in the Genesis passage: first, that those called are to become apprentices or learners before being sent and, second, that, upon sending, those separated are equipped with supernatural power for continuing God's work in the world. What becomes apparent from these two texts read together is that the church is brought into being, not for its own sake, but for the sake of the world. Those called and separated apart eventually become the bearers of God's universal message of salvation.

That it was God's plan from the beginning of time to separate a core people for the gathering of all nations is presented in the first chapter of Ephesians, "...he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in

⁷ Brownson et al., *Storm Front*, 22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Eph. 1: 9, 10). Even the feeble eyes of men and women can see that all things in heaven and earth have not yet been gathered up into God. That time, what the author of Ephesians calls the “fullness of time,” waits in the future. Yet, God has made known to us, the Church, the “mystery of his will,” that we may be agents through whom God’s gathering activity continues.

That mystery, emerging initially in the people of Israel and continuing in the person of Jesus, takes on a new character. In the person of Jesus and his death and resurrection, the present age, where sin and death have the final say in human affairs, comes into contact with God’s future where God liberates all of creation from its present decay (Rev. 21:1-5). Christ’s resurrection demonstrates decisively that it will be life rather than death that will be the final word for all creation. That is to say, in the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, two time periods “touch,” one confronting the other: the life and harmony of God’s eternal kingdom confronting concretely the present time of death and conflict.

As Brownson et al. lucidly argue,

But this contraction of time that allowed the present age to come into contact with the age to come, thus forming an “apocalyptic storm front” in the midst of history, did not “re-expand,” so to speak, with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Instead, it continues to manifest itself in the life of the church, through which “the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places” (Eph. 3:10).⁹

The line that marks the boundary between the present age and the age to come, drawn by God’s redemptive work in Christ, cuts straight through the Church and through

⁹ Brownson et al., *Stormfront*, 21.

each baptized member of his body. God forms this body with persons gathered from every tribe and nation, language and culture (Rev. 5:9), to be its living members, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of a world that, even in its violence and rebellion, God has never stopped cherishing. These followers of Jesus do not simply find themselves passive bystanders to what the mission of God accomplishes for the redemption of the world. That mission continues with the living sacrifice of the bodies of these disciples (Rom. 12:1) in the power of the Spirit, thus suspending them together with Jesus between a world destined to pass away and a new heaven and a new earth that will never pass away. In this way, the New Testament consistently presents Jesus as a living recapitulation of Israel's history and mission.

Disciple-Making as Reorienting the Church to God's Mission in the World

As we have seen, the mission of the church is the same as its Lord's mission: to put the bodies of its members on the line between the two ages on behalf of him who lived and died for the sake of the world. This is evident in what is commonly called, "the Great Commission of the Church," located in the twenty-eighth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, "And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age'" (Matt. 28: 18-20). This passage has a rich texture that invites multiple discoveries. I will limit this observation to two: the "sentness" of God's people to the world and the charge that, as they go, they are to disciple people—to teach all they have learned from Jesus and call them to obedience to those teachings. What is important to

realize in this text is that God is in the business of saving those outside the church, that it is the church that is sent to accomplish this business, and that those sent are disciplined for the purpose of disciplining others. This passage captures what may be called God's apostolic strategy: that the work of salvation accomplished in Jesus Christ is now entrusted to the Church to share among the nations until the whole world is recovered for God's kingdom.

The difficulty that the Church (including LVPC) finds itself in today becomes evident in its vocabulary: when churches talk of "meeting needs" and "satisfying our customers." This language, and the theology that shapes it, reduce God's intentions and purposes from a global perspective to a personal level. Health, happiness, and joy are located in the realm of the private rather than in the shared mission in which God has purposed each one of us to participate. Additionally, the Church misses both the letter and the spirit of Paul's admonition to the saints in Rome: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). In the twenty-first century, in the west, it is the language of the market that governs the ways of the world in Paul's sense of that term. The vocabulary of commerce and the syntax of consumption not only distort our relationship with God and thus with each other, but they also miscast the church in the role of retail vendor, trading in spiritual goods and services. Thus the members of Christ's body discover themselves "conformed" to the culture of self—the very point where the risen Lord summons them to be transformed. Yet, Brownson et al. are instructive here in that, "the gospel has less to do with the alleged benefits that might come with believing in God and more with what God plans to do with

those who answer Jesus' call to give up all and follow him."¹⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright is correct to say that God's people, even under judgment, remain God's people for God's mission.¹¹

The Church of Jesus Christ, of which LVPC is a part, will remain adrift in the turbulent winds of culture, without direction or purpose, until it again honestly wrestles with Scripture, recovering God's intent and purposes for the faith community He has called into existence. Today we believers are pressed by culturally driven fears of scarcity, the obsessively driven desire to grab our share of the wealth, and a willingness to risk relationships to do so at an enormous risk of losing the very promises the world offers. This embrace of hedonism and narcissism from popular culture is done with a failure to notice that it contradicts biblical faith. It is at the very intersection of God's intent for us and the world's empty promises that the Church has the opportunity to be a prophetic voice, calling people back to their true humanity. Engaging people again with the story of Scripture—the great story of God's dealings with all people—and providing a pathway for practicing spiritual disciplines in everyday life positions believers to receive God's work of abundance in their lives, a work that restores purpose and vitality and even rest from the frantic pace demanded by the world.

¹⁰ Brownson et al., *Stormfront*, 2.

¹¹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 99.

CHAPTER 5

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR FORMING DISCIPLES THROUGH FAITH PRACTICES

A Pathway for Forming Disciples

This chapter will sketch the dominant pattern of the spiritual life that was taught in the early centuries of the Christian church and derive from it a pathway for forming disciples within the ministry of Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church. An intentional approach, or pathway, for forming disciples has not been previously attempted. Such an effort would be informed both by Scripture and the practice of the early church, while remaining simple to grasp and execute. The pathway should have an organic principle of natural reproduction, meaning that the multiplication of disciples would be a natural process. Ultimately, the goal is to develop a church characterized by disciples who make disciples. This pathway would be determined successful if it enabled ordinary people to move beyond choosing particular activities in the church and begin to think, act, and be like Jesus in every possible respect, every day of the week.

Lawrence S. Cunningham has written that Mark's Gospel makes it abundantly clear that being a disciple of Jesus was not to be reduced to simply learning from a master teacher.¹ Mark's Gospel understands discipleship as a way of life. Jesus said, "I am the way...." and "Come, follow me." "The disciple of Jesus follows the person, and in

¹ Lawrence S. Cunningham, *Discipleship*, vol. 2 of *Handbook of Spirituality for Ministers: Perspectives for the 21st Century*, ed. Robert J. Wicks (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 603.

following the person the teachings and deeds make sense.”² In a radical conversion of life, the disciples learn to act after the fashion of Jesus.

Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson take this a step further. “Churches should ensure that each of their members receives biblical teaching on the *key habits of discipleship* (italics mine): reading Scripture, prayer, small group, tithing, witnessing, and other disciplines.”³ Dallas Willard, a leading voice in the area of spiritual disciplines, puts it this way, “We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he (Jesus) engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father.”⁴ Willard adds, “The disciplines are activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order.”⁵

The deliberate practice of spiritual disciplines or faith practices also connects our faith with our daily lives. Dorothy C. Bass persuasively argues that many who embark on a spiritual journey simply refuse to leave their beliefs in the realm of theory, insisting that the journey of faith make a difference in their lives.⁶ She continues that “...the idea of ‘practices’ provides a helpful way of addressing the yearning of contemporary people for

² Cunningham, *Discipleship*, 604.

³ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007), 127.

⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988), ix.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁶ Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), xiii.

a deeper understanding of and involvement in the redemptive practice of God in the world.⁷

The training manual is designed for use in the context of small groups. While Jesus frequently taught the crowds, he chose the small group for discipling: the twelve disciples. This model of discipling demonstrates an intentional plan for producing disciples within small groups. Additionally, within the nurture, mentoring, and accountability of the small group, the disciples understood that they were disciplined for a purpose – to be made into mature reproducers, as described in John 15:7-17.

It would be difficult to identify a spiritual formation process that provides a comprehensive list of spiritual practices, nor is that the intention of the process identified here. Rather, what has been sought by the elected spiritual leaders of Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church are the core, non-negotiable faith practices for all Christians—essential faith practices for movement toward authentic discipleship. Alan Hirsch, a sought-after speaker and trainer in missional church leadership and discipleship, suggests, “When discipleship is expected of everyone, and enough key people are involved in the practices, it will create a culture where discipleship is accepted as the norm and the desired goal.”⁸ Additionally, the “classic” Christian spiritual journey recognized that spiritual formation could never be accomplished by self-effort alone, that one’s own efforts to exercise faith practices observed in Jesus and his disciples must be met by the activity of God at work in individual lives. Diogenes Allen puts it so well. He states that one of the most important barriers to the spiritual life is that we tend to regard God as our

⁷ Bass, *Practicing Our Faith*, xiii.

⁸ Alan Hirsch with Darryn Altclass, *The Forgotten Ways Handbook: A Practical Guide for Developing Missional Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 75.

opponent, not our helper.⁹ Dallas Willard pushes this thought forward. “Everyone must be active in the process of their salvation and transformation to Christlikeness. This is an inescapable fact. But the initiative in the process is always God’s, and we would in fact do nothing without his initiative.”¹⁰ Willard adds that all well-directed action on our part toward Christlikeness is accomplished in union with God, not apart from him—not independently, on our own.¹¹ We can hope for transformation because, with our lives centered on God, we receive God’s help to achieve what we cannot achieve by ourselves.

Paul contrasts the striving toward spiritual maturity to the training required for an athlete to participate at the Olympic Games. He tells the church in Corinth, “Athletes exercise self control in all things: they do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable one” (1 Cor. 9:25), and Paul urges Timothy, “Discipline yourself for the purposes of godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7). Both the church in Corinth and Timothy are challenged to train with the same urgency and rigor for the sake of one’s life with Christ. In this case, the attention is not the physical body but the spiritual, which is superior. “For while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 Tim. 4:8).

Disciplines do not readily fall into place, and this includes spiritual disciplines. They must be learned, their value understood and appreciated, and a regular rhythm of practice incorporated into everyday life. Yet, as Michael W. Foss so elegantly states, “Calling people to daily choose the ways of God and teaching them practices that attune

⁹ Diogenes Allen, *Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1997), 83.

¹⁰ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 82.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

them to the ways of God is at the heart of the church's mission."¹² This chapter provides a brief biblical and theological foundation for the spiritual disciplines, or faith practices, that are addressed in the training manual.

Worship Regularly

The heart of worship is a recovery of focus—a focus of what really matters in life. God instructs the people of Israel, recorded in the book of Exodus, “Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God...” (Exod. 20:9, 10a, Matt. 4:10, Mark 12:30). Contrary to what many people may think, there is nothing here, in this fourth commandment, about worship. It speaks of work and leisure—the necessity of work and the necessity of a day without work. As one of my former Old Testament professors once put it, for six days we participate in commerce and on the seventh we turn-off the economic engine. This seventh day reminds us that work and producing and acquiring more stuff is not what life is all about. So we stop.¹³

But this commandment does say that this day without work is a day for God. This seventh day is about recalling what life's purpose is, that all people are to enjoy God. For the busy worker to experience God, the hum of the economic engine must be silenced. Otherwise, one becomes so caught up in producing and acquiring that one day that person will ask, “What was it all for?” That day may be too late, our minds and bodies worn and broken, to learn that eternal life is all about relationships: relationship with our creator and with one another.

¹² Foss, *Power Surge*, 178.

¹³ Walter Brueggemann, “Theology of the Old Testament” (Class lecture, Columbia Theological Seminary, Fall 1986).

Perhaps this is the cause for the failure of so many marriages. Rather than enjoying one another, people work. Caught up in the notion that more work produces more rewards, they miss that the only thing that lasts is their relationship with one another and with God. Ceaseless work may produce more, but it is also the author of misery. A day without work means time for the development of relationships—the only thing that results in joy.

God wants joy for all people, so God commands that one day each week is to be set aside for leisure that is positive, filled with meaning and delight that arises from celebrating time with those whom we love. A day of celebration, a day of recalling what really matters, a day for enjoying God and one another can become the ultimate act of worship.

Pray Daily

Richard J. Foster writes that, “To pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If we are unwilling to change, we will abandon prayer as a noticeable characteristic of our lives.”¹⁴ One of the Psalms reads, “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46: 10a). Prayer finally recognizes that we are not alone, nor are we called to do the work of ministry by our own strength. God is the one who breathed breath into the nostrils of Adam and continues to sustain the life of all people by an active presence in their daily lives. Prayer is stepping into a relationship with the divine creator and sustainer of all life. The practice of prayer provides the power to be the people of God and to accomplish God’s work.

¹⁴ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1988), 33.

The first letter of John says, “This is the victory that conquers the world, our faith” (1 John 5:4). Most ancient religions believed that people’s lives were directly influenced by the actions of the gods. If the gods were in a pleasant mood, things went well. If they were unhappy, then things turned out badly. It all depended upon the gods and their moods. In fact, the course of the weather was determined by the fickleness of the gods. Nice, sunny weather indicated that the gods were having a good day, but hurricanes and tsunamis are signs of the opposite.

The New Testament turns this theology, this understanding of how God works, upside down by placing the power in the hands of humans. The prophet Jeremiah even teaches that God's people have the capacity to change God's mind (Jer. 18:5-11). Whenever someone prays, God responds. When a sinner repents, heaven rejoices. God is moved to action by our prayers. Jesus’ promise that his followers would receive power in the Holy Spirit was not a metaphor.

It has been suggested that brokenness in the world today is less God’s fault and more the misuse – or nonuse – of the power God has given to those who trust him to bless “the nations.” Rather than seeking the good of others, Jesus’ followers are often self-absorbed. Rather than praying on another’s behalf we selfishly seek after things for ourselves. God's people fear scarcity and, consequently, grab what they can for themselves with little thought for others. What is created is a world where only the strong survive. This may be the explanation for so much hate and greed.

This first letter of John is asking his followers to discover that, in such a world of hate and greed, the victory that conquers the world for good is faith in Jesus Christ. Christ is the only authentic hope for the world and for each of his disciples. Each one of his

disciples has the power to unleash that hope through faithful prayers. As Philip Yancey suggests, "... prayer is the most fundamental, challenging, perplexing, and deeply rewarding aspect of our relationship with God."¹⁵

Learn and Apply God's Word

Jesus demonstrates by his life and ministry (John 15:27, Acts 1:8) that his disciples navigate the challenges of daily life. When tempted to listen to another voice than what he found in Scripture Jesus quoted a verse he had learned as a child: "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4; Deut. 8:3). God's Word richly nourished Jesus as he sought to live in obedience to the Father.

Helping people to learn and appreciate Scripture as relevant to their daily lives is an indispensable component in preparing them to experience transformation into Christlikeness. Spiritual passion is birthed from lives immersed continually in God's Word and truth applied in the daily exercise of life. Without a certain level of spiritual passion that flows from an engagement with Scripture, people will be unable to sustain vital spiritual transformation and lack the promised power of Scripture to live victorious lives. Michael W. Foss is right when he asserts that Bibles do not rest on bookshelves and dust does not rest on Bibles in a discipleship church.¹⁶

¹⁵ Hirsch with Altclass, *The Forgotten Ways Handbook*, 70.

¹⁶ Foss, *Power Surge*, 67.

Participate in a Ministry

A danger of pursuing spiritual growth is doing so in isolation. Withdrawal from community and the world is sometimes understood as the most productive means of recovering one's true identity as a child of God. The world is thought to distort one's true identity, and community brings distraction. While the world certainly does seek to distort one's self-understanding, Jesus demonstrates by his life and ministry that his disciples are to live in the world and engage in ministry for the world as partners in God's redemptive activity. This is not the natural inclination of the present culture. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun observes that many Americans spend their lives working themselves into a place where they can be served more than serve.¹⁷ Yet, in his Great Commandment, Jesus calls his followers to serve: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39) even as he has come to earth as one who serves. More than religious rhetoric that casts an attractive glow upon the landscape of the faith, the faith practice of ministry to others is the way the world discovers the love of God. God's people become the very vehicle through whom God blesses the earth.

Leith Anderson once quoted Dallas Willard as saying that new Christians begin their faith journey with a faith in Jesus. As they take responsibility for their spiritual growth and maturity they move to another place. They continue their faith journey with the faith of Jesus.¹⁸ The difference is significant. It is, in fact, the difference that matters to God. How do God's people arrive at such a faith? If we take Ephesians seriously (Eph.

¹⁷ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2005), 145.

¹⁸ Leith Anderson, "Leading and Managing Your Ministry" (Class lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Winter 2004).

4:11-12), it is by participating in the work of ministry. As Paul D. Borden succinctly frames it, salvation in Jesus Christ is a call to serve God with the talents, strengths, gifts, experiences, and passions that God continues to give each of us.¹⁹ It is then that we shall attain “the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:13).

Give Financially to the Work of the Church

Stewardship, or the lack of it, delves into the deep places of the human heart and exposes one’s true worship. Believers’ use of financial resources gives confession to where they have placed their confidence and their trust for the future: in God or in wealth. The conflict of self and God is forced by the decisions believers make with their wealth, the world becoming spectators to their decision to build their own kingdom or God’s.

One of Jesus’ most poignant teachings on giving is, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21). For many, this passage is so familiar that they no longer hear it at all. They understand it, and there is nothing more to be said. It is a straightforward, simple comment from the lips of Jesus. Yet, this passage presents a difficulty for the Church. It is one of the most misunderstood Scriptures in the New Testament. Perhaps a closer reading of it is in order.

What people think they hear is this: “Wherever your heart is, there will your treasure be.” That is what they hear because that is a truth that “goes without saying.” All people know, from personal experience, that where their heart is, there will be their treasure. However, that is a misreading of Scripture.

¹⁹ Borden, *Direct Hit*, 76.

Photography is a passionate hobby of mine. I may never be the professional that my father was, but I enjoy everything about the art of photography: the different kinds of cameras, the particular uses of various lenses, the study of light and composition, and on and on. Without question, it is where my heart is and, consequently, a good deal of my treasure.

On a further look at the words of Jesus, though, he did not say, “Where your heart is, there will your treasure be.” He knows that is true and obvious. Rather, he reversed the images. Jesus spoke first about treasure and then matters of the heart. What Jesus wanted his listeners to hear is that, wherever they place their treasure, their hearts will follow. That is also truth. If one places treasure in the stock market, that person will discover that he or she follows the market very carefully.

What Jesus is offering is an opportunity to grow closer to Him. Those desiring a closer walk with Jesus should try placing “treasure” of their resources in the offering plate. This, of course, is more than the small change someone will never miss. The heart rarely follows small pocket change. When one does give, that person will discover that his or her heart has grown closer to Jesus. It is a matter of investing first where a person wants his or her heart to be because the heart will certainly follow.

Three Points of Engagement of the Life of a Disciple

Three points of engagement have been identified as a basic formula for transformation: time alone with God in silence and solitude, a place in a community of a small group for encouragement and accountability, and a place for sharing one’s growth with another. It is here that the transformation of the inner being is primarily a gift of grace, God gathering up the disciples’ efforts in the faith practices and creating within

them what we cannot do alone. Additionally, the three points of engagement provide structure and accountability to the spiritual formation journey.

Time Alone

At the beginning of any journey, the traveler seeks understanding of the route that will be traveled. When a relationship is sought with another, a good deal of time is carved out of one's busy schedule to be with that person. The same is true for the journey of faith to Christlikeness. The disciple of Jesus recognizes that the goal of the journey is to be increasingly transformed into one who is like Jesus in every area of life. This requires not only an understanding of the ways of Jesus—the route of the journey—but time with Jesus.

There is simply no substitution for spending time alone with Jesus in prayer (Mark 1:35, Mark 14:39) and solitude for becoming familiar with him and noticing his presence and direction for one's daily life. As Ruth Haley Barton so clearly frames it, "Solitude and silence are not self-indulgent exercises for times when an overcrowded soul needs a little time to itself. Rather, they are concrete ways of opening to the presence of God beyond human effort and beyond the human constructs that cannot fully contain the Divine."²⁰ One may well ask persons who profess faith but give little time to prayer and solitude, "If you want to be like Jesus, why do you spend so little time with him?"

²⁰ Ruth Haley Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 31.

Time in Community

The ministry Jesus developed with his disciples was embodied in community. When the disciples encountered Jesus, they responded to his call to “follow,” to live in a relational small group. Living in community with Jesus and the other disciples, they followed Jesus’ teachings and example, resulting in life transformation. The training curriculum for the disciples was more than the Scriptures.

Time in community with one another became the catalyst for discovering by example what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. Jesus would demonstrate kingdom living, ask them to imitate him, and then reflect with the disciples on what they were learning. Life in the community provided encouragement for the spiritual journey, accountability, and the opportunity to sharpen one another in living obedient lives. Similarly, churches that give evidence of spiritual vitality encourage believers to grow in Christlikeness with one another in the context of an affirming, supportive community.

Time Sharing

The greatest motivation for sharing one’s faith with another is one’s own relationship with Jesus (John 1:43-45, John 4:28-29), compelling the believer to love those Jesus loves. As a believer grows in Christlikeness, discovering that the deepest hungers are satisfied in him, that believer begins to notice the hungers of acquaintances, hungers that can only be filled with Jesus. As Adam Hamilton, pastor of the Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas, once shared with me, “We recognize people hungry for more because they act like hungry people!” Trusting in the Holy Spirit to open ordinary opportunities for spiritual conversations, God’s people discover times to share their faith in ways that are entirely appropriate and natural. Perhaps the primary reason

that Christians fear unnatural, abrupt conversations with others about faith is precisely because they are unnatural. God intends for his people to engage in natural, organic conversations with those who do not yet know him. When one becomes a follower of Jesus, that person also becomes God's messenger, in the manner of Jesus. God wants to speak to the world through those whose lives have been entrusted to His power and care. It will be, therefore, God who will open such opportunities for sharing one's faith. What is required of Jesus' disciples is attention to God and the opportunities that he presents us.

Learning the Faith Practices in Community: Small Groups as Discipling Centers

Jesus' own pattern of disciple making was to be intimately involved with a few so that his life and theirs would develop such traction that transformation would occur organically (Matt. 10:1-4; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16; Acts 1:13). The disciples comprised the first Christian small group, and their close contact with Jesus provided not only learning experiences but the opportunity to view appropriate application in daily cultural settings. Observing Jesus not only as teacher but as a fellow sojourner in life offered the disciples the insight required to make incremental changes in their own lives to conform to his. Jesus taught the crowds, but he disciplined a few in a small group.

Alexander B. Bruce, in his book, *The Training of the Twelve*, provides considerable clarity as to the methods Jesus used to develop his disciples and deploy them in the ministry of spreading his message to others. Bruce observes, "From the evangelic records it appears that Jesus began at a very early period of His ministry to gather round Him a company of disciples, with a view to the preparation of an agency for

carrying on the work of the divine Kingdom.”²¹ Bruce goes on to unfold the three stages in the history of the disciples’ fellowship with Jesus that would insure that they were committed to continuing his ministry beyond Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension. What becomes apparent is that Jesus desired not only to have disciples, but to have about him those whom he might train to reproduce their discipleship in others. By limiting his discipling efforts to a few, who would then reproduce themselves in others, Jesus was capable of reaching men and women on an extensive scale.

Effective discipling today must imitate the model of Jesus: selecting a few, pouring one’s life into them, and asking that they reproduce themselves in a similar manner with others. This model— equipping disciples through a small group— provides intimacy and the value of shared spiritual gifts exercised within the group, without the intimidation of a larger group setting. The high level of interaction between Jesus as discipler and those being disciplined teaches well, provides a high level of accountability, and can be a center for shared missional activity that further promotes maturity in Christlikeness—the ultimate goal of the Christian journey.

For many churches, and particularly Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church, this will require a paradigm shift from program-based ministry to relationship-based discipling. As Greg Ogden so aptly observes, “Discipling relationships are marked by intimacy whereas programs tend to be focused on information.”²² The major crisis at the heart of the church is that program-based ministry has failed to deliver mature, self-reproducing disciples of Jesus Christ. Program-based ministry is incapable of such expectations. As

²¹ A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007), 12.

²² Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 124.

Jesus demonstrated, it is life lived before and among others that reproduces life. For this reason, the attached training manual has been designed for use within the context of a small group. It will be the experience of a few seeking formation into Christlikeness, living and learning together, that will provide direction into a lifelong process of continued growth and maturity in Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 6
LEARNING GOALS AND PEDAGOGY OF
THE TRAINING MANUAL

A spiritual formation program that has the capacity to meaningfully respond to the identified issues confronting the membership of the church and empower ordinary people to live extraordinary lives must meet two criteria: it must be simple to grasp and execute and be organic, meaning that the multiplication of disciples will be a natural process. Jesus was clear that faith in Him demanded an intentional decision to live differently (Matt. 25:31-46). The thrust of His teaching and preaching was discipleship—committing to an intentional journey of ordering one’s life around the life of Jesus. In whatever fashion one’s life was previously shaped by the world, that will now give way to a life shaped by living in community with the triune God and God’s people, the Church (Rom. 12:1-2). Recovery of a personal faith that is full of intrigue, passion, and vibrancy and a church that is the center of interest and wonder will require a transformational strategy that connects people to Christ and other believers. Such a strategy will identify the faith practices of disciples and equip individuals to develop their own pathway for weaving the practices into their lives in a meaningful way.

Transformational Strategy in Theory

Richard Peace has helpfully identified the process by which transformation occurs in the lives of people.¹ It is this process, and the theological assumptions that undergird it, that will provide the basis and development for a transformation strategy for adults at Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church. Transformation occurs, says Peace, when people are brought into effective contact with a transforming agent such as Scripture, the Holy Spirit, the Church, the gospel, and godly insights. The process that then follows requires that the real needs of people are confronted directly and faced openly; these needs are understood and owned by persons in a public context; these needs are set next to input that addresses them directly and brings new light on them; these needs are processed in a form or structure that is appropriate to the need and the solution; the whole process occurs in a context that puts the triune God as central.

At its heart, continues Peace, the process of Christian growth and change is nurtured from several theological assumptions. Primarily, it is the acknowledgement of the need for repentance and faith. Repentance involves insight into oneself, insight into God's way, and the cognitive resolve to change the intentional alignment of one's thoughts and behaviors to Christ. This is followed by faith, which involves an act of trust on the part of a person and the active involvement of the God who works in lives.

Applying this paradigm to the needs of adults at Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church will release a disciple-making congregation that measures the effectiveness of ministry, not by church attendance but by those engaged in the life-altering pursuit of

¹ Peace, "The Transforming Process," chapter 5 in *A Paradigm to Guide Transformation* (Course notebook for "Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World," Fuller Theological Seminary, 2008), 1.

Jesus. Believers will develop and follow a faith journey that weaves good information about discipleship into a process that facilitates mutual support, encouragement, and accountability.

Transformational Strategy in Practice

The aim of this adult formation program will be to present a personalized approach to growth in Christian discipleship for adults of the Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church. Adults will be guided in the development of a personal growth plan around five faith practices that result in self-reproducing disciples of Jesus Christ. The five faith practices that are identified for this approach to personal discipleship growth are: “Worship Regularly,” “Pray Daily,” “Learn and Apply God’s Word,” “Participate in a Ministry,” and “Give Financially to the Ministry of the Church.” The formation program will be called: *Faith Journey – A Pathway for Traveling with Christ*. Participants who commit to this process for personal growth and transformation will be identified as “Travelers.”

Seven small-group-based sessions will precede the development of a personal growth plan in the eighth session. Ultimately, the desired outcome is progress in living a life in the manner of Christ, not simply more knowledge about Christ. A personal assessment tool has been created for this program that will identify for participants both present strengths and opportunities for growth in personal discipleship. Three points of engagement will shape the process of discipleship growth. These will recognize the value of time alone to experience silence and solitude; time in community for the purposes of support, encouragement, and accountability; and time sharing with others one’s personal experiences of growth.

Applying Peace's transformation paradigm to these aims might suggest the following structure for eight small-group experiences. Small group session one: "Entering into Community," establishes a biblical foundation for spiritual formation in a small group. Small group session two: "Claiming Our Need," will assure that the real needs of people are confronted directly and faced openly and that those needs are understood and owned by persons in a public context. Small group sessions three to seven: "Claiming Five Faith Practices for Growth," will be organized so that these needs are set next to input that addresses them directly and brings new light on them. Small group session eight: "Claiming a Process for Growth," will see that these needs are processed in a form or structure that is appropriate to the need and the solution and that the whole process occurs in a context that puts the triune God central. Peace's transformation paradigm provided developmental structure for the content of the eight small groups sessions while my own basic formula of transformation—the three points of engagement—guide participants in the regular application of content in daily practice.

The eighth and final small group session will be given over to drafting a personal growth plan and sharing the plan with group participants for comment and then final revisions privately at a later time. The personal growth plan will be developed around one or two faith practices that were shown to be the primary areas of opportunity for growth as indicated by a personal assessment tool also completed in the eighth small group session. Three points of engagement will be introduced as the process through which participants will engage their personal growth plan over the next year.

The three points of engagement that will shape the process of discipleship growth and transformation are: time apart, time in community, and time sharing. Time apart is

individual time alone in which the traveler actively pursues his or her personal growth plan for traveling more intentionally with Jesus. Time in community includes gathering monthly with a small disciple-forming community that provides support, encouragement, and accountability for travelers on the journey. Each session will be for a period of ninety minutes and will provide three activities: guided Bible equipping on some aspect of discipleship, reflections of personal experiences of the faith journey in the past month, and prayer for one another.

Time sharing involves choosing from multiple opportunities to communicate with others one's own experience of growth along the journey of discipleship. Opportunities will include sharing a five-minute faith story in worship, writing a faith story for the church's newsletter, or inviting a neighbor or friend to coffee and sharing one's journey. This point of engagement fulfills the disciple's call to participate in the Lord's Great Commission, sharing his or her hope of Christ with others.

Anticipated Outcomes

As materials for this formation program are developed, they will be identified with a common icon, a compass in an open hand pointing the way for the traveler. The aim of this multi-faceted program is to move adults beyond choosing particular Christian activities and programs and toward a pathway that intentionally equips them to think, act, and be like Jesus in every possible respect, every day of the week. The church will experience spiritual passion that is birthed from lives immersed continually in God's Word and godly insights applied in the daily exercise of life.

In short, the anticipated outcome of this adult formation program is that persons choosing to follow Jesus will recognize that attendance in church functions does not

transform lives; rather, lives will be changed by Jesus being active within the hearts and minds of people captive to the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Participants will claim spiritual resources to meet the challenges and pressures that confront each day and will move from exhaustion and defeated lives to victorious living. Power will be released through the church into the local community, multiplying disciples and fulfilling the Great Commission of our Lord.

Specifically, five general outcomes are expected as participants engage the process for spiritual transformation. First, participants will understand that growth in Christian discipleship is more than right beliefs, right thoughts, and right doctrine. Growth is accomplished with faith practices that, applied consistently, change thoughts, behaviors, and priorities. Second, participants will know by memory the five faith practices of this adult formation program and will be able to identify some aspect of application in personal life. Third, participants will have identified one or two faith practices that require the greatest attention for growth and have a written plan for growth. Fourth, participants will have identified an opportunity to share with another their personal experience of growth. Fifth, participants will have identified a regular time for the reflective reading of Scripture and the exercise of solitude.

The five general outcomes identified above are largely cognitive in nature. They address what participants will know or decisions they will have made concerning their spiritual formation journey. While important, Scripture continually calls God's people to love God with all their heart as well as their minds (Deut. 6:5; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27) and for their behavior to reflect their faith (Eph. 2:10; Eph. 4:12; James 2:14-17). Knowing more about God and understanding specific steps for a spiritual journey

accomplishes little in being transformed into the image of Christ. Therefore, each session in the curriculum has identified affective (to feel) and behavior (to do) goals. The intention is that each session will reach beyond instilling more information (loving God with one's mind – cognitive goals) and generate or stir the affection, or heart, of the participant to feel challenged, encouraged, affirmed, or compelled in some manner and be moved to action (behavior) as a response. Ultimately, the goal of any spiritual formation process is to realize in one's own life the instruction of Ephesians 5:1, to "be imitators of God.

Henry Ward Beecher once commented, "Religion means work. Religion means work in a dirty world. Religion means peril; blows given, but blows taken as well. Religion means transformation. The world is to be cleaned by somebody and you are not called of God if you are ashamed to scour and scrub."² Perhaps a succinct phrasing of an anticipated outcome, as suggested by Beecher's words, is an ever increasing number of persons equipped and committed to the missional work of God in the world.

Program Components

The overall design of this adult formation program is here presented in greater detail, identifying the various pieces that shape the whole. The program may be thought of in two movements. The first movement consists of a eight-session small group experience that builds an understanding of the faith practices central to the formation program. The second movement is the engagement of a personal growth plan developed during the eighth small group session. Together they provide a process for confronting, in

² Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Meaning of Service* (New York: Association Press, 1920), 5.

a small group, the need for spiritual growth, engagement with written material that provides insight into the life and practices of a disciple, and, finally, guidance for preparing a written plan for weaving insights into daily practice.

Movement One: Eight Small Group Sessions

Building upon the work of Benjamin Bloom, a University of Chicago professor, each of the eight small group sessions has its own cognitive, affective, and psychomotor objectives.³ Bloom developed what is known as a “taxonomy of learning” that asserted that all learning can be solidified into three domains. The cognitive domain is that which acquires and evaluates factual knowledge. The affective domain describes values and attitudes that result in specific convictions by the student. The psychomotor domain describes actions and skills that shape a behavioral response.

Each of the eight sessions will have four learning components, the first three with multiple exercises. The desired objective of the various exercises is an immersion into one idea for each of the eight sessions. See table 6.1.

Table 6.1. Learning components and exercises for the seven sessions of Movement One

Learning Components	Exercises
FaithPractice in Scripture	Reading Reading Study Guide
FaithPractice in Life	Personal Life Story Life Story Reflection Guide
FaithPractice Equipping	Read Reflect Respond
FaithPractice Meditation	

³ Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 135-136.

Movement Two: Weekly Engagement

Following the eight small group sessions, participants will continue the spiritual formation process by engaging a personal growth plan. The plan will be simple in design, while having sufficient substance to affect growth in one or two of the faith practices. The three points of engagement that will provide structure and accountability to this follow-up period will each have support pieces. See table 6.2.

Table 6.2. The three points of engagement, with support, of Movement Two

Points of Engagement	Support
Time Apart	Personal Assessment Tool Action Opportunity Sheet
Time in Community	Guided Bible Equipping Sheet Reflections along The Journey
Time Sharing	FaithStory Guidelines

The support pieces for the second movement of this program, the weekly engagement, are presented in Session 8.

Teaching Strategy

Although there are multiple strategies for effective and creative teaching, this adult formation program will present eight small group experiences, each containing three assignments. The assignments are to be completed individually in their entirety prior to the small group. The intention is to allow the participant to reflectively engage the material at a pace that is most helpful to the individual. Additionally, this strategy of presenting the material does not require lesson preparation by the small group leader and invites the leader to mutual participation in the small group process. Each lesson (or

session) has been developed in a manner requiring the leader to simply walk the participants through the discussion format of each of the three assignments.

Jim Wilhoit and Leland Ryken have found that many learners prefer to have one central idea advanced in a single lesson.⁴ This is what they call the “big idea.” Therefore, each session will present one core thought. Each of the session’s exercises will present the core thought from different vantage points to expand the absorption capacity of the participant. The final exercise of each session will call for a specific response to the core thought in the following week.

Following is the structure of the sessions. Each session presents a core thought and develops that core thought through three exercises. Session 1 will present the biblical foundation for spiritual formation within small groups. Session 2 explores the wisdom of many thinkers on precisely what is meant by discipleship. Session 3 through 7 will present and explore deeply each of the five faith practices. Session eight will guide participants in the development of a personal growth plan. One or two passages of Scripture will be presented as the foundation for each core thought.

Exercise one, “Reflection,” will present a biblical exposition that introduces the core thought for the lesson. A clear and credible presentation of the core thought will be developed and will provide direction for the entire lesson. The exposition will be shaped by the work of Haddon W. Robinson and detailed in his book, *Biblical Preaching*.⁵ Here Robinson puts forth the idea of presenting the text’s *subject* and *complement*. The subject is what the text is about. The complement completes the idea by stating what the text says

⁴ Jim Wilhoit and Leland Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1988), 50-51, 81-93.

⁵ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 31-48.

about that subject. Succinctly, the preacher/teacher needs to answer two questions: What is the text talking about? What is the text saying about what it is talking about?

Exercise two, “Life Story,” will present a personal story written at the pastor’s invitation. This story will reflect upon the experience of the core thought in an actual person’s journey of faith. While this exercise helps to fulfill cognitive outcomes, it also advances affective outcomes by shaping attitudes and values. Reflection questions will provide opportunity for participants to engage the personal account within community, identifying their personal “heart” response. Wilhoit and Leland state that the benefit of a whole group thinking together and drawing upon diverse experiences encourages discovery learning, which is of greater value than a student’s simply being told.⁶

Exercise three, “Equipping,” is an inductive study component focusing on one passage of Scripture that speaks to the core thought. Once the core thought has been established, the entire exercise will center on that focus. The Scripture will be printed in the small group material, followed by three or four reflection questions. The intent of the questions is to lead the participants from comprehension of the text to evaluation—making the truth of the text personal. Wilhoit and Ryken offer a simplified understanding of this approach as a progression of three types of questions: from observation to interpretation to application.⁷ The answers to the first two or three inductive questions will address cognitive and affective domains of learning, helping participants assess affective outcomes by revealing attitudes and values. The last question will ask for a

⁶ Wilhoit and Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching*, 143.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 160.

specific behavioral (psycho-motor) response. The intention here is to foster the practice of obedience to all the Scripture teaches.

A similar strategy will be used for the weekly “Time in Community” sessions during the follow up of engagement with a personal growth plan. These sessions will last for a period of sixty minutes and will have three components. The first thirty minutes will be given to a Bible-equipping exercise. Participants will receive at the meeting the resource, “Guided Bible Equipping Sheet.” One discipleship insight will be presented with a supporting Scripture, both printed on the sheet. Participants will be asked to quietly read the Scripture and answer two reflection questions and one response question. The small group leader will complete the assignment with the other participants. The leader will then simply walk the participants through the reflection and response questions, inviting the sharing of responses.

The final thirty minutes will be given over to the support, encouragement, and accountability component of the meeting. Participants will have completed the resource “Reflections along the Journey” prior to the meeting. Four questions from that resource will direct the time of sharing that will support and sustain participants over the fourteen-week faith journey. The third component will be shared prayer for one another to conclude the meeting. The four reflection questions for this exercise are:

Have you experienced God’s presence in the past month? Describe this experience.

Have you been given a fresh discovery or insight about following Jesus? Share with the group.

Have you experienced blockages or obstacles to spiritual growth along the journey this past month? Share with the group.

How may the group pray for you today?

The two movements of the adult formation program and their constituent components provide a balanced approach to teaching that avoids bombarding participants with too much data and facilitates students' taking personal responsibility for learning through inductive study. As Wilhoit and Leland observe, inductive study is shared study.⁸ The value of shared study includes bringing consistency to personal study, use of other participants' insights to test interpretations, and exponential increase of insights generated by groups as compared with individual study. Furthermore, shared learning facilitates accountability and community, both of which nurture spiritual growth.

⁸ Wilhoit and Ryken, *Effective Bible Teaching*, 142.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF THE CURRICULUM

A curriculum of Christian spiritual formation that fails to identify a strategy for implementation and lacks a clear method of evaluation will accomplish little in effecting change in the local church. Effective implementation considers the current climate of receptivity for a curriculum that moves from information to life change; students are often far more willing to explore additional knowledge than to encounter a claim upon their lives to change in response to what they know of Christ's call. The object of Christian spiritual formation is advanced more by growth into a life that resembles Jesus than by acquiring additional knowledge.

Failure to have in place a means of evaluation following a process of spiritual formation indicates either a lack of serious intention to effect life change or the absence of desire to strengthen the process for optimal spiritual growth. Admirers of Jesus – and the Church is populated with such persons – can easily hold themselves personally aloof from any personal invasion of Jesus that results in change of personal behaviors, priorities, and values. An effective method of evaluation not only directs church leadership in modifications in the curriculum for optimal life change, but the process of evaluation forces the question of honesty upon the student: are they truly committed to being conformed into Christlikeness?

Spiritual formation is not a familiar concept for many members of the Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church. The present culture of the congregation is one that has reduced the faith to greater cognitive absorption of the life and ministry of Jesus, of what is required of a follower of Christ, and what such a life would look like in the present day. A call to “put on the character of Christ” often results in confusion and resistance; the teaching and preaching ministry, for the most part, are simply “reflections.” Any call to disrupt the culture, to move from one of “reflection” to one of “personal life change” will require far more than good intentions and simply talking about a spiritual formation process that is now available. Cultural change must be intentional, have “buy-in” from the spiritual leaders of the church, and recognize that a long timeframe will be required.

The intentionality of this commitment is demonstrated in the support of the spiritual leaders of the church, in word and prayer, for the development of this spiritual formation process. Throughout the development of this curriculum, portions were shared with the leaders and comment received for changes that strengthen the final form. Additionally, this engagement with the leaders throughout the process brought about personal ownership by the leaders—the certain sense that they were valued, contributing colleagues.

As the project moved toward completion, the spiritual leaders carefully wrestled with the pastor over appropriate nomenclature that would positively affect the desired outcome of the curriculum. After considerable time, nearly nine months of reflection and discussion, to identify the irreducible qualities of someone who followed Jesus, the leadership settled on five. Recognizing the power of language to communicate expectations, the church leaders considered such descriptors for the five qualities as

“disciplines,” “commitments,” and “expectations,” before settling enthusiastically upon “practices.” The hopeful expectation is that “practices,” communicates forcefully that the desired outcome of the curriculum is that people will “behave” differently.

Finally, the leadership’s “buy-in” was demonstrated by their decision that all new people wishing to affiliate with the church through membership would pledge to an intentional process of spiritual formation, this one or another, that resulted in the actual “practice” of the five, irreducible faith practices of worship regularly, pray daily, learn and apply God’s word, participate in a ministry, and give financially to the work of God in the church. Naturally, the desire is not simply the performing of the five faith practices but a whole life change and orientation toward Christlikeness, brought on by the actual practices. Anything less would reduce members’ behavior to the performance of a script without a heart desire to live as Christ lived.

Any cultural change is difficult and requires a reasonable timeframe. Change will not occur quickly nor is it reasonable to ever expect total participation by the membership. An effective strategy of implementation will not expect too much too soon, will properly prepare the church for the process, will raise-up appropriate leadership, will identify an approach for promotion and recruitment of participants, and will give consideration to such factors as the physical environment for the instruction of the curriculum and the class size. Attention to these matters optimizes the transformative process as the leaders seek to move the culture of the church from one that simply gives assent to the idea of Christ to one that seeks life change in the manner of Christ.

Implementation

Effective implementation concerns itself first with the proper groundwork for cultural change. Mark's Gospel in the fourth chapter speaks of two different kinds of soil, productive and unproductive.¹ There is no hint in this passage that human striving can change the soil. What is apparent is that productive soil is present. Within any faith community, there exists productive soil for growing authentic disciples of Jesus Christ. There may be an abundance of unproductive soil, but Mark calls attention to that which is productive. The task of church leaders is not hand wringing over what is unproductive but discernment of where the productive soil is present. That will be the place for beginning an effective spiritual formation process.

Discernment of productive soil in a faith community rarely requires strenuous effort. What is required is careful listening and observation. Hungry people talk like hungry people and act like hungry people. People who desire something more than worship on Sunday morning and busy engagement in church activities are usually clear in their behavior and speech. They have found the promises of the world unsatisfying and seek rather openly something more from the church. Wise and observant church leaders need only to pay attention to the larger membership of the church and the productive soil will become apparent. Implementation of a spiritual formation process begins with these people.

Though portions of this curriculum were used by a rather large sampling of people in various small groups in the church, the curriculum was presented in its entirety

¹ Actually, the fourth chapter of Mark identifies four kinds of soil. Essentially, however, the four kinds of soil are either productive or unproductive for growth.

with three men, using the pastor as facilitator. In the natural course of movement through the curriculum, the pastor continually sought two pieces of information: first, what was not clear or could be improved and, second, any self-identified life change being experienced by the three men. In the first issue, helpful changes that could be made, the men brought considerable insight and clarity to each of the eight learning sessions. Of primary value was their recommendation that the original design of a six-month process be reduced to fourteen weeks.

The original design was for eight consecutive weeks in a small group followed by a once-a-month check-in experience for six months. The purpose of the monthly check-in was for continued biblical study on spiritual formation and accountability for progress in a personal growth plan developed during the eighth small group session. The argument presented for the fourteen-week consecutive schedule was that eight sessions were not sufficient for developing the discipline to “stick-to” a personal growth plan. In the time between the eighth session and each monthly follow-up session, each man indicated that he simply placed the curriculum aside for more urgent matters in his life, completing the assignments for the monthly meeting at the last minute. Scheduling the six follow-up sessions immediately after the eighth session would keep the material urgently before them, facilitating positive movement in their personal growth plan.

The second issue placed before the men who participated in the testing phase of the curriculum was whether it actually facilitated movement in living the Christian life. Each of the three confirmed the hope of the spiritual leaders who had wrestled with what to name the five irreducible qualities of someone who followed Jesus: the five faith practices. The design of the curriculum that moved from cognitive to heart to behavior

resulted in knowledge, desire, and actual change in behavior in the journey of faith. God used the intentional change of regular behavior in a manner that resulted in what the men described as “greater assurance of God’s presence and love” and “change of heart and desires.” One man in the group shared that the curriculum convicted him concerning how he used his financial resources, resulting in greater generosity to the church.

The leadership of this testing group accomplished more than retooling the curriculum and evaluating its value for life change. The facilitation of the process taught by example the intended manner for use of the curriculum. The curriculum is not to be “taught.” Church members who use this curriculum for spiritual formation are asked to complete all reading and written assignments prior to the meeting. The function of the leader is to facilitate helpful discussion and engagement of the material among members of the group—sharing his or her own responses to the questions in the material as other group members are encouraged to mutual sharing. This will necessarily include a balance of participation by all members of the group—drawing out participation by the quieter members and helping more talkative members understand that others’ insights are also valued. Every group member need not provide an answer to every question in each of the three sections of group study. Group leaders are simply called upon to ensure a balance of participation by every group member in the course of the one-hour session and keep the group members focused on the material.

Leaders of the curriculum will ideally be persons who have completed the material with the author or another leader who has been trained by the author. Leadership will be shown “by example” of how the leader experienced the curriculum in a small spiritual formation group. Beyond basic dynamics of recognizing the difference between

“teaching” and “facilitation,” maintaining focus on the material and beginning and ending on time, a major consideration of leadership is valuing the intentional movement of each small group session: movement from cognitive to affective to a behavioral encounter with the material. Leaders will carefully move group members who remain too heavily in the cognitive arena toward the affective and behavioral, recognizing that the point of the process is life change.

Another important consideration for the implementation of the curriculum is promotion and the recruiting of students. Promotional efforts will include both printed material and announcements in worship with the common thrust that the church is calling for movement from “membership” to “discipleship,” the intentional process of moving toward a life of Christlikeness. Spiritual formation will be continually identified as the primary task of the church that is neither an interesting, optional pursuit of church members nor another activity of church membership among other, equally rewarding activities. Recognizing that “vision leaks,” the vision of every church member becoming engaged in intentional spiritual formation and growth will be supported twice yearly in the preaching ministry.

The promotional means identified above, though basic and important, will not be the primary means of promotion and recruiting students. Built into the curriculum is a component that asks students to share with another outside the group the process they have completed and what it has meant to them personally. This conversation is directed by a template in the introduction to the curriculum that is informed by Scripture and does not require forced registration of additional students. The idea is that such conversations will result in a more organic “buzz” in the church, communicating that lives are being

changed by this curriculum and stirring hunger for participation by others. Those who are attracted to the opportunity of experiencing personally what all the conversation is about will select either a fall or spring start of the fourteen-week curriculum.

The physical environment where the curriculum is provided is also an important consideration. As this is not material that is “taught” but, rather, processed among members of a small group, the space should be conducive to all members having direct eye contact with one another. Ideally, the meeting space will not only be one that provides for the physical comfort of the participants but also one that is relaxed and informal. The emphasis of the curriculum is one of “experience” and, ultimately, “life change.” Any physical attributes of the meeting space that suggest a classroom should be diminished.

Identifying a consistent time and place to engage the material as a small group should not be overlooked. Experience with small groups has demonstrated that any change in time or place diminishes participation by group members who have very busy lives and carefully scheduled weeks. Consider a time of day and week that is best for the particular members of the group. Determine whether a group member’s home is available for fourteen consecutive meetings or gathering in a coffee shop would be more helpful. If the church is the best gathering place, consideration should be given to a space that best facilitates the dynamics of a small group rather than those of a class. If the church is selected, the leader should be certain to reserve a place for the duration of the curriculum to avoid the disappointment of discovering another ministry scheduling the use of the same space before completion of the fourteen weeks.

The size of the small group is another consideration when implementing this curriculum. Since the design of this curriculum is one for use in small groups with the stated intention of facilitating spiritual growth, groups should neither be too small or too large. Optimally, a group using this material will consist of between five and thirteen people. Richard Peace, a nationally recognized leader in small group theory and development, states that these numbers are not arbitrary:

When you have less than five people it is hard to sustain the intentional aspect of the dialogue. The group drifts easily into ordinary conversation. Furthermore, when you have less than five the absence of even one member changes the dynamic for the worse. When you have less than five in a small group you do not have enough voices with different perspectives to work effectively with issues. Five seems to be the critical mass for a small group. The exception to this is when a larger group splits into sub-groups for part of its session to work on a particular module. The larger group provides the energy and identity that carries over into the temporary sub-group of the three or four.²

The curriculum has been prepared for use in this type of small group – a small faith community gathered for the purposes of mutual spiritual formation. Within the size parameters suggested by Peace, a rich interaction occurs among the group members, each member having adequate time for meaningful participation in the shared conversation and reflection on the material. Additionally, there exists a higher level of accountability for one another that becomes difficult in a group larger than thirteen.

Evaluation

Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt suggest that evaluation is probably the most neglected educational task of the church.³ Failure to identify a formal method of

² Richard Peace, “Transforming Small Groups,” chapter 7 in *The Design of Small Groups* (Course notebook for “Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World,” Fuller Theological Seminary, 2008), 18.

³ Richards and Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching*, 307.

evaluation diminishes both the opportunity to determine if desired outcomes are achieved and the opportunity for strengthening deficits in the material. If the goal of an adult formation program is to facilitate transformation in individuals, evaluation is essential.

For the purposes of this program, the Robert Stake's model for evaluation of educational programs and teaching sessions will be used.⁴ The model is comprised of six boxes in two columns labeled "expected" and "actual." Stake believes that an evaluation must take both into account. All programs and lessons expect certain things to happen in the learning experience, but those things rarely happen exactly as designed. Evaluation is a comparison of what was expected and the actual—what the student reports as the real outcome.

The left side of the model focuses on what is expected to happen in the learning experience. Three boxes are labeled: "Expected Learning Antecedents," which are the things that are present at the beginning of the learning experience; "Expected Learning Transactions," which are the learning exercises or tools the program or lesson brings to the learning experience; and "Expected Learning Outcomes," which identify the results the program or lesson seeks to accomplish. On the right side are corresponding boxes where the actual data is recorded following the learning experience. The following table illustrates what this tool might look like for this program.

⁴ Richards and Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching*, 307.

Table 7-1. Stakes model for evaluation

<p>Expected Learning Antecedents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-8 students would participate initially • Mostly undisciplined, nominal Christians • All students desire to grow spiritually 	<p>Actual Learning Antecedents</p>
<p>Expected Learning Transactions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson exercises will be completed before small group sessions • All students will actively participate in guided discussion • Commitment by each student to pray for group 	<p>Actual Learning Transactions</p>
<p>Expected Learning Outcomes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will know that growth in Christian discipleship is more than right beliefs, right doctrine. Growth is accomplished with practices that change behaviors and is receptive to the power of the Holy Spirit working in the individual • Students will know by memory the five faith practices for growth in Christian discipleship • Students will have identified one or two faith practices to strengthen in the next weeks of follow up and have a written growth plan • Students will have identified an opportunity to share their growth with another • Students will have identified a regular time and place for the practice of prayer and solitude • Students will be able to say at the end of the growth plan implementation that they experience an increase love for Christ and for neighbor. 	<p>Actual Learning Outcomes</p>

While Stake's model of evaluation is useful for measuring outcomes for the participant, an evaluation of the process of the curriculum is also important. Design of the curriculum has been a long and difficult process. It is the result of much reading, study, and thought. However, the possibility for improving this or any curriculum is always present. Collection of useful insights, through a formal means of evaluation, provides the opportunity for strengthening the effectiveness of the curriculum for future use.

Personal experience in a doctoral program where evaluations are gathered for each course of study has demonstrated that few students welcome the evaluation process. If the evaluation form is too long or cumbersome, the number of students willing to complete the evaluation is low, diminishing its value. Similarly, if the evaluation does not ask for sufficient feedback or the questions are poorly asked, the result is equally disappointing. The bottom line of any evaluation is two questions: did this curriculum add value to the student and could it have done so more effectively? Seeking a balance between gathering insufficient data and being so long and involved that few will complete the evaluation, the following questions will be used:

- What was the most helpful portion or exercise in the curriculum?
- What was the least helpful portion or exercise in the curriculum?
- What was most inspiring or motivating portion or exercise in the curriculum?
- What was the most difficult portion or exercise to follow or grasp?
- What one or two things would you do to improve this curriculum?
- Would you invite someone else to participate in this curriculum? Why?

The evaluation should be provided immediately following the close of the eighth session and students urged to complete them before leaving. Immediate changes to the curriculum, based upon written evaluations, following one or two offerings may be unwise. More helpful would be to gather evaluations following multiple offerings and look for patterns or trends that would drive future changes.

This adult formation program is presented in the hopeful expectation that the future of this congregation will be one that is outward focused rather than inward, occupied with growing authentic disciples for Jesus rather than providing ministry services. Congregations that accomplish this movement from an inward focus to an outward one recognize that it is not sufficient to lead people to accept Christ. Believers must be engaged in a process that develops ever growing disciples. Marjorie J. Thompson says it best, “When it comes to spiritual growth, humans beings are much like plants. We need structure and support. Otherwise our spirituality grows only in a confused and disorderly way.”⁵

To ensure that such a process accomplishes the desired spiritual transformation, members must receive biblical teaching on the key faith practices of a disciple. It cannot be assumed that church members understand the fundamentals of the Christian faith. The hope is that this program will move the church positively toward that end. The work of building disciples must be deliberate. Yet, the promise of Scripture is that God uses the process of discipleship to strengthen, grow, mature, and fashion his people into the image of his Son.

View to the Future

Present within the church are two small streams, separate from one another, which have the potential to create significant transformation in the congregation’s culture. The first stream is a handful of people who are driven with a heart for mission, both local and overseas. They continually challenge the leadership of the church to increase annual

⁵ Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 145.

budget allocations to ministry beyond the needs of the present membership. The second are those who treat God as a tangible presence in their daily lives and have an urgency to see their experience of God multiplied within the church and the community. Their efforts have included the development of a healing and wholeness ministry to the discouraged and sick and various ministries of prayer.

Releasing the full potential of these two streams will require an intentional strategy of the church's leadership—a strategy to transition the membership culture from a vision of the church as an institution that serves the needs of its constituents to the biblical vision of a movement of God to the world with shared responsibilities. The effectiveness of such a movement relies upon individual lives experiencing change as fully devoted followers of Christ. What is urgently needed is a process for moving persons from church members who demand privileges to lifelong learners of Jesus Christ, committed to continuing his work on earth. This paper proposes a process for the necessary spiritual transformation that will produce a congregation defined by a missional character.

The primary challenge of the strategy proposed here is to come alongside people who are losing their orientation and help them become aware of the nature of their stress and their need for spiritual growth. The economic systems and over-committed lifestyles that brought prosperity no longer function to produce a sense of well-being and wholeness. People feel caught in a rhythm of life that they no longer find meaningful and one over which they have little control. Missing is a clear pathway for recovering meaning and purpose in life and experiencing spiritual transformation. This paper proposes a pathway to achieve this transformation.

The primary target audience for this strategy will be the two streams of members previously identified. These are people who have a vision for something more, whose appetites demand more than prosperity and are eager to abandon self for a God-sized movement. This project will provide a personalized approach to growth in Christian discipleship for them through the development of a personal growth plan, built around five faith practices, that results in self-reproducing disciples of Jesus Christ. The five faith practices that are identified for this approach to personal discipleship growth are: worship regularly, pray daily, learn and apply God's Word, participate in a ministry, and give financially to the ministry of the church. It is anticipated that working with the two small streams identified will initially provide the small transformational movements within the congregation necessary to release an organic process that brings fresh vitality to the church.

Frederick Buechner once observed, "For many years now I have taken to going to church less and less because I find so little there of what I hunger for. It is a sense of the presence of God that I hunger for."⁶ The move to address the felt need for fresh purpose and wholeness in overburdened lives begins with a recovery of the presence of God active in our daily lives. The disciplined engagement with the five faith practices of this strategy cultivates hearts that are receptive to the transformative work of the Holy Spirit. It will be those changed hearts that will provide the church with a fresh orientation to the purposes of God.

⁶ Neil Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999), xxi.

APPENDIX

FaithJourney: A Pathway for Traveling with Christ

An Adult Spiritual Formation Process

Prepared by W. Douglas Hood, Jr.
*Pastor, Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church
New Britain, PA*

Forward by Thomas G. Long

Foreword by Thomas G. Long

In this helpful resource, *FaithJourney: A Pathway for Traveling with Christ*, W. Douglas Hood Jr. not only provides practical guidance for Christians who desire a deeper faith life, he also participates in two significant trends in 21st century American church life. The first trend reflected in these pages has to do with a creative pastoral response to what has been called the “secularization” of American religious life. It has been widely reported that membership and attendance figures for the old “mainline” denominations in the U.S. have declined precipitously in the last fifty years and that many people in our society today are either uninterested in religion altogether or prefer a non-churchy, “spiritual but not religious” version of it. What has perhaps received less attention is the fact that in many of the congregations that are still strong, maybe even growing, the worshippers are nevertheless affected by secularization. Even though they are still church goers, they are less formed by and informed about the Christian faith than were their great-grandparents. There are now many people who worship regularly in Christian churches, who are eager to be faithful, but who do not have a deep working knowledge of the faith. They desire a richer biblical knowledge, a keener awareness of the basic truth claims of Christianity, and a more profound acquaintance with the practical side of the faith.

Good pastors are recognizing that the task of forming people in faith has a new urgency in our time. Preaching to people who are not learning about the faith and being formed in discipleship can devolve into entertaining an audience instead of edifying a congregation of the faithful. In this book, Doug Hood provides welcome help in this important ministry of weaving into the fabric of people’s lives the basic pattern of the Christian faith. The second trend reflected in this book is the renewed awareness of the importance of practices in the lives of Christians. For too long, we have tended to present the Christian faith as if it were a “head experience” alone, a set of ideas and beliefs to which people said yes or no. But Christianity is not merely a collection of thought and doctrines; it is rather an all-encompassing way of life. Over the centuries, Christians have learned how to shape that way of life by investing their energies in certain spiritually sustaining and life-giving practices, such as reading Scripture together, prayer, service to others, and stewarding resources. Without a clear and structured pattern of practices, the Christian life can be fragmented, shapeless, and incoherent. In this book, Doug Hood helps Christians reclaim these ancient practices in ways that are pertinent in our day. Doug Hood has written a wise and worthy guide for pastors and lay people. It is the fruit of much study, thought, and prayer, and we are in his debt.

Thomas G. Long
Bandy Professor of Preaching
Candler School of Theology
Emory University
Atlanta, GA

CONTENTS

FOREWORD	90
APPRECIATION	92
INTRODUCING THE 14-WEEK JOURNEY	94
SESSION	
1. ENTERING INTO COMMUNITY	101
2. UNDERSTANDING DISCIPLESHIP	109
3. WORSHIP REGULARLY	118
4. PRAY DAILY	126
5. LEARN AND APPLY GOD’S WORD	134
6. PARTICIPATE IN A MINISTRY	142
7. GIVE FINANCIALLY TO THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH.....	150
8. CHARTING THE JOURNEY	158
BIBLIOGRAPHY	176

APPRECIATION

A journey of faith is always made in community: in the company of the Triune God and in the company of others who are on the road with us. Some may have traveled ahead of us but leave behind their wisdom as markers for our journey. Others travel with us, contributing their insights, learnings and glimpses of God as we share ours. Still others are behind us with a careful eye on the horizon for the markers we will leave for them. Together, we all journey into the embrace of our savior, Jesus Christ.

The preparation of this resource has been a special journey for me. The hours of reading, reflection, prayer, writing, and rewriting seem now as numerous as the stars of the night sky. What I am certain of is that, if there is any value here, it is the result of my standing under the wisdom and instruction of many great leaders of the faith – some I have enjoyed in the classroom, others from the printed page. My hope is that something of the force of their insight and guidance in Christian spiritual formation has been captured in these pages.

Perhaps most importantly, this work has been brought to completion because of special companions who have surrounded me, nurtured me, and encouraged me to finish the race when I became weary. Clearly, I would not have been successful without the full support of the following people who, for reasons perhaps know only to them, just keep on believing in me and encouraging me in our shared journey of faith:

The membership of the Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church, New Britain, Pennsylvania, who has invited me the past eleven years to be their pastor and a pilgrim with them in spiritual growth. They have loved my family and me, received my ministry with joy, encouraged me in my own journey of faith, and provided for my family's material needs. They have made ministry among them a place of delight.

Mark Beard, Kurt Pleim, and Peter Thompson, each of you have sustained me in the practice of ministry by your prayers, mutual study of discipleship with me and, most importantly, your special friendship. My time with you provided the inspiration for the development of this resource. Your companionship on the journey has been a treasure.

James W. Bauerle, Bert Schillo, and Stephan K. Hess participated with me in the testing of this material within a Faith Journey Group and provided immeasurable insight for strengthening its usefulness to others. My ministry is the richer for each of you.

Bill Kerber, a colleague in ministry and friend whose imagination and creativity expand my own and who has encouraged me in making this resource available to a wider audience.

Laura Cooney, as always, was a tremendous support with her administrative assistance and help in protecting my preparation time for this project. More, she has been a trusted friend and partner in ministry, whose wise and trusted counsel has strengthened my ministry.

My brother Wayne Hood, along with his wife, Nancy and daughter, Christina never cease praying for me and encouraging me. Most importantly, Wayne's commitment to the local church as a pastor encourages my own.

Jonathan Cameron, my brother-in-law and his wife, Janet, Elisabeth Cameron, my sister-in-law, and Wilma Cameron, my mother-in-law have each made extraordinary sacrifices to support me in the completion of my studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA. Additionally, they have contributed to the continued wholeness of my family that has made this work possible.

Most importantly, I deeply appreciate my family, my wife, Grace, and children, Nathanael and Rachael, who gave-up time with me that I may commit energy and time to bring this book to completion. Grace, you are a woman who embodies Christlike character. The Lord's truths, wisdom, and immeasurable love and encouragement always come through you. Thank you for your patience and support for standing with me through the completion of this long project. You, along with two incredible children, have made our life together a joyful place.

INTRODUCING THE 14-WEEK JOURNEY: Read Before You Begin

The great Scottish preacher and teacher, Peter Taylor Forsyth (1848-1921) once said that there is but one great preacher in history and that preacher is the Church.¹ The first business of the individual preacher, contends Forsyth, is to enable the Church to preach, but it is the Church, the community of faith, which is to declare the message of Christ to the world. The preaching Forsyth speaks of has less to do with the spoken word and more to do with changed lives, “either in direction or in scale.”² In true preaching, more is done than said. Any other kind of preaching may be interesting but will remain powerless. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not about the enlightenment of minds but the transformation of women and men into the character of Christ.

Unfortunately, as Thomas Long observes in the foreword, many in the church today are less formed by and informed about the Christian faith than were their great-grandparents. The result is exhausted Christians, busy with good and worthy church activities, who have little sense of an intimate relationship with the One whom all their activity is about. Absent is a sense of awe, wonder, and experience of an unnatural power. Membership in the church is just one more activity in an overburdened life. A matter of great urgency before the Church today is identifying a pathway for ordinary people to become moved by the power of God that results in fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this resource is to equip the Church for its preaching to the world, to provide a pathway for a purposeful and life changing walk with Jesus Christ. The Christian spiritual formation process identified here will provide clarity on the nature of discipleship, identify five irreducible faith practices for growing in Christ, and guide the development of a personal growth plan. The intention is to offer direction in spiritual formation and accelerate personal spiritual growth. Participants will not only discover their footing on a pathway toward Christlikeness but will be introduced to a simple, yet effective means of becoming a self-reproducing disciple of Jesus Christ.

The eight sessions of this study guide will dispel the myth that discipleship is hard work and limited to a few. What will be discovered is that becoming a holy people who are continually being fashioned into the image of Christ is the hard work of the Holy Spirit. What is required of us is that we grant the Holy Spirit access to our lives by becoming imitators of Jesus’ life.

Think of it this way. Plant a seed in the ground. It is not our work to cause the seed to sprout and grow. That is a process beyond our power and ability. It is an organic process hard wired into the seed by God. But we do have to plant the seed in good, rich soil. Spiritual growth is much the same. Growth in Christ is as organic as the growth of the seed. But good, rich soil is required. Preparing the soil of our lives simply means that we will follow the practices of Jesus during his life here on earth. It also means that we avoid poisoning the soil with unhealthy practices. As we become imitators of Jesus, the

¹ P. T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (London: Independent Press, 1953), 53.

² *Ibid.*, 54.

work of transformation into the likeness of Jesus is a natural, organic one. It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Five Faith Practices

The Church has always recognized that the Christian life has much more to do with our lives than with a mental consent to a collection of thought and beliefs. The Christian life is a call to a reorientation of how we are to live. The emphasis, therefore, is not on conformity of thought but on conformity of action – the imitation of the life of Jesus. Faith practices are a means by which we begin to imitate Jesus, his life and ministry, and consequently give ourselves over to the Holy Spirit in such a manner that we see the image of God increase in our heart. Certain practices carefully identified and incorporated into our way of being and living provide attentiveness to the work of God in our communities and the world. The five, irreducible faith practices identified for this spiritual formation process are:

- Worship Regularly
- Pray Daily
- Learn & Apply God's Word
- Participate in a Ministry
- Give Financially to the Work of the Church.

These practices are what we do, the responsibility we take for our growth. They give evidence of a decision to live differently; the refusal to be conformed to this world but, rather, to be transformed by a life that follows the example of Christ. During the eighth session of this spiritual formation small group process, participants will identify both present strengths and opportunities for growth in the five faith practices using a simple assessment instrument. Guidance will then be provided for developing a personal growth plan for the one or two faith practices that require the most growth.

Basic Formula for Transformation

This spiritual formation process recognizes that spiritual growth does not happen by individual effort alone. Though our active participation in growth is important, little would be accomplished apart from the active work of God in us through the Holy Spirit. What is required is that we place ourselves before God in such a manner that God might accomplish God's work in us. Three opportunities or "places of engagement in spiritual growth" have been identified for this as a basic formula for transformation:

- A Place Alone with God in Silence & Solitude
- A Place in a Community of a Small Group for Encouragement & Accountability
- A Place for Sharing Your Growth with Another.

In these places, we encounter the risen Christ much the same as the disciples did following his resurrection. It is in these places that we experience in our lives the animating power of God that produces change into Christlikeness.

Before looking at the format of the small group sessions, a closer examination of this basic formula for transformation may be helpful.

A Place Alone

Spiritual formation and growth require a growing attentiveness to God, to where God is active in our lives, and to where we are being led. This attentiveness requires that we make a place in our lives to sense God's presence and to hear God speak. Psalm 46:10 teaches that such a place is one of stillness – a place apart from the noise, pace, and narrative of the surrounding culture in which we spend most of our lives. God's narrative, God's desire, God's calling is opened to us in places of silence and solitude. It will be in such places that we permit God to have God's way with us, a place where we experience accelerated growth in spiritual living. Time in such places also builds resistance to all other voices that compete with God's voice in our lives.

A Place in Community

The Kingdom of God is relational. A decision to follow Jesus and grow in his likeness cannot be accomplished alone. The Apostle Paul teaches in his letter to the Roman Church that, though discipleship to the Lordship of Jesus is intensely personal, it is corporate in character (Romans 12:3-5). Matthew's Gospel further asserts that the Church, the community of faith, is the primary means by which God answers the Church's prayer, "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10 NRSV). And Ephesians teaches that it is participation in the work of the Church that believers grow into full maturity in Christ (Ephesians 4:13). A call to follow Christ, to be his disciple and exercise spiritual living in the manner of Christ is a clear summons to participate in his community, the Church.

A Place for Sharing

Our daily conversations do more than provide a running narrative of our lives; such conversations shape our experiences, practices and life with one another. The Bible teaches that, as we think, so we become. As we speak, we provide clarity and development of those thoughts that ultimately shape who we will be. The essence of spiritual formation is the quality of life that we live. That life develops positively in the manner of Jesus as our lips take on truthful, meaningful, and compassionate speech that is ultimately grounded in a compelling witness to the place Jesus occupies in our hearts.

There is a marvelous story in the ninth chapter of John's Gospel. A man who was blind was brought to Jesus and received his sight. He went into town to share the miracle of his physical healing. Religious leaders pressed him for a theological assessment of what had occurred. His answer was simple: "One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see" (John 9:25 NRSV). He doesn't become captive to their desire for theological debate. Simply, he states his former condition (blindness), and his present condition (sight) as a result of Jesus. When Christians are asked why they do not share their faith more often, the primary reason stated is that they feel inadequate in presenting the Christian faith or fear theological debates they are ill equipped for. The man in John's Gospel gives us permission to sidestep these conversations. Simply share, as he shared,

that once I was this way, this is what happened, and now I am another way. Three powerful talking points for sharing:

- **This is where my faith was.**

Example: Though I always believed in God, my faith lacked depth, structure, and impact upon my life.

- **This is what I did.**

Example: I joined a spiritual formation process with three other men called *Faith Journey*. Together we studied Scripture, prayed, and held one another accountable for the engagement of certain faith practices in our daily lives.

- **This is where my faith is now.**

Example: I have grown more assured of God's love for me, cherish new friendships made, and now am confidently following a path to grow in the character of Christ.

Anyone who has ever studied a foreign language knows that continued practice is absolutely necessary lest all the time and effort to learn the language is lost. Proficiency follows regular, disciplined use of the language. The same is true of Christian discipleship. Unless followers are regularly learning from Jesus and applying those learnings in the exercise of their daily living and speech, any understanding of what a follower of Jesus looks like becomes blurred and, eventually, drops from sight. The primary goal of this spiritual formation process is to partner with you in language practice; to nudge each church member to recall, speak, and exercise what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. As Thomas G. Long so eloquently states it, "When we talk about our faith, we are not merely expressing our beliefs; we are coming more fully and clearly to believe. In short, we are always talking ourselves into being Christian."³

Small Group Session Format

Each of the eight one-hour small group sessions in this resource is divided into four sections, each building upon a single core thought. The aim is that, by working through these multiple channels of learning, you will be immersed into the core thought in such a manner that not only will you be equipped with head knowledge of the material but you will experience God's own activity in shaping your thoughts, desires, and values. Of course, the goal of this spiritual formation process is *living* a spiritual life. Each session is to be read and the assignments completed in their entirety prior to the small group meeting. The written assignments follow each of the first three sections of each lesson; the fourth section simply a meditation for personal reflection apart from the small group. The four sections of each small group session are:

³ Thomas G. Long, *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 7.

- **Reflection** (allow 15 minutes) – A cognitive (*To Know*) exercise that provides a teaching based upon the core Scripture and core thought. This teaching is intended to provide a contemporary and relevant examination of the core thought challenging our values and lifestyle.
- **Life Story** (allow 15 minutes) – An affective (*To Feel*) exercise, these life stories have been prepared for this resource by pilgrims on their own faith journey and demonstrate the practice of the core thought in their journey. The intention of these life stories is that learners will appreciate the value of the particular faith practice in their own spiritual formation journey.
- **Equipping** (allow 20 minutes) – An exercise that directly asks for a behavioral (*To Do*) response to the lesson, this exercise explores deeply the core thought from the Scriptures. The aim in this exercise is not only to learn what the Bible teaches concerning the core thought but to faithfully respond to the teaching in one's conduct in life and practice of the Christian faith. Additionally, the practice of seeking God's counsel in Scripture models the basic Christian conviction that the Christian journey is informed by a regular study of God's Word.
- **Closing Prayer** (allow 3 minutes) – Suggested prayer provided at the end of each session. Prayer may be read by the group or one person on behalf of the group.
- **Meditation** (allow 20-30 minutes of personal quiet time alone) - Presented to provide structure for time alone experiencing silence, solitude, and reflection. Intended for private devotional reading, each meditation continues reflection upon the core thought of the small group session. Read the meditation slowly. Note what insights, feelings, and nudges of the Holy Spirit you may experience. Simply sit quietly for 20-30 minutes reflecting on these experiences. Conclude by quietly thanking God for them and make a note of them in the margins of your book.

Time allotments for each portion of the small group sessions are provided as general guidance. The group, along with the group facilitator, will exercise discretion should meaningful conversation in one portion demand more time. Naturally, should one portion receive greater attention, time with another portion should be minimized to honor a one-hour time period for each group session. Each small group session closes with suggested activities for further growth: Spiritual Fitness Training. They are specifically designed to be a resource during the eighth and last session for the development of a Personal Growth Plan for the spiritual journey of faith.

Personal Preparation

During your time with the small group the group facilitator will guide group members through the reflection questions that were completed individually prior to the meeting. In addition to sharing your written insights, listen carefully to the insights and answers of the other members of your group. Answers of others should never be judged

as incorrect. The reflection questions have been purposely crafted to seek one's personal engagement of the material, not evaluate one's grasp of the lesson.

Be prepared to write in your training manual anything fresh and new that you hear. This will increase the value of this resource for your personal spiritual growth. Acknowledge quietly to yourself throughout your preparation for the small group and during the small group meeting that Christ is very present, working to transform your thoughts and grow your heart. Weave prayer constantly throughout the process, asking that you not only experience the certain presence of the risen Christ but that you will be transformed by the Holy Spirit into Christlikeness.

Group Preparation

Identify a consistent time and place to engage this material as a small group. For example, consider meeting for an hour on fourteen consecutive Thursday evenings or Monday mornings or Sunday afternoons in a group member's living room, at a convenient coffee shop, or a small room at your church. If the church is selected, be certain to reserve a place for the duration of this program to avoid the disappointment of discovering another ministry using your space at the appointed time of your group. Ideally, the group will begin at a time of the year where the fourteen sessions may be completed in continuous weeks with few or no interruptions, such as Christmas holidays or summer vacation.

A Brief Word for Facilitators

The primary responsibility of the facilitator of a Faith Journey Small Group is the recognition that you are not to teach this material. Members of the group are asked to complete all reading and written assignments prior to the meeting. Your function is that of facilitating helpful discussion and engagement of the material among members of your group – sharing your own responses to the questions in the material as you encourage mutual sharing by others. This will necessarily include maintaining a balance of participation by all members of the group – drawing out participation by the quieter members and helping more talkative members understand that others' insights are also valued. Every group member need not provide an answer to every question in each of the three sections of group study. As facilitator, simply ensure a balance of participation by every group member in the course of the one-hour session. An additional responsibility of the facilitator is keeping the group's members focused on the material and beginning and ending on time.

Final Remarks

It is my hope that this spiritual formation process finds a welcomed place in your yearning to experience Christ more intimately. It is a pathway that gently calls each one of us back to what truly satisfies – learning from Jesus, reordering our lives by those teachings, and experiencing His power for today and all of our tomorrows. As we grow and mature in discipleship, others will notice. And when we share what it is that is making a difference in our lives, we participate with the Holy Spirit in raising-up other disciples of Jesus Christ and the kingdom of God expands.

Additionally, there is the promise that, through each person who follows this pathway, the spiritual passion of the Church will be advanced and her preaching will result in the multiplication of the hands and feet of our Lord.

George Barna has written that discipleship is not a program. It is not a ministry. It is a life-long commitment to a lifestyle.⁴ I would add that it is an exciting adventure with the one who created us, recovered life for us, and daily renews us. I look forward to sharing the journey with you.

⁴ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 19.

SESSION 1

Entering into Community

Core Thought

The journey of the spiritual life must be a balance between time alone with God and time engaged with others who seek to be faithful. The spiritual life is neither a solo voyage nor one only developed in community with others. This lesson develops the value of the community dimension of the spiritual journey. Just as Christ moved within a small group of twelve men, small groups provide for each of us a dynamic and exciting community – a community where people from different backgrounds and life experiences can support and encourage one another while holding each person accountable for their own spiritual growth.

Core Objectives

- **To Know** (Cognitive): An ability to summarize the role and value of a faith community in one's personal spiritual formation.
- **To Feel** (Affective): Will value the richness of spiritual formation within community.
- **To Do** (Behavior): Sign and follow through with a community covenant.

Core Scripture: *“So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”* (Ephesians 2:19-22 NRSV)

Reflection

The wildly popular reality show, “The Apprentice,” permits a weekly glimpse at people who are being groomed by corporate success Donald Trump for an opportunity to manage one of his companies. Individuals are challenged to look deep within themselves, draw upon their own unique skills and talents, and place them before the mentorship of Trump as they are shaped into a remarkable story of success themselves. Some have said of the experience that here is an opportunity to become all that one is meant to be. All that is required is coaching and opportunity. “Apprenticeship” is all about becoming something more through the direct influence of another. God invites each of us to a holy

apprenticeship – to experience spiritual formation through a faith community. The spiritual life is not a private process.

James C. Wilhoit states that, “Christian spiritual formation refers to the intentional communal process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹ There is much in that definition. It is dense and rich. One important observation is Wilhoit’s use of the word, “communal.” The Bible intends for spiritual formation to occur within community – with other people. Spiritual formation is not accomplished by private study or as a student in a classroom listening to the teaching of another. Both activities have value, of course. But they do little in shaping an individual into the character of Christ. That is simply because we have been intentioned by our Lord to grow spiritually in relationship with another. The Scriptures provide a sturdy foundation for this claim.

In Genesis 1-2, we read the account of Creation and God’s purpose that we live in community: “It is not good that man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18a NRSV). For five days God is creating, and with each new thing God declares that it is good. Then on the sixth day God creates man, steps back, and God’s appraisal changes. All was not as God intended. Absent for the man was a suitable creature that would provide “community.” Creation is completed with the creation of woman who now “completes” man with the desired community. This community, writes the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church in Ephesus, is the very aim of God through history: the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons with God himself at the very center (Ephesians 2:19-22; 3:10), which is traced from the Garden of Eden all the way to the new heaven and the new earth (Revelation 21:1-5).

Life in community presents us with both a remarkable privilege and an awesome responsibility. Proverbs 27:17 tells us that “iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens another.” As other people’s lives touch ours, they help to form our faith and make us who we are. As we touch others, we reflect God’s love to them. The clear teaching of Proverbs is that God has ordained the making and growth of Godly men and women to be within community and to be the shared responsibility of all members of that community. Additionally, what becomes clear here in Proverbs is that the mystery of the growth process is more “caught” than taught. The process of Christian spiritual formation goes infinitely beyond facts and information that can be acquired by individual study and reflection. The growth Paul speaks of here in Ephesians is imbibing a way of life that is embodied in a faith community. Joseph H. Hellerman states it most forcibly, “It is a simple but profound biblical reality that we both grow and thrive together or we do not grow much at all.”²

The primary threat to community is what Eugene H. Peterson calls “The Brambles of Individualism.”³ It is the unique orientation of Western culture – especially

¹ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 23.

² Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus’ Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 1.

³ Eugene H. Peterson, *Practice Resurrection: A Conversation On Growing Up in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 112.

contemporary American life – to go it alone; to embrace a strong sense of self-sufficiency and individualism. The result is people choosing to chart their own course through life, apart from a faith community, rather than integrating themselves into the body of Christ. The consequences are numerous: ill-conceived life decisions, lack of personal accountability, and bearing the pain of life alone. Additionally, pride is fostered in individualized programs of spiritual formation – the focus becoming one of outdistancing others.

Ephesians speaks to this individualism, by describing the Church, “which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23). Not only has this letter from the hand of Paul been written to a community of believers in Ephesus and not to an individual, but Paul indicates that it is the Church that is the full expression of Christ. The image of the Church indicates that we are tied to one another and that each member is involved with all other members as together we go about doing Christ’s work on earth. Any attempt to pursue the work of Christ separate from the body simply isn’t supported by Scripture. We grow, mature, and serve within a community of other believers.

Relationships with other believers have extraordinary power in our lives because Jesus is present in them. Jesus knew the importance of people in conveying God’s grace and presence. “Where two or three are gathered in my name,” he said, “I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20). Within our churches, small groups, families, and friendships, we learn from one another. We find encouragement. We challenge one another to follow God more faithfully. Other Christians enable us to walk as we should when we might otherwise have strayed or wandered. God uses relationships to form us, and relationships form us so that God can use us.

Anne Lamott tells the story of her son’s first year of life and the struggles she endured as a single mother and a recovering alcoholic. She writes about a particular day when she had reached the depths of exhaustion and depression and frustration with her newborn son; she had decided, somewhat facetiously, that it was totally crazy to believe in Christ. Then, she writes that something truly amazing happened. A man from the church where she worshipped showed up at the front door, smiling and waving at Sam. A man in his fifties, he said that he wanted to do something for her and the baby. He asked her to imagine that a fairy had appeared on her doorstep and was prepared to do anything around the house, anything at all. After some coaxing, Anne finally answered that she would ask the fairy to clean the bathroom. The man from her church ended up spending an hour scrubbing the bathtub and toilet and sink with Ajax and hot water. Anne recalls that she sat on her couch while he worked, watching TV, nursing her son, Sam, to sleep, and feeling very guilty. But, she says, that kind of love made her feel sure of Christ again. I believe that what happened was that in the “community” that the church member brought to Anne’s home, she once again experienced the certainty of Christ presence and love.

Reflection Guide

1. What are the biblical foundations for corporate spiritual formation?
2. Summarize the role and value of a faith community in personal spiritual formation.
3. According to Eugene H. Peterson, what is the primary threat to community in our culture?
4. From the reading, identify the negative consequences of a solo attempt at spiritual formation.
5. What can you do to move from an individualistic approach to spiritual formation to one that embraces community?

Life Story

Louis Sutton, Co-Executive Director, with his wife, Susan Sutton, WEC International
Prepared for this resource and used by permission of the author

10 pm is a strange and sleepy hour for a men's spiritual formation group, but for us as young college students in the 70s it was the time and place of our transformation. We were informed by our college studies, but we were transformed by that 10 pm group. The group was born spontaneously from four guys who were new believers in Christ and who had strong desires to grow in their faith. We just figured that if we wanted to grow in Christ then why not use every tool God had provided for personal growth. And one of those "tools" is our brothers and sisters in Christ. Hebrews says "let us spur one another on to love and good deeds." So we made an informal commitment to "spurring" each

other in the faith at 10 pm every night on the beat-up couches of the empty second floor lounge of the campus YMCA building.

The agenda was simple: share our hearts, challenge and encourage each other, pray for each other, and look at Scripture together. Some meetings were short. Some evenings we lingered together late into the night. Our commitment to other college groups came and went, but we never let go of that one. We remained committed to that group throughout all the years of college. Why? I think because God was using that group to change us. Thirty years later I don't remember much of the information from my college classes, but I continue to be impacted by the personal growth and lasting truths that were set in my soul those nights.

One of my most profound realizations of the nature of Christ happened in that little beat-up lounge. One of the members had just learned a new scriptural truth and shared it with the rest of us that night. He shared this truth very simply, but it impacted us all. In addition, one of the most challenging moments in my "sanctification" happened in that same room when one of the guys walked through the door with a new student he had invited to the study. New to everyone else, but not to me. I walked my arch-enemy from junior high school whom I had not seen since those conflicted days. The old "enemy" had also become a follower of Jesus and was attending our university. We now began a different kind of "engagement" in each other's lives!

The commitment to each other forged in the heights of the YMCA building has lasted. Seven years after graduation, we had a reunion and renewed that commitment, this time through a signed covenant. The document is now twenty-five years old. The commitment still stands, and the paper remains in front of me. The first part reads:

Knowing that we have been made sons of God through the love and sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ;

Knowing that we are thus brothers in Christ;

Having experienced for a time the blessing of close daily fellowship with one another during our years at UNC-Chapel Hill;

Remembering especially our times of prayer together on the second floor of the "Y" building;

Realizing that God has significantly used our common friendship in each of our lives;

...we pledge ourselves...we covenant together ...

We signed this covenant to continue to spur each other on even as our lives took us miles apart. In fact our paths did take us far apart as three of us became missionaries in Chad, Spain, and the Philippines. But the difference it made in our lives remains. Our simple commitment to be there for each other and to be a part of each other's growth in Christ was used by God for genuine transformation. Had I not been a part of that 10 pm group I might have had a few more hours of sleep or a few more hours of study, but I would have missed the transforming power of the spiritual formation group. God changed us, and He did so through a small group.

Take a moment and briefly write down anything you would like to discuss with your small group about this Life Story. What insights did you discover? What feelings did you experience? How did this Life Story increase your desire for living a deeper and more vibrant spiritual life?

Equipping: Proverbs 27:17

The metallurgical metaphor of iron sharpening iron illustrates the profound value of one person participating in the development of the godly character of another. The spiritual life is not something that is gotten for the wishing or assumed by the efforts of an individual. The spiritual life takes discipline and the “tough love” of direction and accountability of another.

Read Proverbs 27:17. *Write your answers below each question.*

1. Share with the group an experience where your own insights were “sharpened” and further developed by others.

2. Describe a time when poor personal decisions were lovingly called into question by another and a challenge was given to change your behavior. An example may be when a medical doctor or friend held you accountable to a better diet and exercise.

3. A common activity is two or more people studying together for an exam or exercising together to achieve some benchmark of physical wellbeing. What is the apparent value of these “communities” working together?

4. Psychologists tell us that we know ourselves as we know, and are known by, others. This is because the self refracted through another self becomes richer and more clearly understood. Have you experienced this to be true in your life? Describe this experience.

5. How has the reflection on this verse from Proverbs shaped your understanding of the value of spiritual formation within community?

6. What attitude will you change, action you will take, or prayer you will pray this week as you seek to share and experience God within the community of your church?

A Faith-Community Covenant

With the intention of opening my life to spiritual formation and growth I commit myself to the following:

- Complete all assignments on a weekly basis prior to my Faith Journey group meeting in order to participate meaningfully.
- Attend each week unless there is an emergency that prevents my participation.
- Participate actively in the weekly discussion, sharing my reflections from the completed assignments.
- Contribute to a climate of honesty, trust, openness to the Holy Spirit, and mutual support and value of the other group members' comments and reflections.
- Maintain confidentiality of comments shared.

The above reflect the minimum standards for a productive and accountable process for spiritual formation. The group may add other elements to the covenant

Signed _____

Date _____

Closing Prayer

Prayer may be read by group or one person on behalf of the group.

We bind ourselves together, Lord, in the confident hope that through mutual accountability and the power of the Holy Spirit we may sharpen one another until we come to show the character of Christ in our lives. Amen.

Meditation

To be read devotionally apart from small group.

“Run in such a way that you may win” (1 Corinthians 9:24 New Revised Standard Version).

The Apostle Paul frequently uses imagery from the early Olympic Games to illustrate the point of the Christian life. Here Paul compares the life of a Christian to running a race. And the point of both is the same: to win. Anyone running a race knows that to win demands a singular focus on the finish line. Stopping to check your pulse, to

grab some refreshment, or look around at how others are doing simply distracts. Winning demands focus, and for the Christian that focus is the person of Jesus.

The difficulty for some Christians is that they have misunderstood where they should be in the Olympic Stadium. They have placed themselves in the grandstand or, rather, in the seats of the local church. They show up at the competition but not to compete. They show-up to watch, to be entertained. Some may even turn out to jog a couple of laps but little more. The Christian faith is reduced to a spectator's event that requires little effort. The sad result is a lack of personal transformation.

Paul is aware that competition is hard work. Perhaps that is why he uses the Olympic Games to make his point. Self-denial and grueling preparation are the order of the day for the athlete. For the person who is aiming for Jesus and his character, that means intentional practices as worship, prayer, Bible study and service. Such faith practices equip us to run the race with vigor and stamina. Winning a race requires purpose and discipline – and diligent training. But for those who run the race, the finish line is the embrace of Christ.

SESSION 2

Understanding Discipleship

Core Thought

There are times when all of us simply go through the motions – just doing what needs to be done without any emotional engagement. This is also true for our spiritual lives. There is a dramatic difference between membership in a church and a vital and real relationship with Jesus Christ that grows and matures regularly.

Core Objectives

- **To Know** (Cognitive): Write a personal definition of discipleship.
- **To Feel** (Affective): Express your own sense of spiritual barrenness, your own hunger for a deeper faith.
- **To Do** (Behavior): Identify personal habits, practices or attitudes that need to change as you seek to grow as a disciple of Jesus.

Core Scripture: *“For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them! (2 Timothy 3:2-5 NRSV).”*

Reflection

There is a prevailing assumption that authentic discipleship is hard and only for a few. Consequently, the church is populated with persons of faith who attend weekly services but whose lives give little evidence of being deeply affected or aroused by the hope of the gospel. Such a minimal experience of the faith denies the promise of Christ that he intends to give us life and that we shall have it abundantly. Such people may come to church but rarely do they come in an expectant mood. They betray their lack of expectancy by comments such as, “I only came to hear a good message.” Theirs is a faith that may go through the outward appearance of practice but absent is any important change in their personal lives. This is mild religion and bears no resemblance to the church in the Book of Acts – the early church. If we want to see the kingdom of God and become animated by its power, we must open ourselves to radical renewal. The beginning place is an understanding of what discipleship is for the believer. The first exercise of this lesson is an exploration of some of the best wisdom on the question of discipleship – A Convergence of Wisdom about Discipleship.

A Convergence of Wisdom about Discipleship

In His Image

Discipleship means living a fully human life in this world in union with Jesus Christ and His people, growing in conformity to His image, and helping others to know and become like Jesus.

Michael J. Wilkins
In His Image: Reflecting Christ In Everyday Life
 (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1997), p. 55.

Transforming Discipleship

Discipleship means knowing him, loving him, believing in him, being committed to him.

Greg Ogden
Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time
 (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003), p. 76.

Traveling Together

..., a beginning point in describing a Christian disciple would be to say that this person is someone who desires to learn more about Jesus, so he or she can follow Jesus more fully.

Jeffery D. Jones
Traveling Together: A Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations
 (Herndon, Virginia: The Alban Institute, 2006), p. 41.

Discipleship Matters

Discipleship is the voluntary submission to the Lordship of Christ that results in the decision to learn from Christ, follow His example and participate in the expansion of God's Kingdom.

W. Douglas Hood, Jr.
Discipleship Matters, Vol. 2
 Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church
 New Britain, PA

The Great Omission

A disciple is a learner, a student, an apprentice – a practitioner, even if only a beginner. In that context, disciples of Jesus are people who do not just profess certain views as their own but apply their growing understanding of life in the Kingdom of Heaven to every aspect of their life on earth.

Dallas Willard
The Great Omission (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), p. xi.

The Disciple Making Church

Being a disciple means that you are one who trusts in and follows Jesus Christ, growing in his likeness and committing your heart, mind, soul and strength to obey and serve him.

Glenn McDonald
The Disciple Making Church (Grand Haven, Michigan: FaithWalk Publishers, 2007), p. xiii.

Dissident Discipleship

"Jesus, what do you want me to do?" is the question that marks the first step of discipleship.

David Augsburger
Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbor (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2006), p. 31.

Growing True Disciples

Discipleship is not a program. It is not a ministry. It is a life-long commitment to a lifestyle.

George Barna
Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ (Colorado Springs, Colorado: WaterBrook Press, 2001), p. 19

From Members to Disciples

The expectations of discipleship are clarified and simplified: to be in a living relationship with Jesus Christ, to meet him in worship and personal practices of the faith, and to be in a community of living witnesses to his life-giving presence in our world.

Michael W. Foss
**From Members to Disciples: Leadership Lessons from
 the Book of Acts**
 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), p. 5.

Renovation of the Heart

Rather, becoming a disciple is a matter of giving up your life as you have understood it to that point. Jesus made this starkly clear in Luke 14 and elsewhere. And without that “giving up,” you cannot be his disciple, because you will still think you are in charge and just in need of a little help from Jesus for your project of a successful life.

Dallas Willard
**Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of
 Christ** (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2002), p.
 243.

Jesus of Nazareth

Again and again we are told that the crowd presses round him and follows him, and that Jesus can scarcely restrain them. They listen to him eagerly, amazed at the “authority” of his teaching; they seek his healing power for the sick; they praise the miracles he performs. Such is the general picture evoked by the Gospels, which serves as a frame for the innumerable individual scenes from the story of Jesus. These people, however, do not constitute his disciples. To follow somebody from place to place does not mean discipleship.

Gunther Bornkamm
Jesus of Nazareth (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995),
 p. 144

Disciple-Making Teachers

Fundamentally, the biblical word for “disciple” means learner or student. Of course, few people aspire to be lifelong students. Many become students for a short while, but generally as a means to an end. They usually have some larger goal in mind. But Jesus called us to be permanently in the classroom. The word “disciple” does not imply a static state. It implies someone who is growing, improving, reaching, stretching.

Josh Hunt with Dr. Larry Mays
**Disciple-Making Teachers: How to Equip Adults for
 Growth and Action** (Loveland, Colorado: Group, 1998),
 p. 13.

The Shape of Faith to Come

For this study, disciple means “to be a learner and a follower of Jesus Christ.” It implies obedience. It implies a lifestyle that demonstrates spiritual formation in terms of character and service. It means “to be like Christ.” The word discipleship refers to a deliberate process of moving Christians forward spiritually.

Brad J. Waggoner
**The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and
 the Future of Discipleship** (Nashville, Tennessee: B & H
 Publishing Group, 2008), p. 14

Conversion in the New Testament

Discipleship begins, therefore, with the act of turning from rebellion against God (self-denial) and accepting instead God’s will and way (cross bearing).

Richard V. Peace
Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve
 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 256.

Reflection Study Guide

1. Which observation do you like best? Why?
2. What reoccurring themes do you notice?
3. What would you identify as the minimum requirements of discipleship?
4. With insights from this exercise write your own definition of discipleship.
5. What places of spiritual barrenness or hungers has this exercise brought forth within you?

Life Story

Susan Scott Sutton, Co-Executive Director, with her husband, Louis Sutton, WEC
International

Prepared for this resource and used
by permission of the author

A commercial in the 1960s featured a slogan that became a fixture of American pop culture. The commercial opens with a woman surrounded by chaos in her home. We can see her tension mounting until she utters the famous words, “Calgon, take me away!” The next scene shows her relaxing in a bath surrounded by quiet. The idea is that peace and restoration is only a bath product away.

The slogan came to mind more than a few times during our thirteen years as missionaries in Chad. Our home was “grand central station” with people coming and going at all hours. There were days when I felt closed in, not only by the physical walls surrounding our yard, but also by the busy-ness of our life. I often longed for a place where I could retreat in order to restore perspective.

There were two doors to our house. The front door was the center of activity. That was the door through which we met the outside world, where we welcomed visitors, interacted with merchants and beggars, and offered glasses filled with strong, sweet tea to drink with friends. The front door signaled by its openness that we were available to interact with anyone who came by.

The second door, directly opposite through the kitchen, led to a small backyard where we threw out dishwater and hung laundry to dry. Rarely did anyone walk around the house to the back door to find us.

One day in a desperate desire for relief from the demands of life at the front door, I exited the house through the back door, sat down on a rough wooden stool, leaned against the house and closed my eyes. When I opened them again and looked straight ahead, I saw only a cement wall, but when I looked up, I saw the sky.

There were birds flying overhead. I followed their unhurried movements on the warm currents of air and wished that I could sprout wings and fly with them, away from the demands waiting on the other side of the house. I opened the Bible I had grabbed on my way out of the door and read the following words: *But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint (Isaiah 40:31).*

After a few moments of letting these words sink into my heart, my tangled thoughts unraveled, and I talked with God. I told Him what I was feeling, from the frustration of being little more than a pocketbook for constant requests for money to the weariness of handling a stream of visitors. And, to top it off, there was guilt. I was a missionary. Missionaries are loving and patient, and I was, most decidedly at that moment, not.

As I talked with God about how I felt, being real with Him and holding nothing back, the frustrations relaxed their clenching grip. Repentance pushed away the bad attitudes. Grace nudged away the guilt. A Father held his weary daughter. For that moment, I flew with the birds in the wide, open spaces, borne up by unseen currents of His spiritual air, and was soon able to return to the other door with renewed strength.

What changed me in those moments alone in the backyard? Taking a break from life's challenges? No doubt this helped. Stepping out of chaos into calm is a tried and true method for maintaining sanity, and I highly recommend it. But the truth is that real change came from a Person and not a place. What happened through the back door was a conversation and a re-connection. I spoke to God through prayer about what was on my mind and in my heart, holding nothing back – my part of the conversation. He spoke to me through His Word – also holding nothing back in His words that both encouraged and challenged me – His part of the conversation. Re-connecting with God in the middle of my hectic day restored my perspective and renewed my strength.

I realized in that afternoon that I don't need a physical place for peace and restoration, because I know a Person who is with me always. I just need to keep the door of my heart open to Him. Even while I am busy at the 'front door' of my public life that interacts with others in the home, in the office, at school, at the store or post office, I can at the same time step into His presence through the 'back door' of my heart. At any time and in any place, I can carry on a conversation with God and, in that moment with Him, be changed.

Take a moment and briefly write down anything you would like to discuss with your small group about this Life Story. What insights did you discover? What feelings did you experience? How did this Life Story increase your desire for living a deeper and more vibrant spiritual life?

Equipping: 2 Timothy 3:2-5

Paul is here concerned with those who have the appearance of godliness but whose inner attitudes of belief, love, and devotion to Jesus are lacking. If the inner qualities of a disciple of Christ are lacking, the outer appearance is meaningless. Paul warns us not to be deceived by such people – people who only appear to be Christians. More, the reader may discover that Paul's words speak to their own spiritual condition.

Read 2 Timothy 3:2-5. *Write your answers below each question.*

1. Paul's list of vices adds up to a "me-first" syndrome. What other vices do we see in our culture that demonstrates a "me-first" syndrome?

2. “Instant gratification” is a descriptor that is often used for the times we live in. How is this in conflict with Paul’s desire that we be “lovers of God?”

3. Many pleasures are readily accessible, but love of God often requires effort. Briefly identify some of the effort that is required to nurture a love for God.

4. Paul’s list of vices includes both obviously serious sin and others that our culture is often tempted to excuse as mere character flaws. Identify those vices from his list, which are easily dismissed today as minor flaws and how they may be a hindrance to authentic discipleship.

5. In verse 5, Paul speaks of those who have the outward appearance of godliness – which can also be interpreted as “religion” or “faith” – yet deny its power. What Paul is saying here is that persons who have an authentic relationship with Jesus also experience Jesus’ power that changes lives. Simply, going through the motions of faithfulness without evidence of a changed life is proof that an individual is a deceiver rather than a genuine disciple. They haven’t opened themselves to the power of God to transform them; they “deny its power.” What habits, practices or attitudes might we have that “deny God’s power” in our own lives?

Closing Prayer

Prayer may be read by the group or one person on behalf of the group.

O God, we come to you with our distractions, our differences, our disappointments and our secret hurts. We even come with our childish hostilities. We come as we are and ask you to transform each of us by your power that we may grow, day by day, into the image of Christ. Grant to us the understanding to know you, the diligence to seek you, the wisdom to find you, and the faithfulness to embrace you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Meditation

To be read devotionally apart from small group.

“Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed. I know because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. When Jesus heard this, he was amazed” (Luke 7:7-9 New Living Translation)

This passage startles us – a man of position and power comes to Jesus and asks him to give an order so his servant will be healed. Notice what the man doesn’t ask of Jesus. He doesn’t ask Jesus to come quickly to the bedside of the sick servant. He doesn’t ask Jesus to touch the servant that he may receive healing. No. He simply asks that Jesus “give the order.” That is enough.

What startles us is that this man, a man of authority, places himself under the authority of Jesus. More, he really believed that healing would come simply by the authority of Jesus’ spoken word. The man’s faith is not in what he wanted Jesus to do. Rather, his faith was in Jesus himself, whatever happened. He had faith to place himself under the authority of Jesus. This is the beginning place of discipleship.

This faith amazed Jesus. Perhaps Jesus was amazed because faith is so often misplaced. Often faith is rooted in a particular outcome. Healing is asked for and the test of faith is whether there is healing. This places Jesus under our authority.

What if we begin to rethink faith? Rather than thinking of faith as Jesus responding to our request, we are invited in this passage to submit to the authority of Jesus, regardless of the outcome of our prayers. This is what it means to truly be under the authority of Jesus.

We can’t always understand Jesus. Sincere prayers are not always answered the way we would like. But we can trust Jesus. That is real faith. Believing in spite of what Jesus does. It is the kind of faith that will amaze Jesus.

Spiritual Fitness Training

Try one or more of the following Spiritual Fitness Training exercises and note whether it fosters spiritual growth. They may also be used in the development of your Personal Growth Plan during Session Eight.

1. Think through whom you would like to grow with you in your spiritual life. Pray for God to bring a few names to mind. Contact these people following these eight Faith Journey Small Group Sessions and invite them to share with you in a regular small group that focuses on spiritual transformation. Ask the pastor to help you identify appropriate curriculum for the small group.
2. Take a closer look at your life right now. Are there habits, practices, or attitudes that need to change as you seek to grow as a disciple of Jesus? Confess them to God in prayer and ask God's help.

SESSION 3

FaithPractice: Worship Regularly

Core Thought

Worship is ultimately offering our world back to God. It is a demonstration of our ultimate loyalty and desire to center again and again our lives on that which truly satisfies: an intimate relationship with God in the person of Jesus Christ. Consequently, worship incorporates a vow to service – to be instruments in the hands of God for God’s purposes in the world.

Core Objectives

- **To Know** (Cognitive): Summarize God’s desire for us in worship.
- **To Feel** (Affective): Will feel compelled to experience worship more regularly.
- **To Do:** (Behavior): Reflectively read Revelation 4-5 and identify the places in worship you most readily connect with God. Attend worship regularly and take notice of parallels between worship in Revelation 4-5 and your experience.”

Core Scripture: *“But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. (John 4:23, 24 NRSV)*

Reflection

We were created for worship. Everyone worships someone or something, perhaps multiple things at once. It is in our nature to assign ultimate value and worth to something beyond ourselves. The object of our worship may be the God disclosed in the Holy Scriptures of the Christian faith or any number of other gods of our fashioning. Even followers of Jesus Christ who gather regularly to worship him as Lord must confess that there are moments in life when our worship is directed to other things; we give ultimate value to money, a political party, a worthy cause or personal success. What is not always noticed is that the primary persons or things that receive our regular devotion ultimately shape our lives.

Here in John’s Gospel, Jesus addresses a Samaritan woman and her question of location for worship; upon a mountain or in Jerusalem. Absent in the woman’s concern about worship is any reference to who is being worshiped. Jesus rejects the traditional categories of worship location and redirects the woman’s focus to the object of worship: “the Father.” Far too often, the woman’s condition is ours – we simply lose focus on the object of our worship, distracted by the many little things that matter very little. Such

distractions for the modern Christian may be the style of worship, music preference, ascetic considerations of worship space, and quality of worship leadership. Though these considerations are not without importance, they are as distracting to God's desire for our worship as the woman's concern about location.

The difficulty with assigning ultimate value to matters or things other than "the Father" is that we lift up personal choice and preferences rather than Christ. Though it may appear subtle, the desire to shape worship to our liking actually diminishes authentic Christian worship. "The Father" is replaced by self in the preparation and delivery of worship. Rather than being transformed by the power of the Gospel, we continue participation in the culture that values self above all else. Jesus' lesson to the woman in John's Gospel – and to us – is that God desires in our worship for us to fall into the arms of God and say, "Here I am. There is no other place I'd rather be. Have your way with me."

Worship also restores an understanding of the source of all that is good, true, and beautiful. In a culture that values self-sufficiency and striving for more, Christian worship reminds us of who we are and that what we may become is not limited to our ability but is powerfully determined in the creative and redemptive power of God. Christian worship is an invitation to move beyond a work ethic to an experience ethic, to experience that God is in our midst and is the only real source of help in the troubles that most deeply impact our lives and the world. It is an invitation to a new orientation from presumption of one's own ability to a relationship with the Lord; a life orientation called for in Jesus' command, "Seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33 NRSV).

The celebration of Christian worship, recognizing God's good desire for us, also speaks against the notion of scarcity that results in human striving for all things good, competition for one's own fair share, and finally evil towards others. Some years ago, I was provided with an unexpected (and what seemed an unorthodox) opportunity to explore this notion with my five-year-old son, Nathanael. He had again asked me to watch an episode of *The Simpsons* with him. Previous requests were resisted – certainly there were more fruitful ways to spend my time. It had been only a few months earlier that I acquiesced to his pleas that he be permitted to watch the show himself. The choice to spend time with my son that particular evening came down to playing Nintendo or watching this show with him. I watched *The Simpsons*.¹

Homer, the father of this animated family, had found himself on the losing end of a bet that sent him packing to a tropical island as a Christian missionary. Asked by one of the indigenous people of the island why God needed people's worship, Homer's reply is, "Because he is an insecure God." Homer then resisted the people's effort to complete the building of a church begun by the previous missionary. Rather, Homer mobilized the people to build a Las Vegas-style casino – with gambling, entertainment, and inexpensive food. The result was self-indulgence, greed and, finally, the apparent self-destruction of the people. Realizing what he had brought to this once peaceful people, Homer began singlehandedly to build the church. Though unspoken, Homer and the island people then

¹ *The Simpsons*, "Missionary Impossible," #BABF11 / SI-1111 (originally aired February 20, 2000).

discovered that only in worship can we ever hope to experience wholeness and receive goodness.

Here, in this lesson from John's Gospel, Jesus seeks from the woman worship that preserves life from the destruction self-indulgent behavior would bring. God has the goal of goodness for all people and God's call to worship provides the hope that each of us will continue to experience blessings. My son's comment following this episode of *The Simpsons* will continue to be a treasure in my ministry: "Dad, worship really does matter!"

Reflection Guide

1. Summarize how you have experienced in your own life the experience of worship of someone or something other than God.

2. What have been distractions for you as you have shared in your church's corporate worship?

3. From the reflection you just read, summarize God's desire for us in worship.

4. Summarize what Homer, the character from *The Simpsons*, apparently learned about the value of worship.

5. How might our worship protect us from self-indulgent behavior?

Life Story

Nancy Strickland, Elder, Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church, New Britain, PA

Prepared for this resource and used

by permission of the author

A Sunday morning service of worship is for me a gift of renewal, a reassurance of God's love – through the reading of Scripture, prayer, the sermon's lesson, and songs of praise, a surround of friends who give hugs and reaffirm my worth. The challenge begins immediately I leave the peace and focus of church for the world. I have to remember that the service of worship strengthens me for worship service: living my life as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Without worship service, a Sunday service of worship is empty. I'm trying to live God's guidance to Isaiah and Matthew: give food to the hungry, water to the thirsty, shelter to the wanderer, clothes to the naked; to end oppression, the pointing finger, the malicious talk. As my faith has deepened and the desire for discipleship grows, I'm trying actively to follow Jesus' direction to His disciples, "*to make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to obey.*" In this discipline, I'm strengthened by Bill Hybels, a modern evangelist, who says that no one person is responsible for guiding the entire walk of another: helping through one step may be enough – others will come behind.

I started my worship service at church, reaching out – with mixed results – but I believe there were some very positive reactions – some small steps. For a short time this year, a young mother regularly brought her two young daughters to Sunday worship – then they stopped coming. I'd talked with her and felt her faith was fragile, but she was a believer, so I wrote her a couple of short notes, telling her how much I'd enjoyed meeting her and hoped she'd come back and worship with us. She did come back one Sunday, greeted me warmly and said my notes were the reason she was there! Right before Easter I sent her a well loved book by a woman missionary and Easter cards to the little girls. They all came for Easter Sunday! They've not been back since, but I'm still praying for them and writing my notes. I'm confident that God will guide them back to us or on to another church.

There's the bearded man in the red tow truck who hailed me by name in the convenience store packing lot one Saturday morning. He knew I didn't recognize him. Even after he introduced himself he had to recall meeting me at church several years ago – said I had been nice to him. Right: he attended irregularly with his wife and son, seemed uncomfortable in the sanctuary. But I insisted on greeting him whenever he showed up, striking up whatever conversation was possible in the short time before worship service. This family, like the young woman and her daughters, no longer come to our church, but I went home that Saturday and wrote a note to the man's wife; and I'm praying for them. I'm pretty sure they must be close to Him in some way because, after he gave me his business card and encouraged me to call him if ever I needed a tow, he said, "God bless you," before I could. I'm certain that if I ever need I tow I'll call him – and he will come and get me.

Away from church I read to preschoolers in a Head Start classroom, sharing a story, delighted by their exuberant participation. Recently I joined a new group

determined to make a difference in our neighborhoods. Our first effort was collecting food for the local food larder – 2000 pounds in three hours from generous donors at area supermarkets! There is so much need in the world – I must keep my eyes open, my spirit focused on Him – and I must do the work!

Take a moment and briefly write down anything you would like to discuss with your small group about this Life Story. What insights did you discover? What feelings did you experience? How did this Life Story increase your desire for living a deeper and more vibrant spiritual life?

Equipping: Revelation 4-5

Revelation 4-5 provides a glimpse into the continuous activity of worship around the throne of God. It is here that the follower of Jesus is given a view of the future, our own eternal vocation in God's Kingdom.

Read Revelation 4-5. *Write your answers below each question.*

1. The first three chapters of Revelation are set on earth, specifically, on Patmos where John was in exile. In these three chapters John relates a vision where Christ came to him and instructed him to write to the seven churches. Now the drama shifts, and John is transported to heaven. What John sees there he is also to “write in a book...and send to the seven churches” (1:11). In the fourth chapter John relates the continuous worship that surrounds the throne of God. In your own words, summarize what John experiences and writes of in the fourth chapter.

2. Summarize any parallels between John's vision of heavenly worship in chapter 4 and your own experience of worship. What are the differences?

3. What characteristics are ascribed to God in the fourth chapter?

4. John's vision shifts in the fifth chapter from the worship that surrounds the throne of God to the Lamb who is "worthy" of our worship. Summarize in your own words why the Lamb is considered "worthy" of our worship.

5. The vision of the fifth chapter clearly presents that it is the "slain" Lamb that merits the worship of the heavenly host. What does this suggest about the character of the lifestyle that is pleasing to God?

Closing Prayer

Prayer may be read by group or one person on behalf of the group.

Almighty God, strengthen us in our journey of faith, arouse in us a renewal of authentic worship and keep us from stumbling into lesser loyalties. Give us strength to stand firm in our hope in Jesus Christ, trusting in his grace and power for our lives. Amen.

Meditation

To be read devotionally apart from small group

"When they saw him, they worshiped him – but some of them still doubted!"

Matthew 28:17 (New Living Translation)

It is not unusual to have people share with me that they experience moments of doubt in their faith. Often in moments of suffering, despair, or hardship, they question, "Is it true?" What they want to know is if there really is a God and does God really care? The question is always asked in hopefulness; hope that their faith has not been for nothing. Unlike atheists, who refuse to accept the possibility of God, people who doubt genuinely want to believe – they are hungry for God.

It may help to realize that even some of the original disciples doubted. Men who had shared three years of their life with Christ, who had heard him say beforehand that he would be handed over to crucifixion, would die and, on the third day, be raised from the dead – some of them doubted. Doubt has always been a part of the Christian experience.

What is somewhat spectacular about this particular passage – a passage that acknowledges doubt among some of the disciples – is that it immediately precedes Jesus’ sending the disciples out into the world. Jesus sends his disciples out, with their doubts and belief, to share the Christian faith. Apparently, unwavering faith isn’t a requirement for evangelism.

A questioning faith doesn’t seem to be a problem for worship either. It’s clear in this passage that the doubts of some didn’t stop them from worshiping Jesus.

It just may be that we are more troubled by our doubts than Jesus. Jesus is not dismayed by our doubts, but Jesus does want us to love him. Perhaps we have it all wrong. Rather than being troubled by doubts, we should be asking, “Do we love Jesus?” If we do, then, as the doubting disciples, let us worship him and be urgent in telling of his love to a hurting world. We may just discover our doubts swallowed up in the power of our worship.

Spiritual Fitness Training

Try one or more of the following Spiritual Fitness Training exercises and note whether it fosters spiritual growth. These exercises may also be used in the development of your Personal Growth Plan during Session Eight.

1. Public worship provides the opportunity for both experiencing the richness of God’s character as well as our own celebration of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ. In the next weeks of our time together, visit at least three traditions or styles of worship different from your own church. Keep a journal of how you experience God differently in the other church’s worship. What feelings did you have about the services? What did you like? What didn’t work for you? If you were on the worship committee of your church, what changes would you suggest?

2. Think of times when you experienced deep emotions in a particular service. What was happening in your life at the time? What, in particular, about the service was the most meaningful to you?

3. Resolve to be regular in worship the next six to ten weeks. Before each service, ask God to open you to experiencing God in new ways. Do not only pay attention to the leaders in worship, but take notice of the other worshipers around you. How are they engaged? Is there a sense that they are in a holy place? Is there a note of joy and expectancy in their worship? From your observation of others in worship what do you sense about their own experience of worship? By the end of each Sunday, share with a spouse or friend what you experienced personally in worship and what you noticed about those with whom you worshiped.

SESSION 4

FaithPractice: Pray Daily

Core Thought

The spiritual life has to do with one's relationship with God. Prayer is the essential expression of this relationship. Prayer changes us and it changes God. Prayer changes us by directing us from self-reliance to trust in God and aligning our life with God's purposes. Prayer does not change God's nature but does change how God will direct God's power.

Core Objectives

- **To Know** (Cognitive): Identify predominant cultural understanding of prayer and reflect upon a new biblical understanding.
- **To Feel** (Affective): Will be encouraged to a more regular practice of prayer.
- **To Do** (Behavior): Set apart a specific time and place each day where you ask God to participate in your life. What time of day will you pray and where will you pray without distraction?

Core Scripture: *“He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, ‘Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.’ Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.’ Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, ‘Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial’”* (Luke 22: 39-46 NRSV).

Reflection

The core Scripture is Luke's account of Jesus' prayer on the Mount of Olives. Though the first three Gospels report this story, only Luke develops the story to place the entire focus on Jesus. Matthew and Mark's focus is on the apathy of the disciples; Jesus came back to them three times and found them sleeping.

Luke has softened Matthew and Mark's rebuke of the disciples and explains their sleep as due to sorrow (Luke 22:45, 46). This change by Luke moves the attention of the reader to Jesus. Here, Jesus is not characterized as one who is eminently mortal, fallible, and vulnerable. New Testament scholar Luke Timothy Johnson observes that nowhere

does this story reflect emotional tension or anguish of the soul. Rather, Jesus enters the struggle, much as an athlete engages in strenuous competition, his sweat not the physiological reaction to stress but a sign of his great effort. And his prayer demonstrates Jesus' awareness of God and the power of that awareness to strengthen. Fear and cowardice is shifted from Jesus to the disciples.

Jesus' struggle is not with fear but disobedience. It is a struggle of self-will that competes with God's will. Poignantly, this Scripture addresses the struggle of the popular culture with prayer. When prayer is approached today, it is often only after other resources to obtain what is wanted have failed. Prayer becomes the final expression of what is desired, reduced to a want list addressed to God. Here, the writer of this gospel invites the reader to another experience of prayer – to discover prayer as an opportunity of ecstasy that is experienced through a deep personal communion with God.

This alternative experience of prayer – one that is less about receiving and more about a heightened awareness of God – is brought forth poignantly by an article that appeared sometime ago in the Wall Street Journal. Here the Journal reported of a symposium held at Princeton on midlife career transitions. "There was a lot of solidarity around the question of what is next," commented one participant. Whereas prior generations often relinquished the tumult of youth for stability around the time they turned 40, midlife today increasingly involves starting over. The mantra of baby boomers – that work should be personally fulfilling – no longer satisfies and many feel propelled in middle age to risk following their deepest dreams. Striving for success is out of fashion; realizing significance is in. The kind of prayer Jesus engaged in on the Mount of Olives is prayer that pays attention to God and what God would have to do with us. This kind of prayer rarely changes our circumstances; it changes us.

Luke's treatment of the sleeping disciples also addresses the present culture's hunger for finding courage for life. I enjoyed a brief friendship with Bryant Kirkland, former pastor of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York City, before his death on Easter, 2000. He counseled me to listen to the city before attempting to preach to it. "Listen to its voice – to the needs, fears and concerns of those who live there." From his own listening, Kirkland found restless seekers of our post-traditional culture strolling through the spiritual marketplace in search of a God who makes life easier, rather than a God that offers courage to overcome life's difficulties. Every moment of life is pregnant with possibilities of both defeat and redemption. Enter the struggle alone and, like the disciples, one may become exhausted from grief and fall asleep. Yet, equipped with the discipline of prayer, we will not be overpowered. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, a Jesuit priest and scholar, suggests that the translation of verse 46 might be better served with: "What! Do you sleep?" Jesus expresses surprise that the disciples would so easily accept defeat rather than fortifying themselves through prayer.

Robert Wuthnow shares a helpful story of an individual who chose courage over despair. Mary Frances Housley was a young woman who lived in eastern Tennessee. One tragic day, she was witness to a plane crash in her community. Perhaps because she had once had a principal who talked about heroes, Mary Frances did not hesitate to enter a downed airplane to rescue whomever she could. She could have married, enjoying life as any other young wife except that she kept going back into that plane. Eleven times Mary Frances went back into the plane and that 11 times was just one time too many.

3. Joseph A. Fitzmyer has suggested a different way to translate Luke's version of this story. What is your opinion of his translation?

4. What questions do you have about the reading?

5. Has the reading changed how you will understand and practice prayer?

Life Story

Bruce Main, Executive Director, UrbanPromise Ministries
 Prepared for this resource and used
 by permission of the author

Friday morning chapel. The less-than-enthusiastic teenagers slouched into the room. It was 8:15 and everyone believed that even God wasn't awake till nine. Some placed their heads on their desks, not ready to deal with school yet. Others gossiped about weekend plans. It seemed unlikely there would be a reverential epiphany this morning. Teachers shushed the students. Chapel was just a chore.

"Listen to this sentence from the Bible," began Mr. Bell tentatively. He doubted there would be any rustling of angel's wings this morning. He opened to an earmarked page, slid his finger down the page and read in a deep, rich voice, "*Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest*" (Matthew 11:28 NRSV). He closed the Bible and leaned on the edge of the desk at the front of the room. He paused and intently looked at the sleepy, disinterested gathering.

"Do you have any burdens? Are you tired of carrying them?" It was like ice water tossed on them. The boys in the back defensively snickered, hoping to rally the others.

Mr. Bell: "Settle down, guys."

Awkward silence came over the room. Mr. Bell waited.

"My younger sister moved out of the house last week," began 14 year old Sheena in practically a whisper. One of the back boys muttered, "Good for her," provoking chuckles. But Sheena was not deterred. "She's living with my dad and I'm concerned for her safety. I don't get to see her." Sheena began to cry. Nobody in the room breathed.

Another hand shot up. "I'm worried about my mom," voiced Shamar, "She has two jobs and she still can't keep up...she's under a lot of pressure."

3. Jesus cautions, “do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do (Matt. 6:7).” Thomas G. Long suggests that “the target is not lengthy prayers per se, but what could be called ‘safecracker’ prayers; that is, windy and fawning prayers that attempt to use flowery charm to pick the lock on the favor of the gods, to manipulate the gods into action by uttering the right combination of words.”² How does Long’s comment alter, if at all, your understanding of the character of God?

4. Jesus tells us that the Father already knows what we need before we ask. What difference, if any, does this make on your prayer life?

5. Someone once said that this model of prayer is really asking God to participate in your life. How would you ask God to specifically participate in your life this week?

Closing Prayer

Prayer may be read by group or one person on behalf of the group.

Grant to us this week your certain presence in our moments of prayer. Help us enter each day in the joy of the Lord and retire in the evening certain of your protective embrace. Amen.

² Thomas G. Long, *Matthew* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 68.

Meditation

To be read devotionally apart from small group

“We always thank God for all of you and pray for you constantly.”

I Thessalonians 1:2 (New Living Translation)

I received a powerful and warm e-mail recently. A woman in this congregation took a moment from her workday to tell me that on Saturday evenings she pauses to pray for me. She remembers a comment I made once that Saturday evening is the time I get off alone to walk through my neighborhood and reflect on the sermon I will deliver the next morning. “Just wanted to thank you for being my pastor and let you know that each Saturday I pray for you as you reflect on your sermon.”

Perhaps you can appreciate the extreme joy I felt when I read those words. The bond between this woman and me grew a little stronger. Her note also reminded me that the Christian faith is not a solo voyage; we share together in the life of faith with other believers and with the Lord.

Paul knows this, of course. Here, Paul continues to build a bond with a new Christian community that he had started only months earlier. He begins reminiscing about the time he had been with them and the warm thoughts that well up in his heart burst forth in thanksgiving. Yet, as Paul’s words continue, he moves beyond giving thanks and mentions that he prays for them constantly. The Thessalonians are new at the Christian faith and have much to learn. Paul hopes to encourage them and be a source of strength along their journey with Christ.

Prayer is the binding force of the worldwide fellowship of Christians. Constant prayer for one another has the capacity to brush away the tarnish of disagreements, misunderstandings, and little hurts that would diminish the quality of our relationship with one another. Curiously, the development of a regular network of prayer relationships promises to build a church that is invincible to the sin in each of us that would destroy it. Perhaps constant prayer for one another should be a priority for every Christian.

Spiritual Fitness Training

Try one or more of the following Spiritual Fitness Training exercises and note whether it fosters spiritual growth. They may also be used in the development of your Personal Growth Plan during Session Eight.

1. Purchase an inexpensive journal and record daily prayer thoughts. Follow the progression of your thoughts over a period of time. Do your prayers express adoration, confession, thanksgiving, requests for others as well as yourself?
2. Join a prayer group that meets regularly for prayer.
3. Attend a prayer retreat.

4. Read a book on prayer. Keep a journal or writing pad near for recording insights and questions. Two recommended books are:

Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home, Richard J. Foster (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.)

A Life of Prayer: Cultivating the Inner Life of the Christian Leader, Paul Cedar (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1998.)

SESSION 5

FaithPractice: Learn and Apply God's Word

Core Thought

Central to the thought and practice of the Christian faith is God's Word. We read God's Word, along with practice of other Christian disciplines, for spiritual transformation. God's Word transforms our worldview, reorders our priorities, shapes our behavior and empowers the heart for abundant expressions and demonstrations of love and forgiveness. Reading God's Word replaces old destructive habits with life-giving habits. God's Word reshapes people, distorted by the world, to be the people of God we were created to be.

Core Objectives

- **To Know** (Cognitive): Know why a regular and attentive reading of Scripture can be beneficial to our spiritual formation.
- **To Feel** (Affective): Cherish the richness and benefit of the regular reading of God's Word.
- **To Do** (Behavior): Begin to make connections between what is learned in Scripture and application of learnings in your personal life; to make "life application" in your reading of Scripture.

Core Scripture: *"The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' But he answered, 'It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*
(Matthew 4:3, 4 NRSV)

Reflection

Perhaps it's no surprise the number of persons today who think they know the Bible but, in fact, have absorbed mistaken notions popular today. For instance, parents are sometimes heard telling their children the story of Adam and Eve. As the story unfolds, an apple appears – and often it is a bright red apple. Truth is there was no apple in Eden. The story of Adam and Eve doesn't even mention "forbidden fruit." What the Bible does say is that Adam and Eve were not to eat the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

There are other widely held beliefs about the Bible that are equally mistaken: Joseph's garment was not a "coat of many colors" but, rather, a long robe with sleeves" and we really have no idea how many wise men came to adore the Christ-child. Matthew's Gospel simply states that there were three kinds of gifts brought by them. It seems apparent in the larger church that knowledge of the Bible is shaped more by what is heard than what is read.

Many of the mistakes heard today don't really compromise our faith. They may be untrue, but it would be difficult to argue that they are harmful to the witness of the church. And it may be that, by politely pointing them out, curiosity will propel people to read the Bible and discover a whole new world of understanding.

While these mistakes may be harmless, they do point to a great danger, the potential for mistaken notions of who is the living God. Idolatry – the creation of some image of God that becomes the focus of our devotion and worship – is kept on a very occasional and loose leash. There is a robust sense that ours is a culture that is given more to forging gods that will serve personal and ambitious goals than honestly – and without qualification – engaging the God of the Bible.

We live today in a world of options and choices and gods who enchant us with promises. Walter Brueggemann, a prominent Old Testament scholar, suggests that what Israel sought during Moses' absence in the wilderness was not a representation of God through the golden calf but another god that would powerfully grant material desires.¹ The commandment against idolatry in the Book of Exodus explores whether our love for God is for who God is or for the things God is able to give us. The Middle Eastern world with all of its physical representations of gods has narrowed the church's understanding of this commandment. Idols can be fashioned by the mind and will more lavishly than by the hand. To seek after a god who is nothing more than the great giver is to have fallen before a graven image in worship; it is to practice idolatry. Lack of faith, or the disturbance of faith, becomes the dark symptom of this worship when what is sought is not received.

A personal experience may be helpful. At the beginning of my sophomore year of college, my parents bought me my first car – a canary yellow Pontiac Firebird Formula. They purchased the car on a Wednesday prior to the Saturday I would fly to London for the fall semester. For four months, all I had of that new car was a Polaroid. When my father picked me up at the airport he did so in my new car. Finally, after four months I would enjoy driving my Firebird. He suggested that rather than going straight home we stop by the beach. It was late in the evening and few people remained. My father and I parked the car and began walking together along the shore. It was then that I realized what I had missed more during those four months was not my car but being with my father. It is good sometimes to honestly examine the character of our love for God; do we love God or simply the things that God can give us?

This passage from Matthew's Gospel invites God's people to discover that our deepest desires are not met in anything but intimacy with God, the God disclosed to us in God's Word. Jesus is out in the wilderness. He has been there for a considerable period of time and is now hungry. The devil reminds Jesus of his power and his ability to grant the desires of his stomach. He responds to the temptation by calling upon God's word in Deuteronomy 8: "Man does not live by bread alone, but he lives by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God." As Jesus speaks those words here in Matthew 4, he has in mind both the historical back-story of Deuteronomy 8 and the larger purposes of God. Jesus wants us to hear that God desires for us exceed our immediate appetites.

¹ Walter Brueggemann, "Theology of the Old Testament" (Class lecture, Columbia Theological Seminary, 1986).

5. Share how this reading has provided you with fresh insights about the practice of regularly reading and applying God's word to your life.

Life Story

Jim Mignard, elder, Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church, New Britain, PA
Prepared for this resource and used
by permission of the author

Nobody's perfect. Not even the cast in the Bible. Adam was disobedient, and Noah drank too much. Isaac was weak-kneed, and Jacob a scoundrel. David committed adultery and plotted murder, and Solomon his son set a record for womanizing. Job went bankrupt. Jeremiah spent most of his life whining and complaining. Rahab was a hooker, and Peter a coward.

And God loved all of them.

He loves me, too, but at times I forget this. When I get grumpy (a part of my personality, I'm afraid), I'm uplifted when I turn to the Bible and *allow God* to remind me again that I'm in his hands, as is my family.

Despite a testy disposition, I have a desire to live in a way that pleases God—nothing is more important than that—and that catches his eye and shows him that I trust his promises. When finances are tight, for example, and worry begins to pull, I rest in Jesus' encouragement in Matthew 6:25-34. He mentions "worry" or "anxiety" six times as *unnecessary* emotions for God's children. He urges me to bank on what he's saying because he knows what our heavenly Father can do.

Have you ever thought of taking one—just one—of the promises in the Bible, memorizing it so you can recite it easily, then telling God, that as a follower of his Son, you want to please him by relying on that promise?

Consider forgiveness. Then turn to Mark 11:25 (or Matthew 6:14-15) for one of Jesus' promises on the link between divine and human forgiveness. The happiest person I have ever met was an Episcopal chaplain with the RAF during World War 2. I asked him about his cheerfulness, and he just said, "I'm on the ins with God and on the outs with nobody." That's Jesus' promise in living color!

At the age of 84, I think a bit more about heaven than on what career I should be preparing for. But regardless of age, immerse yourself in Jesus' promise in the Gospel of John, chapter 14. It's for everyone. Jesus speaks: "Don't be troubled. You trust God, now trust in me. . . . I am going to prepare a place for you" (New Living Translation).

When Jesus went through a severe testing (Matthew, chapter 4), he held up by reminding himself, three times, that his Father's promises were written down in black and white and he could trust them. And that grueling hour in the desert is itself described

three times in the New Testament so that we won't miss the point: we also can find relief when life is tough *by doing what Jesus did*.

He passed the test, but how? He recalled Scripture: “*One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*” (NRSV) Or as the New Living Translation puts it: “*The Scriptures say, ‘People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every word of God.’*”

I'm glad that I don't have to try to win God's approval for eternal life; I couldn't do it anyway. But if God in his mercy, love, and forgiveness has accepted the Rahabs, Noahs, and king Davids of the world, he can also bring me into his family. And now that I'm a family member, I want to follow, as best I can, the teachings and examples of his Son. I can do that by listening to him each day in the Bible.

Take a moment and briefly write down anything you would like to discuss with your small group about this Life Story. What insights did you discover? What feelings did you experience? How did this Life Story increase your desire for living a deeper and more vibrant spiritual life?

Equipping: Psalm 119:105

Considered by many to be one of the most beautiful strophes in all of the Psalms, this verse aptly characterizes Israel's understanding of God's word – that God's instruction lays out the pathway for the faithful to walk. Rather than viewing God's word as an instrument for correcting the wrong doer, Scripture assists in the correct use of individual freedom, identifying dangers along the way of life and offering direction, encouragement, and strength for life's journey.

Read Psalm 119:105. *Write your answers below each question.*

1. Psalm 119 is the longest of the psalms, and there is hardly a verse that does not contain a reference to God's word and law. In this verse, the metaphor of “light” is used to indicate that God's word is a reliable guide to life. Read through Psalm 119 and list other metaphors used for God's word and law.

2. Which metaphor best describes your present experience of the Bible. Explain.

3. James Limburg writes that Psalm 119 is designed for people who understand life to be a journey through territory that is not their homeland. In other words, this is a psalm for persons who understand themselves as sojourners.² This segment assumes that our journey is through darkness (see Ps. 23:4). In such a situation, the Lord's word is like a flashlight, suggests Limburg, helping one find the way. "Darkness" becomes a metaphor, including personal affliction (v. 107) as well as attacks from certain wicked persons (v. 110).³ Describe a period of "darkness" in your life and how God's word provided guidance and comfort.

4. What does this verse suggest will be the result in our lives if we use God's word for direction in our daily steps?

5. Rewrite this verse in your own words.

Closing Prayer

Prayer may be read by group or by one person on behalf of the group.

Heavenly Father, through your Word you made all things in heaven and on earth. By your Word you have opened to us the path from death to life. Sustain us today, and all of our tomorrows, by the words of Holy Scripture that our love for you may increase even as we discover more deeply your love for us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

² James Limburg, *Psalms: Westminster Bible Companion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 413.

³ *Ibid.*, 417.

Meditation

To be read devotionally apart from small group

“I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.”

Psalm 119:11 (New Living Translation)

It isn't unusual for me, as a pastor, to hear people say that they can be good Christians without reading the Bible. “After all,” they argue, “my life doesn't allow such a luxury. Full-time career, spouse, parent, and keeping a home demand all that I have. There simply isn't anything left over to give to reading the Bible.” Yet, they continue, they are good Christians, never cheating on taxes, loving to their families, and showing kindness to the stranger.

Certainly, these are the marks of a good person. And the world would be a better place with more of them. What seems to be overlooked, however, is that there are non-Christians who are also good people. What makes one Christian cannot be boiled down to being a good person. To be Christian literally means one who seeks to bear the image of Christ. This is far deeper and richer than simply being good.

To claim the title, Christian, means that we seek to have our lives directed, driven, and dominated by Jesus. That means who we are and who we will be is not for us, or the world, to determine. Christians submit their lives to be determined by Jesus – the Jesus revealed in the Bible. Reading the Bible, then, becomes an act of submission. We submit ourselves to be molded into the image of Christ by God's word. No other word can make us Christian.

This, of course, is sometimes threatening. If we are use to the words of the popular culture that we should get what we deserve, then the words of the Bible will appear strange, even subversive, when they speak of sacrifice. But then, William Willimon, popular author and teacher, has said that those who genuinely seek to be Christian will appear to the world a peculiar people.

Perhaps there is no sin greater than not becoming who we were created to be, a biblical people shaped into the image of Christ. But if we read the Bible, if we hide the Word of God away in our hearts, we will one day discover that we have become Christians!

Spiritual Fitness Training

Try one or more of the following Spiritual Fitness Training exercises and note whether it fosters spiritual growth. They may also be used in the development of your Personal Growth Plan during Session Eight.

1. Explore different ways of listening to Scripture.
 - Read short passages of the Bible out loud and slowly. Listen carefully to the words. Which words or thoughts resonate most meaningfully to you? Keep a journal of these words and thoughts. Reflect on them throughout the day.

- Print a short Bible passage on a card and place it on your desk or work station. Read it throughout the day, reflecting on its application to your life.
- Have the pastor suggest an appropriate commentary on a book of the Bible of your choice and read it, along with the corresponding book of the Bible. Exercise care that you don't try to read too much or read too rapidly. The goal is to read slowly and reflectively, asking God in prayer to make connection points between the Word of Scripture, the scholarship of the commentary, and your life.
- Select a short Book of the Bible, or a portion of a longer book, and create an outline of the book, noting characters, places, action, lessons that are taught.
- Listen to the Bible on CD while you work around the house or drive.

2. Join a Sunday school class or small group that specifically studies the Bible. Record in a journal any insights that you discover and any application to your life that are revealed.

3. Listen carefully to the sermons in worship for the next weeks of our time together. Make notes of the Bible passage that is preached on, helpful illustrations that are used, the lesson or lessons that are communicated, and any call to personal action that may be in the sermon. Following the worship, read the sermon passage alone. Are there other insights that you discover not addressed in the sermon? What other connection points to your own life do you find?

SESSION 6

FaithPractice: Participate in a Ministry

Core Thought

Implanted deep within the nature of men and women is the hunger to serve others. Those who receive love discover a need to love. Those who receive ministry experience a compulsion to minister to others. Through loving others and participating in a ministry, we discover a depth and vitality of faith that cannot be experienced otherwise. Indeed, we discover that the promise of Ephesians is certain and true, that as each one of us engages in the work of ministry, we shall all experience a maturity of faith, even to “the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Ephesians 4:13).

Core Scripture: *“The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:11-13 NRSV).

Core Objectives

- **To Know** (Cognitive): Enhanced clarity concerning the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts for spiritual formation and growth.
- **To Feel** (Affective): Challenged to identify a personal ministry within the church.
- **To Do** (Behavior): Demonstrate personal faith through personal actions and participation in a ministry of the church.

Reflection

In an engaging and insightful book, *Creative Spirituality: The Way of the Heart*, Robert Wuthnow identifies some of the criticisms that have been voiced in recent years about spirituality in the broader culture. “One of the most reoccurring criticisms is that too many Americans shop around for spiritual cues, rather than settling into communities of faith where they can learn discipline or serve others. Spiritual seeking draws criticism because it seems to reflect a shallow consumerist mentality.”¹ Against this consumerist mentality, Ephesians announces that an authentic relationship with God is rooted in a personal engagement in all that God is doing in the world. Quick routes to personal

¹ Robert Wuthnow, *Creative Spirituality: The Way of the Heart* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001) 269.

gratification may be an easier course to navigate, but it is a pilgrimage that is unknown in Scripture and one that fails to encounter the deep mysteries of faith.

If there is to be a recovery of a reawakened faith, the experience of expectancy and power of Christ in daily life, all who are Christians must be engaged in some kind of ministry. The old-fashioned idea that ministry is a professional matter must be abandoned. Elton Trueblood once remarked in a sermon that, “Religion is like medicine. There is a sense in which both are good for everybody, but they are dangerous in both instances, unless they are administered by those who have the professional stamp upon them.”² The vitality of early Christianity was not primarily due to a few brilliant leaders; instead, it arose because the idea of non-ministering Christians was unanimously rejected. Engagement in ministry results in the sense that we belong to something great, that we are connected to something larger than ourselves.

Peter J. Gomes, minister emeritus at Harvard’s Memorial Church, spoke of the prevailing sense of emptiness in our culture to the editors of *Harvard Business Review*. In that conversation, Gomes shared that he often crossed paths with successful people in business at just the point where they are asking questions such as, “What’s it all worth? What am I getting out of this? What have I done? I’m successful by every standard this world can imagine, and yet I’m unhappy. Or I can’t produce happiness in others. How do I reconcile my success with my sense of emptiness?” Gomes says that such individuals have put their ultimate confidence in penultimate enterprises. “Business has to be a means, not an end. If you treat success in business as life’s ultimate goal, then it becomes a great, glowering, impressive, but ultimately empty and futile, tin god.”³

The contemporary soul wrestles with the spiritual anxiety of claiming meaning despite the press of meaninglessness that is very pervasive in our lives. Ephesians invites such fragmented anxieties to be brought to Jesus where they are woven into a bold and confident purpose. Discovery of God’s purpose for each of us and active engagement in that purpose gives birth to a truly aroused faith. Consider what Kenneth C. Haugk says about God’s call to every person to participate in a ministry:

The depth and vitality of faith shows in the actions of the faithful. When people experience God’s overwhelming love, they are compelled to share it through their words and their deeds by using their spiritual gifts. When people’s needs for spirituality, community, and care are met, they overflow with gratitude and love for God and others. The abundance spills over in deeds of ministry. People need to minister. They long to share the thankfulness, joy, and understanding they have with those in need. Individuals are eager to be involved in ministries that use their gifts.⁴

² Elton Trueblood, *The Yoke of Christ and Other Sermons* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), 139.

³ Peter J. Gomes, “Is Success a Sin? A Conversation with the Reverend Peter J. Gomes,” *Harvard Business Review*, September, 2001.

⁴ Kenneth C. Haugk, *Discovering God’s Vision for Your Life: You and Your Spiritual Gifts*, Participant Manual (St. Louis: Tebunah Ministries, 1998), 130.

When people are invited to participate in a project larger than their individual selves, what emerges is a far greater Christianity – a greater Christianity than one that restricts ministry to a few.

This brings us to another point. As good a definition of practical Christianity as you will find comes from the Book of James. It is this: Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. That comes from James' second chapter, and what it is saying is that, when God comes to judge us, the question is not going to be whether we were obedient to the law, or whether we made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. The question is going to be ultimately whether there exists any evidence of faith, whether in our lives there is fruit of lives given over to a new orientation because of Jesus. The new orientation that God will be looking for is a life that has given itself away in ministry to others as Jesus lived his own life.

Ephesians urgently calls us to discover that the maturity of faith God desires for us is within our grasp. The pathway is made clear. You and I are gifted people – gifted for the work of ministry. In this world a common mantra that has emerged is that we are not to become overly committed, to stay on balance and keep our lives for ourselves. In this worldview, the writer to the Ephesians sticks out like a stray dog that has wandered into our living room during a party. "I am a prisoner of the Lord (Ephesians 4:1)." It takes a person who has spent considerable time listening to God to recognize that placing one's gifts at the disposal of the church is not only a divine commandment, it is ultimately how we are able to keep our lives from slipping into meaninglessness and despair.

Reflection Guide

1. Restate, in your own words, the primary criticism that Robert Wuthnow identifies about spirituality in the broader culture.
2. To what extent is this criticism true of your own spiritual journey?
3. Summarize Ephesians' antidote to a superficial, consumerist spirituality.

cinderblock. I was among a group of Americans on a mission trip who had flown down to help the school with whatever needed doing. What needed doing that morning was building some columns and extending the roof of the classrooms. My qualifications for the job were primarily that I was there. Masonry is not a skill or talent that I would ever list on a resume. Nonetheless, here I was, carefully tapping another cinderblock into place. Suddenly, I was passed by a flock of children running toward a field. It was time for recess. An impromptu soccer game began, but one young boy stayed behind. He watched me intently as I did my assigned job. At home, his first language was Spanish, but he offered a critique in perfect English, “This must be your first time that you’ve ever done this.” As I reviewed my work, I hadn’t realized that my inexperience showed. We both laughed.

In terms of simple finances, the mission trip would be a failure. The money it cost to send unqualified people to do work in a faraway place could have been used elsewhere. However, the laugh that we shared made all the difference. We would not be bringing Jesus to Belize. Instead, ministry is about joining God already at work. When we go to serve, we show the world that Christ is not divided by culture or geography. Our faith deepens when our relationship with Christ develops into relationships with the people we serve. Ministry becomes an avenue for spiritual growth.

All of the Americans who came on this mission trip brought different talents and different motivations. In the context of our work, we were drawn closer to God and to each other. God’s purpose became clearer as we worked together. We recognized our ministry partners here and abroad as brothers and sisters in Christ. We saw a glimpse of God’s faithfulness, and we were able to recognize it again when we saw it in our daily lives.

An amazing thing is that we don’t have to join God in a place overseas. Jesus wants to be with us in our homes, schools, and workplaces. We work out our faith in the context of our lives. It is no wonder that James writes, “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:17). The lives we lead are expressions of the faith we have. God simply created us to do ministry.

Take a moment and briefly write down anything you would like to discuss with your small group about this Life Story. What insights did you discover? What feelings did you experience? How did this Life Story increase your desire for living a deeper and more vibrant spiritual life?

Equipping: James 2:14-26

The Book of James is widely regarded as a kind of how-to manual for the Christian life. Here in this passage, James explores the relationship between faith and works, developing his theology by means of explanation, humor, and illustration.

Read James 2:14-26. *Write your answers below each question.*

1. What is James' understanding of the relationship between *faith* and *works*?

2. Some suggest that verse 2:19 is a rather humorous illustration by James: "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder." James's point is that only believing the right things makes little difference in our life – even the demons believe the right things! Faith is more than right belief. Genuine faith that changes lives is enacted in works, which are its proper expression. How has this insight changed your understanding of God's call upon you to participate in a ministry?

3. James provides us with two examples of "faith in action": Abraham and his willingness to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice to God and Rahab, a prostitute, whose faith in God moved her to protect Israelite spies. Share your own example of someone who, through their actions, demonstrated their faith in God.

4. James closes this portion of his letter with another illustration: "For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead" (James 2:26 NRSV). In this context, "spirit" means "breath." James intends for the reader to hear that, just as "breathing" is a sign that the body is alive, so are "works" a sign of the presence of faith. Write in your own words what James is trying to say.

5. Martin Luther, the leader of the Protestant Movement, once remarked, “I almost feel like throwing Jimmy (the Book of James) into the stove.”⁵ Luther’s concern was that readers of James would mistake James’ teaching on “works” as the means by which we are made right with God. What the careful reader of James discovers is that, while we are made right with God only through trusting in Jesus Christ as Savior (faith), our works are the demonstration of that faith. How would you explain this to a new believer?

Closing Prayer

Prayer may be read by the group or by one person on behalf of the group.

Heavenly Father, you meant that our faith should be alive and vital, full of wonder and power. Give us today a vision of how you intend to use us for your purposes that we may experience a full maturity of faith, even to the full stature of Christ. Amen.

Meditation

To be read devotionally apart from small group.

“...for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.” Philippians 2:13 (New Revised Standard Version)

Someone once cautioned that Christians must avoid the anxiety of doing God’s work for him. In other words, we are all gifted and called to participate in God’s work in the world, but only in partnership with God. There is vast difference in doing work for someone and participating with them in a work. God may send us out into the world but we are reminded in the Great Commission, “I am with you always.” Our work on behalf of God’s kingdom is always done with God.

The prophet Isaiah understood this. Speaking through Isaiah, God tells us, “You are my witnesses.” It’s the job of witnesses to point away from themselves to another, in this case, to what God is doing. And understanding this, we can release ourselves from the anxiety that we are responsible for the salvation of the world. That would make us a savior, but not Jesus.

What the apostle Paul wants us to hear, however, is that God’s activity in the world is largely through people like you and me – people who are committed to Jesus. As we are called and sent to participate with God in ministry, we are asked to notice that it is God who enables all that we do. Our ministry is a shared one, shared with one another and God.

⁵ Frances Taylor Gench, *Hebrews and James* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 104.

The question then becomes, “Are you paying attention to God?” The Psalms instruct us to “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalms 46:10a). It is only when we pay attention to God that we discover that we are invited to a partnership with him in all the work that remains to be done in the world. A follower of Jesus who is not involved in some ministry is simply a contradiction.

Spiritual Fitness Training

Try one or more of the following Spiritual Fitness Training exercises and note whether it fosters spiritual growth. They may also be used in the development of your Personal Growth Plan during Session Eight.

1. Register for the next opportunity of the Egeiro Ministry’s Spiritual Gift’s Class. Upon completion of the class, schedule a meeting with a ministry coach for using your identified gifts in ministry at Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church.
2. Remove the bulletin insert from the weekly worship bulletin that is titled, “Can You Be of Service This Month?” Look over the ministry needs that are identified and make contact with the ministry coordinator to serve.
3. Keep a journal of ministry activities that you participate in. Who did you meet? What ministry did you provide? How did you feel upon the completion of the ministry? Exhilarated? Sense of personal worth? Exhausted? Not the right ministry for me?

SESSION 7

FaithPractice: Give Financially to the Ministry of the Church

Core Thought

Giving financially to the work of the church has little to do with meeting the needs of the church and a great deal to do with one's own progress in the spiritual life. Wealth can be a significant impediment to discipleship blocking our way to God. Responsible financial giving to the ministry of the church is a demonstration that we trust, finally, not in our personal resources to hold together our future but the power and gracious activity of God.

Core Objectives

- **To Know** (Cognitive): To state the value of responsible financial stewardship for personal spiritual growth.
- **To Feel** (Affective): An increased desire for responsible financial giving to the ministry of the church.
- **To Do** (Behavior): Look thoughtfully and prayerfully at present giving to the church and demonstrate a commitment to grow in sacrificial giving.

Core Scripture: *“But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate”* (Luke 15:22 NRSV).

Reflection

The story of the prodigal may be read from many different angles, none more poignant than the extravagant, squandering grace of the father. Squandering grace is a fairly good place to begin thinking about financial giving to the ministry of the church. That is because we are called as disciples of Jesus Christ to respond with extravagant gratitude to the extraordinary gift of life. As God's people struggle to grasp the magnitude of God's grace, they are changed from a people who “store up for themselves” into a “squandering people,” who generously release financial resources in active participation with God in God's redemptive work in the world.

This parable of the lost son primarily addresses personal relationships: our relationship with God, one another, and with our financial resources. The present culture of affluence challenges disciples to an honest assessment of those relationships. A look at where we invest our time and money may move us toward observations that are unsettling. Were the parable of the lost son set in the present day, we might find him

investing time and money in the pursuit of distinctive cars, luxury vacations, and cashmere socks. As one someone once observed, “I have not made a life for myself; I have purchased a life for myself.”¹

Another, yet equally compelling, dynamic that may be found in this parable is the quality of those relationships. While the lost son invested time in the pursuit of an abundant life materially, the son that remained home did so bitterly. This bitter alienation of the other son represents a loss of another kind – a broken relationship with family. It is a loss that is harder to recover than the loss of material wealth. One can reasonably assert that surrendering your Visa card is more honest, and less hurtful, than the pretense of continuing in a relationship that one deeply resents. The tragedy of the older son is his failure to cultivate a satisfying relationship with the father. The difficulty was that he remained focused on that portion of the inheritance squandered by his younger brother. Though he remained on the old homestead, his heart drifted far way.

This parable challenges a culture of consumerism with God’s claim on our checkbooks and lives. It is a parable that invites reflection and consideration of what really matters to us. Our checkbooks will answer whether we are organized around a particular lifestyle or if our lives are focused on celebration and thanksgiving. The true poignancy of the parable of the lost son is that both sons were far from the father and, consequently, both hungry - the one son who squandered his inheritance on extravagant living and the other who “stored up treasure” for himself. The father goes out to both, one on the road returning home and to the other in the field for he won’t come into the home. For both, the father provides comfort. God’s claim on our checkbook isn’t for the balance noted on the ledger. It is the Father again on the road and in the field seeking to reclaim hearts held in bondage to the checkbook balance.

Congregations and their members who approach financial stewardship from a biblical perspective do not view the money they give to their church merely as a way to cover the necessary expenses of providing ministry. Rather, such members understand that, as followers of Jesus Christ, financial giving to the ministry of the church is an act of discipleship, a tangible means of growing spiritually. By supporting the church and its mission and ministry with a percentage of their incomes, they demonstrate the high value they hold in participating in the activity of God in their community and the world.

Reflection Guide

1. Share how you have seen the misuse of wealth damaging relationships within families and with God. Avoid disclosing the names of individuals.

¹ David Remnick, ed., *The New Gilded Age – The New Yorker Looks at the Culture of Affluence* (New York: Random House Trade, 2000).

2. In your own life, which character in this story do you most identify with: the father, the son who stayed home, or the prodigal son? Explain.

3. Briefly identify the difference between a lifestyle driven by culture and one driven by discipleship.

4. To what extent has your own spiritual journey been hindered or advanced by your personal giving?

5. What is there about money that it has the power to injure relationships?

6. Does the seductive power of money frighten you? Explain.

7. How has this reading spoken to you this week?

Life Story

Al DeVries

Prepared for this resource and used
by permission of the author

I have always been a Christian. My father was Assistant Supervisor of the junior department and a deacon in a large Presbyterian church in a suburb of Newark, New Jersey. My mother was a member of a Southern Baptist Church in Newark, New Jersey. I don't ever remember not going to Sunday school. When I got old enough, I started going to church after Sunday school with my dad. He would give me ten or fifteen cents to put in the plate as it came past. When I was about 10 years old, I accepted Christ as my savior.

After I came back from the Army, I sort of drifted away from church. None of my friends went to church, and we always seemed to have something else to do on Sunday. If there was nothing to do, I would go to church with my Dad. I was working and would throw a buck in the collection plate; made me feel like a big man as I was supporting the church.

In 1952, the insurance company I worked for was opening an office in Jacksonville, Florida. I talked it over with Mary and we decided I should ask for a transfer. I did and was accepted.

A number of the people I worked with in Jacksonville belonged to a Southern Baptist church in Jacksonville. This church televised their Sunday morning service live, and I started turning it on to find out if I would see anyone I knew. Then, on Monday morning, I would go to work and say, "Hey, saw you on TV yesterday," and I always got the same reply, "Why don't you come and join us, and you, too, can be on TV." So I did.

Up to that time I had never heard the word "tithe," or, if I had, I'd let it slip over my head. Once a year, the pastors of this church would preach "tithing" for three or four weeks, and then everyone in the church would turn in their slip telling how much their tithe would be that year. I thought, "there is no way I can give 10% of my money, I'm just getting by as it is." The pastors, Dr. Lindsay and Dr. Vines, kept telling all of us to, "try it for one month and see what will happen." I would not take the chance.

Although I worked full-time for the insurance company, Mary and I opened a florist business at home specializing in orchids. We belonged to an organization that would sponsor orchid shows in malls all over the state. These were three-day affairs, set up on Friday morning, sell Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, tear down on Sunday night, and go home. I had an old Dodge van I would load up on Wednesday night, leave early Thursday morning, and drive to where the show was to be held. I would find a trailer park and rent a space to park for the time I was going to be there.

There was a show in Miami, and I was staying at a county-run park about 10 miles from the mall. It was Sunday morning, and I was on my way to the mall when the oil light came on. Instant panic! I pulled over and crawled under the van to find out the oil pressure switch had blown out and was leaking oil all over the engine. Here I was 400 miles from home with a broken down van on a Sunday morning. What to do??

I know you are not supposed to bargain with God, but I got back in the van and prayed, "Lord, if you will help me out of this, I will start, this week, tithing all the profits

from these sales.” The campground where I was staying had given me a paper with its rules and some business advertisements on it. I had put it on the console in the van, and, as I looked down at it, there was an ad for an auto parts store that was open on Sunday, and it was on my way to the mall. This just doesn't happen. I drove there, and they had the part. I replaced the bad switch and drove home that night.

The next morning, I told Mary about the deal I had made with God and she said, “How do you know how much is 10%? You have to figure in the cost of heat, supplies, etc.” My answer to that was simple, “We know how much I left with and we know how much I came home with. So we take 10% of the difference.” From that day, on we were tithers, but only on what we made from floral sales. Funny thing, ... floral sales just kept getting bigger and bigger, and with it our 10%.

After about six months of this, we were talking about it and Mary said, “What do you suppose would happen if we started tithing on ALL of our income?” We started that week and have never stopped, and anytime we NEEDED money it has always been there for us. Note that I say, “needed,” I don't think if you said, “God, I need a Rolls Royce or a Lincoln Town Car,” you would get it, but when the rent is due I'm sure it would somehow get there.

A friend and I were talking and the subject of tithing came up and he told me this story. He was down to his last \$10.00 one Sunday morning and had been laid off from his job. He had a wife and two kids. The question in his mind that day was, “Do I give God his tithe or should I keep that one dollar?” Only God would know if he kept it. He made his decision and gave God his dollar. That afternoon his union boss called and offered him the foreman position on a big project that would last all winter. You figure.

Take a moment and briefly write down anything you would like to discuss with your small group about this Life Story. What insights did you discover? What feelings did you experience? How did this Life Story increase your desire for living a deeper and more vibrant spiritual life?

Equipping: Luke 12:13-21

Responding to an anonymous question put to him, Jesus offers a parable that addresses attitudes and actions concerning possessions. Most immediately, Jesus looks to draw from the crowd insight about what our practices concerning material wealth proclaim about our understanding of God and God's promises. Jesus' hope is that disciples will be released from the fear of scarcity, thus the need to gather and hoard wealth, and enabled to reorder their lives toward active participation in God's work in the world.

Read Luke 12:13-21. *Write your answers below each question.*

1. The prevailing assumption in our culture is that life does in fact consist of one's possessions. In your own words, how does Jesus address that assumption?

2. The question placed to Jesus is really about fairness; the fair distribution of an inheritance. Jesus' response is one of refusal to act as a "holy" referee but, rather, he uses the question to reflect deeply about the accumulation of wealth. Identify how you have observed a desire to accumulate wealth negatively impacting individuals, families, and communities.

3. Tom Wright, reflecting on this passage, states that the world seems to thrive on people setting higher and higher goals for themselves, and each other, so that they can worry all day and all year about whether they will reach them. If they do, they will set new ones. If they don't, they will feel they've failed. Wright asks, "Was this really how we were supposed to live?"²

² Tom Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 151.

4. Briefly describe the man's attitude in Jesus' parable as he talks to himself in verses 17-19. Have you ever seen this attitude in yourself? Explain how you feel now.

5. Anxiety about wealth reflects a lack of trust in God as well as a lack of generosity toward others. Have you ever given so generously that you felt "pinched" or "hampered" in your personal finances? Describe how you felt after making that sacrificial gift.

Closing Prayer

Prayer may be read by the group or one person on behalf of the group.

Almighty God, so draw our hearts to you and so direct our minds that our ultimate trust may be found in your love and not in the treasure we accumulate. Show us how to manage our money that we show concern for the poor and advance your work in our community and the world; though our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Meditation

To be read devotionally apart from small group.

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Matthew 6:21 NRSV

For many of us, this passage is so familiar that we no longer hear it at all. We understand it, and there is nothing more to be said. It is a straightforward, simple comment from the lips of Jesus. Yet, this passage presents a difficulty for the church. It is one of the most misunderstood Scriptures in the New Testament. Perhaps a closer reading of it is in order.

What we think we hear goes something like this: "Wherever your heart is, there will your treasure be." That's what we hear because that's a truth that "goes without saying." We all know, from personal experience, that where our heart is, there will be our treasure.

Photography is a passionate hobby of mine. I may never be the professional that my father was, but I enjoy everything about the art of photography: the different kinds of cameras, the particular uses of various lenses, the study of light and composition and on

and on. Without question, it is where my heart is...and, consequently, a good deal of my treasure.

But look again at the words of Jesus. He didn't say, "Wherever your heart is, there will your treasure be." He knows that's true. It's obvious. No, he reversed the image. Jesus speaks first about treasure and then matters of the heart. What Jesus wants us to hear is that, wherever we place our treasure, our heart will follow. That is also true, isn't it? Place your treasure in the stock market and you will discover that you follow the market very carefully.

What Jesus is offering us is an opportunity to grow closer to Him. If we desire a closer walk with Jesus try placing a "treasure" of your resources in the offering plate. This, of course, is more than the small change you will never miss. The heart rarely follows small pocket change. And when you do give, you will discover that your heart has grown closer to Jesus. It's a matter of investing first where you want your heart to be...because it will certainly follow!

Spiritual Fitness Training

Try one or more of the following Spiritual Fitness Training exercises and note whether it fosters spiritual growth. They may also be used in the development of your Personal Growth Plan during Session Eight.

1. Daily, for the next weeks of this journey together, ask God in prayer to speak to you about your management of money. Seek God's direction in your giving to the ministry of the church. Particularly consider giving a percentage of your income to the church rather than arbitrarily settling upon some amount. Develop a plan to increase this percentage until you have reached the biblical standard of ten percent.
2. Maintain a journal over the next weeks of this journey together where you record the amount of your weekly giving to the church, including amounts to special giving opportunities. Include reflections of your feelings about each gift – were your feelings those of duty or of joy? Did participation in some special gifts touch you deeply? How might you continue to give in ways that increase joy?
3. Participate in a church sponsored financial management seminar on responsible Christian management of your money. As your debt decreases from responsible management, consider increasing your giving to the ministry of the church.
4. Read the book, *The Stewardship of Life: Making the Most of All That You Have and All That You Are* by Kirk Nowery (published by Spire Resources, Inc.) or a similar book on stewardship, and maintain a journal of lessons learned, reflections that you have, and questions. At the end of your reading, share with the congregation, written for the newsletter or orally in a worship service, how you have grown from the reading and changed your attitude about giving to the church.

SESSION 8

Charting the Journey

Core Thought

Dallas Willard, noted speaker and author in discipleship, writes that it is unlikely that followers of Jesus will experience a satisfying relationship with him without the vision, intention, and means to do so. The casual and haphazard practice of faith of so many usually results in a faith that lacks vitality and joy. What is required is some intentional commitment and reorganization in our own lives.

Core Objectives

- **To Know** (Cognitive): Define present strengths and growth areas in the five faith practices.
- **To Feel** (Affective): Confidently know the next steps in your faith journey toward putting on the character of Christ.
- **To Do** (Behavior): Construct a Personal Growth Plan from the Spiritual Fitness Training suggestions for identified faith practice requiring growth.

Core Scripture: *“Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us”* (Hebrews 12:1 NRSV).

Reflection

Following Jesus is an intentional decision followed by intentional activity. A plan for spiritual growth must be placed alongside appropriate support and the accountability of a small faith community; otherwise our spirituality grows only in a confused and disorderly way. Absent a plan for growth, support, and accountability, the beauty of our lives becomes disfigured by the forces of our culture; the quality of our relationships with one another and God is diminished. Structure, support, and accountability give us the freedom and place to grow as we were meant to be. Dallas Willard states it best, “The ultimate freedom we have as human beings is the power to select what we will allow or require our minds to dwell upon.”¹ A Personal Growth Plan can be a great help in realizing the growth God desires for each of us.

Personal plans for spiritual growth may be developed in many different ways. Ideally, a plan will be developed by the individual embarking on a journey of spiritual

¹ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), 95.

growth with consideration given to one's particular needs or growth areas at the present moment. During this small group session, you will identify at least one of the faith practices we have studied in which you recognize your need for personal growth: a place where you seek God's gift of freedom from particular barriers to living as a fully committed follower of Jesus Christ. You will then develop a Personal Growth Plan with weekly check-in for the next six weeks from the Spiritual Fitness Training found at the end of the appropriate session previously studied. A commitment to pursue such a plan will help you experience God's transforming work in that faith practice. The result will be a spiritual journey far more satisfying than one left to the malnourishment of selecting particular activities at the church that seem interesting.

During the time that you pursue your personal growth plan, you will journey with a specific roadmap that provides structure, support, and accountability. This road map significantly increases the possibility that the journey will be a fruitful one. The roadmap may be thought of as "Three Points of Engagement for The Journey." Each of these points of engagement will provide the structure or framework for your spiritual formation: 1) Time Apart - actively pursuing the selected Spiritual Fitness Training exercises and intentionally practicing a regular time of silence and solitude, 2) Time in Community – for the purposes of continued study of discipleship in the Scriptures and the giving and receiving of support, encouragement, and accountability, and 3) Time Sharing – following the personal growth plan, sharing with one other person your personal experience of growth. Consider it this way. The particular Spiritual Fitness Training exercises you select for your personal growth plan will be the "content" of your faith journey, the three points of engagement will be the "structure or shape" your journey will take.

The anticipated outcome of this adult formation program is that you will discover that following Jesus and living as his disciple is more than attendance at church functions. Transformed lives is the result of Jesus active within hearts and minds of people who are captive to the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and who intentionally pursue a pathway for growing in obedience to all Jesus taught. My hope is that you will find in this adult spiritual formation process the spiritual resources to meet the challenges and pressures that confront each of us daily and you will move from exhaustion and defeated lives to victorious living. Henry Ward Beecher once commented, "Religion means work. Religion means work in a dirty world. Religion means peril; blows given, but blows taken as well. Religion means transformation. The world is to be cleaned by somebody and you are not called of God if you are ashamed to scour and scrub."² Perhaps a succinct statement of an anticipated outcome, as suggested by Beecher's words, is an ever increasing number of persons equipped and committed to the missional work of God in the world.

Take a moment and briefly write down anything you would like to discuss with your small group about this reflection. What insights did you discover? What challenged you? What questions do you have?

² Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Meaning of Service* (New York: Association Press, 1920), 5.

Personal Assessment of Your Faith Practice

The following assessment tool will help you create a Personal Growth Plan that is best suited for your particular needs and growth areas. By answering the following questions, you will identify both your present strengths and your opportunities for growth. After you have answered all the questions, you will recognize the one or two faith practices of discipleship that require an intentional plan for growth. They will be the ones that received the largest number of “no” answers. Once the one or two faith practices that require growth are identified, simply return to the end of those small group sessions and select two or three Spiritual Fitness Training exercises that make the most sense for you and circle them. These exercises will comprise your Personal Growth Plan.

Faithful Practices of Discipleship: A Personal Assessment

Worship Regularly	Mostly Yes	Mostly No
Do I desire and regularly experience intimacy with God?		
Is there an inner assurance that I am saved by God’s grace?		
Am I aware of God’s power working in my life and respond to the nudges of the Holy Spirit?		
Do I trust that Jesus is the Truth and rely on Him to be my teacher?		
Is my daily life punctuated with praise, thanksgiving and adoration of God?		
Do I regularly sense the power of God?		
Am I continually driven by a desire for greater obedience to God?		
Do I expect to hear from God during the weekly service of worship in my church?		

Pray Daily	Mostly Yes	Mostly No
Am I comfortable with talking to God?		
Do I desire to know God and desire the things God desires?		
Do I believe that my prayers will be answered and can change things, even God’s mind?		
Is there an expectation that God will answer my prayers?		
Am I aware of God’s presence when I pray?		
Am I comfortable listening for God in silence?		
Do I offer prayers of celebration and thanksgiving as well as prayers of requests?		
Do I make time daily, regardless of my schedule, to devote time to prayer?		

Learn and Apply God's Word	Mostly Yes	Mostly No
Do I have basic knowledge of Jesus' teachings?		
Do I model my life after Jesus?		
Have I found that setting aside time to read the Bible is an important use of my time?		
Have I found the Bible to be relevant to the struggles and demands that confront me each day?		
Can I say that I read the Bible with pleasure and anticipation that God will speak to me?		
Is my understanding of the Jesus of the Bible sufficient to make me want to give my life to Him?		
Do I expect God to be present when reading the Bible and that he will speak to me through my reading?		
Do certain passages of the Bible come to memory throughout the day?		

Participate in a Ministry	Mostly Yes	Mostly No
Do I believe, at heart level, that volunteer service in the church or community is service to Jesus?		
Have I identified my spiritual gifts and understand how to use them in service to others?		
Am I aware that I am unique, precious and useful to the advancement of God's work on earth?		
Am I willing to place the needs of others above my own need for recognition, position and power?		
Can I identify two or three opportunities for ministry in the church that I could do well?		
Am I willing to invest time in the lives of others?		
Have I taken personal responsibility for the effectiveness of the church in fulfilling its mission?		
Am I passionate about becoming Christ-like in service to others?		

Give Financially	Mostly Yes	Mostly No
Do I trust God to provide for me financially?		
Am I willing to set a goal over the next few years to reach the biblical standard of 10% in my giving?		
Do I ensure that my regular giving to the church remains a priority in my monthly financial obligations?		
Would Jesus regard the way I manage money as an honor to Him?		
Am I able to practice generosity to the church even when I disagree with the leadership?		
Do my priorities include advancing the work of the church?		
Have I prayed for guidance in my financial giving to the work of the church?		
Do I experience joy in my financial support of the church?		

My Personal Growth Plan

(Write your personal growth plan here.)

Listening in Community and Developing a Personal Growth Plan

After you have created your Personal Growth Plan, share it with the members of your small group. Ask them to share anything else they may personally have found to be of value in their own growth in that FaithPractice. You are not limited to the Spiritual Fitness Training exercises found in this manual. Feel free to use suggestions from the group for the final content of your Personal Growth Plan. A useful growth plan should be neither too simple nor overly difficult. Write your Personal Growth Plan here and, later, on a large index card that you keep in a visible place.

Closing Prayer

Prayer may be read by the group or one person on behalf of the group.

Heavenly Father, the greatest experience life can offer is that of experiencing your presence and power for our lives. Thank you for these eight weeks we have shared together - for fellowship shared, lessons learned, and direction for spiritual growth received. If today we are defeated or weakened by anything, grant to us the hope that, as we continue on our FaithJourney over the next weeks, we may increasingly discover the certainty of your presence and love that overcomes all. Through Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

The Following Six Weeks

Personally: Determine when during your week you will pursue your personal growth plan. Deciding now when and where you will devote the time required of your plan significantly increases the likelihood that you will take the journey. You may change the time and place later if necessary but determine now when you will begin. When will you regularly experience silence and solitude of at least 30 minutes twice a week? Use this time for quietly reading Scripture and reflecting on what is read. Begin thinking about whom you will share this experience with, following the fourteen-week process. Your sharing need not be an elaborate undertaking. Coffee and thirty to forty minutes of why you engaged in the process, what you did (your Personal Growth Plan), and any experience of spiritual growth including habits or practices changed or begun as a result.

As a Group: When and where will you gather once a week for sixty minutes for continuing study of Scripture and providing support, accountability and prayer for one another?

When You Gather: Each week your group will use two resources provided with this session. For the first 30 minutes, share with the group your responses to the questions on the *Guided Bible Equipping Sheet*. Six are provided in this session. Complete one sheet no more than a few days before meeting with the group. Do not complete all six ahead of time. The second resource, *Reflections along the Journey*, provides you with an opportunity to share with the group your experience with your Personal Growth Plan and faith journey. Do not complete this resource more than a few days before meeting with your group. For the last 30 minutes of your time in small group, each person will share their responses to the questions on this sheet. Feel free to offer comments of insight and support to one another during this sharing. Close the meeting with prayer for one another and remind one another of the date and time for the next meeting.

Guided Bible Equipping Sheet

Date _____

Discipleship Insight: Disciples Are Assured of Their Salvation by Grace Alone**READ:** Titus 3:4-7

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy, through the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This Spirit he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. *New Revised Standard Translation*

REFLECT: In these few verses, the good news of our faith is summarized in a highly condensed form. In your own words, what is that good news?

We are told near the end of this passage that we are heirs – that we have been named to receive an inheritance from God. Have you ever been named an heir in an inheritance? If so, how did that change you life (financially, self-esteem, sense of responsibility, priorities, etc.)?

RESPOND: God has named you an heir, specifically that you will have eternal life. Does this knowledge change anything about how you will live now? Explain.**PAUSE & CONSIDER:**

Inward changes in our attitude toward God and others will result in changes in our outer behavior. Michael J. Wilkins

Reflections along The Journey

Date _____

What specific actions have you taken this past week toward your personal growth plan?

Have you been given a fresh discovery or insight about following Jesus or have you experienced God's presence this week? Share with the group.

Have you experienced blockages or obstacles to spiritual growth along the journey this past week? Share with the group.

How may the group pray for you today?

Guided Bible Equipping Sheet

Date _____

Discipleship Insight: Disciples Learn & Apply God's Word**READ:** Philippians 4:8-9

Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. *New Revised Standard Translation*

REFLECT: Why do you think it is important to the Apostle Paul, the author of Philippians, that followers of Jesus “think about these things?”

In the second sentence of this passage, Paul offers his own life as a model that followers of Jesus should follow. Name someone of faith whose life you admire and share what you have “learned, received, heard, and seen” in them that has influenced your own walk of faith.

RESPOND: Identify someone in your network of relationships (spouse, children, friends, etc.) whom you have the greatest chance of influencing by the example of your life. How would you behave differently this week if you knew they were watching closely?**PAUSE & CONSIDER:**

You cannot pass (your) faith on to others if you are not living it...and you cannot live it if you do not understand it. A paraphrased quote of George Barna

Reflections along The Journey

Date _____

What specific actions have you taken this past week toward your personal growth plan?

Have you been given a fresh discovery or insight about following Jesus or have you experienced God's presence this week? Share with the group.

Have you experienced blockages or obstacles to spiritual growth along the journey this past week? Share with the group.

How may the group pray for you today?

Guided Bible Equipping Sheet

Date _____

Discipleship Insight: Disciples Obey God's Commands**READ:** Luke 10:25-28

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." *New Revised Standard Translation*

REFLECT: Jesus has the lawyer answer his own question. Then Jesus tells the lawyer that he answered correctly. This suggests that the lawyer does not need more information. Something else is missing. What is it?

The lawyer's answer suggests that there is no distinction between loving God and loving your neighbor. What do you think?

RESPOND: What attitude will you change, action you will take, or prayer you will pray this week as you seek to love God and neighbor more deeply?

PAUSE & CONSIDER:

It is not enough just to know (what Jesus teaches); a disciple is devoted to carrying them out consistently and wholeheartedly. A paraphrased quote of George Barna

Reflections along The Journey

Date _____

What specific actions have you taken this past week toward your personal growth plan?

Have you been given a fresh discovery or insight about following Jesus or have you experienced God's presence this week? Share with the group.

Have you experienced blockages or obstacles to spiritual growth along the journey this past week? Share with the group.

How may the group pray for you today?

Guided Bible Equipping Sheet

Date _____

Discipleship Insight: Disciples Represent God in the World.**READ:** Mark 5:18-19

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon possessed begged to go with him. But Jesus said, “No, go home to your family, and tell them everything the Lord has done for you and how merciful he has been.” *New Living Translation*

REFLECT: What insight about following Jesus do you draw from this passage?

How do you think the man felt after hearing Jesus’ response?

RESPOND: What insight can you apply to your life this week?**PAUSE & CONSIDER:**

*Discipleship is not a program. It is not a ministry.
It is a life- long commitment to a lifestyle. George Barna*

Reflections along The Journey

Date _____

What specific actions have you taken this past week toward your personal growth plan?

Have you been given a fresh discovery or insight about following Jesus or have you experienced God's presence this week? Share with the group.

Have you experienced blockages or obstacles to spiritual growth along the journey this past week? Share with the group.

How may the group pray for you today?

Guided Bible Equipping Sheet

Date _____

Discipleship Insight: Disciples Serve Other People

READ: Matthew 20:25-28

But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.” *New Revised Standard Translation*

REFLECT: Summarize how followers of Jesus are to behave differently than others.

Jesus teaches here that whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant. Name someone you know, or know of, who exemplifies servanthood in their walk with Christ.

RESPOND: Identify one person who has a need that you can meet this week. What will you do? (Name of person is not necessary)

PAUSE & CONSIDER:

The purpose of discipleship is to help Christians become transformed individuals who imitate Christ daily. George Barna

Reflections along The Journey

Date _____

What specific actions have you taken this past week toward your personal growth plan?

Have you been given a fresh discovery or insight about following Jesus or have you experienced God's presence this week? Share with the group.

Have you experienced blockages or obstacles to spiritual growth along the journey this past week? Share with the group.

How may the group pray for you today?

Guided Bible Equipping Sheet

Date _____

Discipleship Insight: Disciples Raise-up Other Disciples for Christ**READ:** Matthew 28:19, 20

Go therefore 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 that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. *New Revised Standard Version*

REFLECT: In your own words, what is Jesus asking his followers to do in these verses?

Why do you suppose Jesus mentions “teaching” after “baptizing” in the process of making disciples of all nations?

RESPOND: How have these verses spoken to you?**PAUSE & CONSIDER:**

Discipleship began then, and begins today, as a personal, costly relationship with the Master who came to seek us out.

Michael J. Wilkins

Reflections along The Journey

Date _____

What specific actions have you taken this past week toward your personal growth plan?

Have you been given a fresh discovery or insight about following Jesus or have you experienced God's presence this week? Share with the group.

Have you experienced blockages or obstacles to spiritual growth along the journey this past week? Share with the group.

How may the group pray for you today?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abraham, William J. *The Logic of Renewal*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003.
- Ackerman, John. *Listening to God: Spiritual Formation in Congregations*. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute, 2001.
- Allen, Diogenes. *Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1997.
- Barger, Rick. *A New and Right Spirit: Creating an Authentic Church in a Consumer Culture*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2005.
- Barna, George. *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2001.
- Barton, Ruth Haley. *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God's Transforming Presence*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.
- _____. *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006.
- Bass, Dorothy C. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997.
- Borden, Paul D. *Direct Hit: Aiming Real Leaders at the Mission Field*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006.
- Brownson, James V., Inagrace T. Dietterich, Barry A. Harvey, and Charles C. West. *Storm Front: The Good News of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.
- Bruce, A. B. *The Training of the Twelve*. New York: Cosimo Classics, 2007.
- Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2005.
- Cole, Neil. *Cultivating a Life for God*. St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999.
- _____. *Organic Church: Growing Faith Where Life Happens*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005.
- Cunningham, Lawrence S. *Discipleship*. Vol. 2 of *Handbook of Spirituality for Ministers: Perspectives for the 21st Century*. Edited by Robert J. Wicks. New York: Paulist Press, 2000.

- Daniel, Lillian. *Tell It Like It Is: Reclaiming the Practice of Testimony*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006.
- Demarest, Bruce. *Satisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1999.
- Ford, David F. *The Shape of Living: Spiritual Directions for Everyday Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004.
- Fosdick, Harry Emerson. *The Meaning of Service*. New York: Association Press, 1920.
- Foss, Michael W. *Power Surge: Six Marks of Discipleship for a Changing Church*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000.
- Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. 20th anniversary ed. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.
- _____. *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008.
- Gench, Frances Taylor. *Hebrews and James*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996.
- Gibbs, Eddie. *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry*. Downers Grover, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- _____. *In Name Only: Tackling the Problem of Nominal Christianity*. Pasadena, CA: Fuller Seminary Press, 2000.
- Gomes, Peter J. "Is Success a Sin? A Conversation with the Reverend Peter J. Gomes." *Harvard Business Review*, September, 2001.
- Gorman, Julie A. *Community That Is Christian: A Handbook on Small Groups*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002.
- Halter, Hugh, and Matt Smay. *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community: The Posture and Practices of Ancient Church Now*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008.
- Haugk, Kenneth C. *Discovering God's Vision for Your Life: You and Your Spiritual Gifts; Participant Manual*. St. Louis: Tebunah Ministries, 1998.
- Hirsch, Alan, with Darryn Altclass. *The Forgotten Ways Handbook: A Practical Guide for Developing Missional Churches*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009.

- Hull, Bill. *Building High Commitment in a Low-Commitment World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1995.
- _____. *The Disciple-Making Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1990.
- _____. *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others on the Journey of Faith*. Rev. and exp. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007.
- Jones, Jeffrey D. *Traveling Together: A Guide for Disciple-Forming Congregations*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006.
- Kuhatschek, Jack. *Taking the Guesswork Out of Applying the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990.
- Limburg, James. *Psalms: Westminster Bible Companion*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.
- Long, Thomas G. *Matthew*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.
- _____. *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.
- Macchia, Stephen A. *Becoming a Healthy Church: 10 Characteristics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999.
- Malphurs, Aubrey, and Steve Stroope. *Money Matters in Church: A Practical Guide for Leaders*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007.
- McDonald, Glenn. *The Disciple Making Church: From Dry Bones to Spiritual Vitality*. Grand Haven, MI: Faith Walk Publishing, 2004.
- McIntosh, Gary L. *One Church Four Generations: Understanding and Reaching All Ages in Your Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002.
- Mulholland, M. Robert Jr. *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- _____. *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*. Rev. ed. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2000.
- Ogden, Greg. *Transforming Discipleship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2003.
- Palmer, Parker J. *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.

- Peace, Richard V. *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999.
- _____. "Spiritual Formation and Discipleship in a Postmodern World." Seminar notebook, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2008.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2006.
- Remnick, David, ed. *The New Gilded Age – The New Yorker Looks at the Culture of Affluence*. New York: Ransom House Trade, 2000.
- Richards, Lawrence O., and Gary J. Bredfeldt. *Creative Bible Teaching*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1998.
- Schmalenberger, Jerry L. *Called to Witness*. Lima, Ohio: C.S.S. Publishing Co., Inc., 1993.
- Standish, N. Graham. *Becoming a Blessed Church: Forming a Church of Spiritual Purpose, Presence, and Power*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2005.
- Stetzer, Ed, and Mike Dodson. *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2007.
- Swanson, Eric. "Ten Paradigm Shifts toward Community Transformation," White Paper. Dallas: Leadership Network, 2008. www.leadnet.org (accessed December 21, 2009).
- Thompson, Marjorie J. *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.
- Trueblood, Elton. *The Yoke of Christ and Other Sermons*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958.
- Watson, David Lowes. *Covenant Discipleship: Christian Formation through Mutual Accountability*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998.
- Webber, Robert E. *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003.
- Wicker, Christine. *The Fall of the Evangelical Nation: The Surprising Crisis inside the Church*. New York: HarperOne, 2008.
- Wilhoit, Jim, and Leland Ryken. *Effective Bible Teaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1988.

Wilkins, Michael J. *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992.

_____. *In His Image: Reflecting Christ in Everyday Life*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997.

Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.

_____. *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.

_____. *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002.

_____. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988.

Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006.

Wright, Tom. *Luke for Everyone*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Wuthnow, Robert. *Christianity in the 21st Century: Reflections on the Challenges Ahead*. Oxford University Press, 1993.

_____. *Creative Spirituality: The Way of the Heart*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001.

Vita Of
William Douglas Hood, Jr.

Present Position:

Head of Staff, Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church
New Britain, PA

Personal Data:

Birthdate: May 4, 1960
Birthplace: Atlanta, GA
Marital Status: Married to Grace Cameron
2 children: Nathanael, Rachael
Home Address: 4486 Honeysuckle Lane
Doylestown, PA 18902
Phones: Office: (215) 345-1099
Home: (267) 880-1788
Denomination: PCUSA
Ordained: August 1987

Education:

BA Eckerd College, St. Petersburg, FL 1982
MDiv Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, GA 1987
DMin (cand) Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA

Professional Experience:

3/00 to present Head of Staff, Lenape Valley Presbyterian Church
New Britain, PA
8/94 to 2/00 Head of Staff, Woodhaven Presbyterian Church
Irving, TX
12/88 to 7/94 Pastor, McLeod Memorial Presbyterian Church
Bartow, FL
6/87 to 11/88 Associate Pastor, First Presbyterian Church
Columbus, GA

Professional Writing:

Lectionary Homiletics
Biblical Preaching Journal
Preaching: Word & Witness
Preaching Great Texts (Editorial Board)