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MOBILIZING NEW MEMBERS TO PURSUE DISCIPLESHIP
THROUGH MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

Mobilizing New Members to Pursue Discipleship through Ministry

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Highland Park Presbyterian Church is a large congregation in Dallas, Texas. Its mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. However, the church lacks a plan to mobilize new members into ministry where they can be fruitful and experience transformation. The discipleship strategy will train mentors to assist new members in taking their next step in discipleship through spiritual disciplines and ministry.

This paper contains three sections. The first section profiles the surrounding communities and the relationship that culture has upon the congregation. Recent traumatic history has shaped its demeanor, and the socioeconomic success of the community influences the mindset of the membership. The denominational influences have devalued spiritual maturity and elevated a club mentality. A false dichotomy between being a Christian and a disciple further diminishes the church. The need for discipleship is at the core of the church and is the church's purpose as a transformative agent in the world.

The second section describes biblical and theological mandates that serve as the impetus for discipleship and for the new laity to take greater responsibility for ministry and spiritual growth. The paper profiles a maturing disciple, showing how the disciple is actively involved in ministry, which is an exercise in obedience and faith. Discipleship is at the core of the church, requiring change: a surrendering of ourselves to the purposes of God.

The third section provides relational and programmatic application. This final section describes the tasks of the staff and mentors. The pastor's role will be to cast the vision, to demonstrate discipleship and maturity, and facilitate the staff and mentors in doing the same. The mentors will be trained to come alongside new members, coaching them to involvement in ministry, through the ordinary means of grace and the power of spiritual disciplines. These mentors will be the heart of this discipleship strategy. The relational component from the mentor will ensure follow-up and help new members experience a customized discipleship plan that fosters transformation.

Theological Mentor:

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INTRODUCTION

Nowhere in the Scriptures does Jesus tell His followers to go and make church members. Jesus did not tell His disciples to start a committee, establish a club, nor create an institution. The Church is the collection of people who have received God's grace through the atoning sacrifice of His son, Jesus. The Church is, thus, a collection of people who are co-heirs with Christ and have expressed a desire to be His followers, while assisting and encouraging others to do the same. Yet, most often what churches do best is to make members instead of making disciples of Jesus Christ. Many churches have revolving doors where members come and go, and there is a degree of pleasantness among the members. Status quo has become the greatest value among some church members. It is the serious Christian who is seen as the zealot, who rocks the proverbial boat, and is marginalized. Among Christians, across the theological spectrum, church is a part of our lifestyle and our culture. It is where spiritual traditions were started and where a multitude of people were raised. Church is an integral component of our personal identity and of our practice of faith. The purpose, then, of this ministry focus paper is to present a strategy for mentors to help new members at Highland Park Presbyterian Church customize and pursue a personal plan of discipleship, using ministry and spiritual disciplines to foster spiritual transformation and maturity.

Over the years, society has grown less and less tolerant of the Church in North America, and culture appears to be drifting farther and farther away from the Judeo-

Christian foundation that was once respected by most, if only accepted by the minority. The number of high-profile pastors has increased, and mega-churches are more common around urban areas. However, it seems that the schism between the Church and the people of North America is increasing.

A schism also exists within the churches. In many, if not most, churches throughout North America, there is an apparent paradox beneath our steeples. Many congregations are flourishing with activity, and there is a burgeoning supply of materials and resources for ministry professionals to consume and distribute among their respective flocks. However, there is a plethora of statistics and candid observations which indicate that the North American church is immature. Greg Ogden writes, “For many years, 25 or more, the church-growth school has been dominant. I rejoice in the statistics, but we must say it is growth without depth. I believe it was Chuck Colson who said the church is 3,000 miles wide and an inch deep. Many are babes in Christ.”¹

Those “babes in Christ” are the members of our churches. For many pastors, the greatest call of the church is corporate worship. People are often attracted to personalities, and a congregation is built around the oratorical skills of the preacher. In a conversation with one of these pulpiteers, he said worship was the number one thing for the Church. However, while attempting to still show respect, I politely disagreed. The greatest thing the Church is called to do is to make disciples. While Jesus evoked worship from those who followed Him, Jesus did not command worship, but he

¹ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 22.

commanded love between His disciples (John 13:34), and He commanded disciples to make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20).

Scripture is also silent regarding making pew sitters. The Great Commission, as recorded in Matthew's Gospel, is a unique account of one of the resurrection appearances of Jesus Christ. These resurrection appearances are sometimes called Christephanies, of which there are less than a dozen recorded. In these post-resurrection encounters, Jesus often proved His physical resurrection by eating and allowing some women (John 20:17) and his disciples to touch him (John 20:27). On one occasion, Jesus reinstated Peter into ministry (John 21:15-24).

In the conclusion of Matthew's account of Jesus' earthly ministry, Jesus gave a unique and interesting directive to His disciples prior to ascending to Heaven. What is spoken by Jesus, after perfectly obeying the Heavenly Father, taking on the sins of the world, and being resurrected, should captivate our attention at the least, and, at the most, define our individual life's mission. What comes next should be paramount. The next step is crucial. The mission cast should be consuming. Jesus would not pick up where He left off, nor would He continue to teach the people and perform miracles, which would attest to His divinity. Jesus does not need to confront the spiritual problems in the heart of the people. Now His disciples need their marching orders. The beauty of this passage is that there is a turning point in mission and focus. This underscores why Jesus' words are so critical to the Church. Much hinges on the final words of Christ. Therefore, what Jesus says and what the Church should learn from this final appearance helps set the stage for where the Church should focus its attention and set its priorities.

While corporate worship is central to the life of the Church today and a response to God's grace, mercy, and faithfulness toward His redeemed, churches across North America have made worship the bare minimal activity for the Christian life. Attending worship, which is often more passive than active, has become a low bar of expectation for believers. As long as attendance is maintained to some standard set by the church or the denomination, then spiritual health is perceived to be maintained or achieved.

What is needed in the Church today is a higher bar of expectation for believers. Grace is a wide door which the Church has flung open for all. The invitation to believe is for all, but the way is narrow, and the Church often errs on the side of grace as it deals with its members. The problem experienced today in North America is similar to the problem of the churches in Germany and the rest of Europe during the 1930s. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his seminal book *The Cost of Discipleship*, expounded on the problem of permitting, if not advocating, cheap grace.

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.²

When Jesus called his first disciples to follow Him, there was an inherent surrendering of life. To follow Jesus means to go in one direction, to walk away from something by walking toward another. For many Christians, Jesus is merely added to their pre-existing life. The Christian is called to acknowledge a Savior, but not to wholeheartedly accommodate a Lord. When the believer is not called to surrender, nor

² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1963), 47.

challenged to minister, then discipleship is not expected, nor is transformation experienced.

In an attempt to address this problem at Highland Park Presbyterian Church, we, the ordained leaders, plan to elevate the role of all believers as ministers. When Jesus called his disciples to obey all that He taught, Jesus expected His followers not to just acknowledge His creeds and principles, but to put love into practice. When all disciples use our spiritual gifts and all our resources in love, we are in ministry. Every member is called to be a minister for Jesus Christ. The goal of this project is not to get every current member into ministry, but to get every new member into ministry. Attempting to go back and recapture the stayed members of Highland Park is not feasible, but it is feasible to set the path for the next generation.

The new membership classes introduce new members to the congregation, and its vision, mission, and values. With fresh eyes looking into the church, I plan to help shape the course of future church members and establish higher expectations. As the content and the format of the class is strong and healthy, there is no need to fix what is not broken. However, through this six-week course, the leaders and mentoring shepherds of the new member class will seek to give greater emphasis to being in ministry.

The primary force behind the emphasis on ministry from our members will be the new member shepherds. These new member shepherds are people in the church who have demonstrated a passion for ministry, a heart for new members, and a perceivable spiritual maturity. They will help host the new member class and facilitate the discussion with the small-group-format class.

A problem among many new members is the perception that, once a member completes the requirements for membership, that person has arrived. Membership class is often experienced as a means to an end. The point, however, is to present the class as a training ground or a launch pad for further endeavors. As is explained on numerous occasions, God did not save us so that we would remain the same. God saves us and changes us with the plan that we might continue to be changed.

While the means of transformation God uses are uniquely tailored by God for the individual, there are common themes to these means. Not all means can be manufactured through a program. For example, a crisis may be the means by which God grabs someone's attention. C. S. Lewis once wrote, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."³ God can use a crisis to foster transformation, but, as a church, we cannot manipulate circumstances in someone's life to produce the spiritual environment which can foster transformation.

Spiritual transformation is something God has ordained for those whom He has elected. Paul wrote to the Romans saying, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:28).⁴ A passive behavior does not put a disciple in the best posture to experience God's grace, nor to see God's hand at work. However, when a disciple

³ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1962), 93.

⁴ All Scripture quotations will be taken from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

extends himself or herself outside the comfort zone, into a position of needing God, then the disciple is more likely to experience God's transformative power.

There are so many Christians who have sat through many Sunday School lessons and heard countless sermons without their lives being challenged or changed in any substantial way. That is because their faith lacks application and their gifts lie dormant. A disciple needs to live by faith. Such a person can gather all the information desired, but in the end, transformation is a prerequisite to spiritual maturity.

The goal of the new member class is to use ministry as the primary means to make disciples and promote transformation. The expectation is that, as disciples exercise their faith in some form of ministry, God will bless them. We do not need any more people to warm our pews, and the world does not need that either. The world needs Christ followers to will go out into the world and live in obedience to the commands of Jesus.

PART ONE

WHO HPPC IS: A CONTEXT FOR DISCIPLESHIP

CHAPTER 1

A PORTRAIT OF HIGHLAND PARK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A Brief History of the Surrounding Community

Highland Park Presbyterian Church is a large mainline congregation affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA). In 1926, Highland Park Presbyterian Church was started by members of First Presbyterian Church of Dallas, Texas. The congregation was established and settled within the two municipalities, Highland Park and University Park, and situated within Dallas city limits. Within a few short years, the congregation was enjoying a gothic facility and growing resources.

Highland Park Presbyterian Church is located just five miles north of downtown Dallas, Texas. The city of Dallas has a population of 1,279,910 people¹ and is surrounded by many populated suburbs which stretch west to Fort Worth, Texas. The cities and surrounding suburbs that combined make up the DFW (Dallas-Fort Worth) area have a population of 5,088,450,² spread over five counties.

Highland Park and University Park are the two smallest cities close to Dallas, Highland Park being incorporated in 1913, with University Park incorporated in 1924, two years prior to the founding of Highland Park Presbyterian Church. Highland Park is

¹ "Dallas, Texas," <http://www.city-data.com/city/Dallas-Texas.html> (accessed August 24, 2009).

² "DFW Urban Wildlife," <http://www.dfwurbanwildlife.com/dfwPopulationPage.php> (accessed August 25, 2009).

2.26 square miles in size with approximately 8,900 residents.³ The average estimated value of detached houses in 2007 in the city of Highland Park is \$902,060.⁴ The average adjusted gross income (AGI) in 2004, for those filing Individual Income Tax Return in 2005 who lived in the zip code which includes Highland Park, was \$275,199.⁵ Compared to the average person in Texas, whose AGI was \$47,881, those in Highland Park have 600 percent more income than the average state resident.

Bordering the north side of Highland Park is the City of University Park with a population of 23,324 settled in a 3.8-square-mile area. University Park includes Southern Methodist University in the area, but not in its population. The 2007 AGI of those who live in the zip code, which subsumes University Park, was \$258,447. Again, by comparison, the average resident in University Park makes 550 percent more than the average Texan. Also worth noting is that the average estimated value of detached houses in 2007 in the City of University Park was \$722,973.⁶

Average residents in Highland Park and University Park are blessed with an abundance of worldly resources and opportunities. The increased income of these residents greatly influences their lifestyle and the life of the congregation as well. Many families enjoy second homes, club memberships, and the many amenities associated with a worldly and luxurious lifestyle.

³ "Quick Facts," Highland Park, TX, updated July 30, 2009, <http://www.hptx.org/index.aspx?page=300> (accessed August 25, 2009).

⁴ "Highland Park Neighborhood of Dallas Texas," <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/Highland-Park-Dallas-TX.html> (accessed August 25, 2009).

⁵ "75205 Zip Code Detailed Profile," <http://www.city-data.com/zips/75205.html> (accessed August 25, 2009).

⁶ "University Park Neighborhood in Dallas Texas," <http://www.city-data.com/neighborhood/University-Park-Dallas-TX.html> (Accessed August 25, 2009).

Highland Park and University Park share one school district, yet have their own city services and infrastructure. These two cities are within the city limits of Dallas, but remain independent. This independence has allowed these cities to pursue special projects and achieve a relatively pleasant lifestyle in the eyes of the world.

One of the outcomes of the prosperous nature of the residents is the highly successful independent school district. Four elementary schools feed into one middle school and then into one high school. All of the schools regularly receive recognition from the state for their academic and extracurricular achievements. Highland Park High School has consistently been listed among the best high schools in Texas and in the nation.

Approximately 97% of each year's graduates enroll in colleges and universities. Highland Park High School was named among the Top High Schools in the country in 2009 by Newsweek magazine.⁷

The culture of the surrounding community is thriving, ambitious, confident, proud, and also generous. Parental involvement is very high in the school district, and the financial investment in the school district is supplemented with special fundraisers each year of several million dollars. The "Mad for Plaid" fundraising campaign supplements the salaries of teachers and administrators, as well as the expenses generated from the ambitious goals of a successful and challenging school district.

⁷"Highland Park Independent School District," <http://www.hpsid.org/Default.aspx?tabid=53> (accessed August 25, 2009).

A Brief View of Highland Park Presbyterian's History

Highland Park Presbyterian Church was planted by the members of First Presbyterian Church of Dallas in 1926. Over the first six decades of this church, the congregation enjoyed incredible growth, influence, blessings, and spiritual transformation. The membership exploded from 190 founding members to over 7,000 members, with a TV and radio audience of over 60,000 in the DFW area.

At the “peak” of the congregation’s life during the 1970s and 1980s, the church employed as many as fourteen ordained clergy and promoted with great success the best programs, as evidenced by high attendance. For many years, Highland Park Presbyterian Church celebrated the fact that the congregation was one of the largest, in terms of membership, in the city and the largest in the denomination.

The programmatic efforts and the attractional model of ministry drew the attention of many in the community and across the nation. A strong pulpit ministry was a beacon for the community and the congregation. These complimented each other and the congregation flourished.

Family Feud

During its seventh decade, the congregation enjoyed more growth, before tremendous schism, division, and turmoil wreaked havoc for years to follow. The problem which arose was born out of the reunion of the northern Presbyterian Church and the southern Presbyterian Church in 1983. The southern congregations had the right to withdraw from the denomination within an eight-year window and retain their property if they were dismissed to a reformed denomination.

Consequently, those who wanted to withdraw fought with their many resources to wrest the congregation and the property away to a more conservative denomination. Many, however, wanted to remain and work for the spiritual renewal of the reunited denomination. The war was waged, and the casualties mounted.

Following the official congregational vote in June 1991, those who wanted to withdraw lost and immediately started their own church the following Sunday with more than two thousand in attendance. Members of all ages left for the new congregation. Others who did not join the new church felt disaffected by the denomination and opted to avoid them altogether by seeking out independent Bible churches and the proverbial greener pastures. There were many who wandered off and eventually stopped attending any church at all. Painting a portrait of the aftermath is anecdotal at best. Even years afterwards, there are many who officially retain their membership at Highland Park Presbyterian, but they attend infrequently or maintain their membership only for sentimental or superstitious reasons. However, the split was very real, painful, and scarring. Friendships were lost, and even some families were split over the decisions. In some manner of speaking, the resulting split was like a bitter divorce where the ex-spouse moved across the street.

The vibrancy and optimism which had characterized the congregation for decades had dissipated. Many leaders vacated the ranks, and the grand visions which fostered the activities, programs, and ministries needed to be recast with far fewer resources.

Today's Church Family Portrait

Almost twenty years later, while that scar remains, Highland Park Presbyterian is experiencing frustration, growth, death, fear, confusion, resistance, and change. Much of what we continue to experience is the result of emerging from the trauma of the split, as well as attempting to understand that the larger North American culture has changed. The congregation cannot go back to what was once comfortable and familiar and recapture those days of influence and energy.

As a result of the split, the theological and spiritual profile shifted. While statistics are elusive, the perception is still real. A large number of evangelicals and conservatives left the congregation. At the same time, many evangelicals stayed the course, but the small minority of liberals and the “lukewarm” souls who remained were now a larger minority. Many in this minority found themselves in positions of influence, which slowed the revitalization of the church.

On paper and in the pulpit, Highland Park Presbyterian maintains a strong commitment to the doctrinal stance which retains a biblical, evangelical, and Reformed commitment. A high view of Scripture and the centrality of Jesus Christ remain at the core of this church family.

The Heart of Highland Park Presbyterian Church

Highland Park Presbyterian Church shares some of the same strengths and weaknesses that dominate the North American spiritual landscape. Even though it has enjoyed popularity and a very rich heritage for many years, Highland Park has also absorbed values that influence the health and vitality of the life of the church.

Just like the numerous churches who have developed mission, vision, and value statements, Highland Park has also submitted itself to similar processes where these defining items have emerged. Years after the devastating split, and with the advent of a new senior pastor, Highland Park Presbyterian Church sought to define itself by writing a mission and vision statement to declare its values. In 2004, Highland Park Presbyterian completed its introspection and exhaustive self-evaluation with the help of an outside consulting group. At that time, the congregation put aside any lofty and creative language, claimed Jesus' words from the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), and declared their simple mission statement, reaffirming it in 2009. The mission of HPPC is: Making Disciples of Jesus Christ.⁸

While the mission of the church is applaudable and certainly biblical, I believe it is the values of the church which reflect the character, priorities, and personality. The mission of Highland Park Presbyterian states what the members should be doing with our resources, but the values-the things we hold dear to our hearts-influence the amount of effort we place in fulfilling our mission and determine if we will realize the vision before us.

The Character and Priorities of HPPC

The congregation has done much with its resources. God has used HPPC and its ministries to help transform thousands of lives within its walls and around the world. Millions of dollars have been given away in the name of Jesus Christ to missionaries and ministries at home and abroad. People have been sacrificial, generous, gracious, merciful

⁸ *Highland Park Presbyterian Church Vision Manual* (Highland Park, TX: by the church, 2009), 9.

and loving. The influence of Highland Park's faithfulness to God's design for the Church is impossible to measure, but there are many avenues and examples of stewardship which reveal Highland Park's faithfulness to the gospel.

This faithfulness is not always the case among disciples. As Paul wrote to the Romans, he acknowledged the frustration inherent in the disciples' life. While we at Highland Park know what we should do, we often do not do that thing (Romans 7:21-25). We may in reality do the very opposite.

As an example, many members in Highland Park Presbyterian are owners of industry and members of industry boards. These same members of the church highly value decisive leaders who will dictate vision, or who can help steer and guide ministries and meetings with authority. The corporate experiences of many members have created the expectation that the ministers of Highland Park should carry a commanding presence and yet a cooperative demeanor.

Quality and beauty are truly treasured, as well. The flowers in the sanctuary, the bulletins, the brochures, the architecture of the church building and grounds all demonstrate that members of Highland Park expect everything done in the name of "Highland Park Presbyterian Church" to be done with the utmost precision and with impeccable taste. While some would say this is an excessive value, as well as expensive, others believe that this value reflects a desire to honor God with those physical things produced for the congregation.

Tradition is a strong value at the church. The habits and customs of many members have reinforced their patterns of behavior. Many have refined their spiritual

expressions within this congregation, and they have created a reliable, comfortable, and repeatable experience. The traditional expressions of worship have been refined and given a special place of honor.

In the wake of installing a new senior pastor, and with the changing culture around the congregation, the accepted norms have been challenged. Programs have been abundant and well designed. However, the programs have left a few exhausted and many passive in their faith. The congregation's growth has stopped, and the church is unaware that the Christian era is waning and that the traditional norms of Christian expression are not appreciated, nor understood, by outsiders. As many members cling to these traditions, they are realizing that their values are challenged.

Incongruent Values Of HPPC

The value of respectability ranks high in these communities, where sophistication is treasured. To try new ways of reaching people and exploring various ways of expressing and experiencing what it means to be a disciple may involve doing things that church members will not understand. Presbyterians are known for being the "frozen chosen." To remain staid and conservative in every expression of faith gets old and stale, yet comfortable. However, to follow Jesus seriously means one has to die to oneself and surrender even respectability before the cross.

To be liked by others is at the core of many souls. Similar to the above value, many people want to get along with those around them, to be included, and ultimately to be liked, if not loved. The small-town feel of the surrounding community is a constant reminder that its citizens are never far from one another, and, thus, the members of the

church, along with those non-members, need to maintain good relationships with all our neighbors or face constant tension. To die to oneself and challenge the staid “Christian” culture might jeopardize the like-ability factor. To challenge the status quo would test the relationships which are held so dear in this tight community.

An unfortunate reality in Dallas, Texas, which has been shared by Highland Park Presbyterian Church, is that it has been culturally acceptable to be a Christian. Being a church member is a part of the social fabric; it is socially acceptable, if not also socially beneficial. Highland Park Presbyterian has enjoyed the favor of a culture that seemed to respect the Church. The residents are socially conscious, and appearances play an important role in the neighborhood.

It is a high value to be seen and recognized for having the best taste in clothes, affiliations, and accoutrements. Along these lines, the apparent need to “keep up with the Joneses” and present an enviable façade with like-ability draws a large number of people to join a church for social appearances.

During the decade of the 1990s, Christian pollster George Barna tracked the numbers of those who identified themselves as “Born-again” Christians. The percentages of adults during the decade of the 1990s who fit this description ranged from a low of 35 percent to a high of 43 percent. Barna’s counterpart in the wider culture, George Gallup, asked whether people would describe themselves as “born again or evangelical.” Over the same period, an astonishing range of 35 to 49 percent so identified themselves. These numbers scream for an explanation. How can Christian leaders moan over the moral decline of our society while so many people have indicated a meaningful encounter with Jesus Christ? If these multiple millions of Jesus namers were Jesus’ followers, we would not be wagging our fingers in shame at a civilization that has turned away from God.... Cal Thomas, a Christian syndicated columnist and social commentator, calls Christians to look at the quality of our discipleship instead of directing our indignation at the moral decay. He writes, “The problem in our culture... isn’t the abortionists. It isn’t the pornographers or drug dealers or

criminals. It is the undisciplined, disobedient, and Biblically ignorant Church of Jesus Christ.”⁹

One unhealthy attitude shared among some is that church is for their pleasure; it is a country club attitude. As a result of society’s previous favor toward church, Highland Park Presbyterian enjoyed a remarkable, burgeoning membership in the 1970s and 1980s. At one point in the mid to late 1980s, the congregation saw a record-setting number of people involved in Christian Education with about two thousand in weekly attendance. The programs offered and the events presented were of the highest quality. Almost everything which was done in and around HPPC was successful by most church standards, especially by denominational standards. These denominational standards present a low set of expectations and require very little from anyone wanting to maintain church membership.

An active member of a particular church is a person who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into membership of the church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of the church, and participates in the church’s work and worship. An active member is entitled to all the rights and privileges of the church, including the right to participate in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, to present children for baptism, to take part in meetings of the congregation, and to vote and hold office. Other conditions of active membership that meet the needs of the particular church and are consistent with the order and confessions of the Presbyterian Church (USA) may be adopted by the session after careful study and discussion with the congregation.¹⁰

From this definition of an active member, there are really only two things expected of a member to maintain his or her status. Those two requirements are that he or she participate in the “church’s work and worship.” Most often, that is only defined as

⁹ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 23.

¹⁰ *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA), Part II, Book of Order 2001-2002* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 2001), G-5.0202.

attending something sponsored by the church during a calendar year and giving something financially to the maintenance or mission of the church. It is conceivable that a member may attend only on Easter Sunday and give one penny to maintain his or her active status as a member in good standing.

This low standard seriously hinders the mission of the church. Inversely, the church can take in many more members and thus inflate the roles too easily and devalue the meaning of what it means to be a part of the Body of Christ. Consequently, while mega-churches are growing larger and the plants are making bigger footprints on real estate, the spiritual impact upon our culture and society sometimes appears negligible.

According to Neil Cole, current trends actually indicate that the Church is receding in America.

Currently the US is the fifth largest unchurched nation in the world with over 187 million Americans who remain untouched by the gospel. Of the adults who do attend any given Protestant church on a typical Sunday morning, half are not even Christians. Churches lose 2,765,000 people each year and between 3,500 and 4,000 churches close their doors each year for the last time; while only 1,100-1,500 churches are started. Not a single county in all America has a greater percentage of churched people today than a decade ago.¹¹

The church in North America has become increasingly irrelevant to many. It appears to be a club to many people, and equally optional. The sad truth is that many clubs expect more from their members than some congregations do of their members.

The conspicuous consumption of wealth is endemic to the spiritual life for some. The discipleship deficit at Highland Park Presbyterian is not too dissimilar to the aforementioned statistics from Cole. At Highland Park, there are about forty-five

¹¹ Neil Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God: Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999), 11.

hundred active members on the roles. On any given Sunday, among the six different worship services that are offered, there are only about thirteen hundred worshippers attending. Along the same lines, being a denominational congregation, Highland Park offers a wide variety of Christian Education opportunities for members of all ages. Altogether, there are about twelve hundred communing members who attend one of these Sunday schools or mid-week Bible studies. The end result is that less than 30 percent of the church's members are intentional about their membership on a weekly basis. To be optimistic, it could be estimated that there are closer to 50 percent of the active members who attend worship and a continuing Christian education opportunity at least two times throughout any given month.¹²

The result of the low membership expectations and the poor attendance of worship and Christian education opportunities has produced weak disciples. This weakness demonstrates a discipleship deficit. For various reasons, many members have taken a temporary commitment to their involvement. From Sunday to Sunday, their involvement may depend upon their Saturday night activities, the schedule of their children's extracurricular events, the weather, or their mood.

As previously mentioned, there is a high number of people who are attending some form of continuing Christian Education at Highland Park Presbyterian. The congregation has enjoyed as many as fourteen ordained clergy serving concurrently in its recent history. Wonderful studies have been offered over the years, and many lives have been blessed from their participation.

¹² Statistics are unfortunately not available. These numbers are projected from assorted and incomplete Highland Park Presbyterian Church attendance figures.

At the same time, missions has been a strong suit for decades at Highland Park. The congregation has enjoyed missionaries passing through the doors, and mission emphasis conferences that have awakened and renewed the interest of many in domestic and international missions.

These brief references to some of the strong traits of Highland Park Presbyterian underscore the wealth of resources this congregation possesses. However, the wealth of resources merely demonstrates the favor given to this congregation. It does not demonstrate the spiritual depth and maturity of the congregation.

For most members, there is an unwitting assumption that their mere membership and casual attendance will produce a mature spiritual life. Then, there are others, the more involved members, who participate in classes and Bible studies and may even serve on committees. Yet, it would be my assumption that, if they were asked if they were involved in discipleship or actively pursuing transformation for the sake of Jesus Christ, their honest answer would be negative.

Lane Adams, in his book *How Come It's Taking Me So Long?*, wrote, "There was general agreement on what brought maturity. Serious, in-depth, daily study of the Bible; a living relationship to God in prayer; regular sharing of your faith in Christ through witness; involvement in the local church and other service to mankind as opportunities presented themselves. All of this I had been doing for several years. Why were the results not greater?"¹³

¹³ Lane Adams, *How Come It's Taking Me So Long?: Steps to Spiritual Maturity* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1985), 19.

Many members presume maturity and remain willfully ignorant about discipleship and how to pursue the transformed new life in Christ. Spiritual maturity comes most often through discipleship. It is God's grace that makes spiritual maturity possible, and it is most often accompanied by personal surrender and intentional participation with the Holy Spirit.

The task before HPPC is to place disciple making as the principal mission of the church, with all other activities and programs, at best, secondary to the mission of fulfilling the great commission of making disciples. To accomplish this, critical symptoms have to be addressed. Starting with the new members, they need to be introduced from the beginning of their membership to the joy and benefits of being proactive ministers.

As members see their identity in Christ as ministers, the result will be ministry. This will differ from the past, when members saw their identity as members meaning to be involved at best, or at the least be present in the community; either involvement or presence was fine. The identity of each member may not be changed, but over the next many years, when members join, if they join with the expectation that ministry is what church members are, then the result should be a climate of ministry expectation and spiritual growth.

The congregation's pastoral leadership is changing the paradigm that programs can do it all. Placing the burden upon an event or speaker leaves too many people in a passive state, and it still does not accomplish discipleship. Providing a sense of anonymity increases this passive state. As Greg Ogden said, "The very nature of a crowd

is the ability to be lost in it. It costs nothing to be a part of the masses. One can either be positively or negatively inclined.”¹⁴ He added, “We rely on programs because we don’t want to pay the price of personal investment that discipleship requires. By putting people through programs, we foolishly hope that we can mass produce disciples.”¹⁵ Most of the membership is uninvolved in discipleship and the life of the church. However, that does not mean the membership is opposed to it.

The Optional Nature of the Church

Members of HPPC have long enjoyed a traditional church model. The church has traditional worship and Sunday school. Years ago, Wednesday night classes were introduced and, subsequently over the years, mid-week Bible studies began to appear. To a large degree, spiritual progress was measured by adding up how many were involved in worship, Sunday School and Wednesday night programs. However, the two latter numbers have dwindled significantly over the years. In fact, HPPC recently suspended Wednesday night programming due to low attendance.

While some construed that the congregation was suffering, the opposite was true, but unnoticed. Wednesday evening programs were dead; however, there are about twelve to fifteen other Bible studies that are in full-swing. The number of people involved in these is greater than the number of those who were involved in the Wednesday night

¹⁴ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 66.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

programs. At the same time, the small group ministry has become a shadow ministry. No one, except the Lord, knows what is happening in this area. The church staff has great difficulty tracking the existence, let alone the progress, of this ministry.

Additionally, a recent shift in the responsibilities of the pastors has helped to change the expectations upon them, as well as the programs. The pastors have limited their responsibilities to focus more on people, thereby minimizing their obligations to programs. This shift has great potential in addressing the discipleship malaise and minimizing the lethargy the malaise supports.

With the pastors taking a greater role in discipleship, more education and experience will ensue. The need, demand, and joy of discipleship is lost on the casual church member. One of the most influential reasons why many see the church as optional is that they do not realize their need. Many people are self-sufficient, especially within this community. The amount of resources available to the typical member is incredibly high. A spiritual desperation is lacking from most Christians' lives. The one ingredient that Neil Cole thought was most important for those who would join one of his Life Transformation Groups was a sense of desperation. He has given seven important reasons why the disciple-making process should begin with desperate people.¹⁶

In Highland Park, desperation is a sign of weakness. Staying busy, accumulating experiences and being immersed in activities is a great temptation. Because of the affluence in the community, many people have access to wonderful lake homes, ranches, and vacation destinations. These luxuries are often a short trip away from Dallas, which

¹⁶ Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 40-41.

makes them convenient. The drawback to these luxuries is that many members are absent on Sunday mornings. With an optional attitude, they can enjoy these possessions too easily and miss out on the connection to the Body of Christ. While it is true that Church is not limited to Sunday morning, in the minds of many, that time appears to be the best chance to experience church and enjoy corporate worship.

Another dynamic that makes it difficult to address the optional attitude symptom is the great number of private schools in the community. There is an intense competition between students and education in this community. The immediate public school district is consistently rated very high nationally, and the private schools have to raise their expectations to stand out among their competitors. It is this same school district which receives the most attention from the youth ministry, and, consequently, the overwhelming majority of students within the youth ministry are from this one school district. A sizable minority of these students feel like they are on the fringe of the youth group. Accordingly, these fringe students, regardless of the strength of their faith, end up dictating the family involvement within the congregation. The parents put a high value on their child's ability to be accepted into the community, and the result is that many children hold sway over the whole family's participation within the ministry of this congregation.

At the same time, part of the problem may be that many of these children attending Christian private schools "get church" at school during the week. In some schools, the children actually receive a thorough Bible education. The expectations are high for these children, and they are surrounded by great role models. Unfortunately,

when these children come to Sunday school, the lessons and games that may be used to foster community and growth are lost on them, or the lessons may be beneath their training. The result of this great spiritual support in school is that corporate church is optional on the weekend.

While it could be easily argued that Sunday school is not paramount to one's discipleship, corporate worship and community (read Body of Christ) are non-negotiable. Many in the church have the information necessary for a life of membership, but most have not allowed their faith to transform them towards a life of spiritual maturity.

Conclusion

The traditional model of church has been the dispensing of information. At HPPC, the Scriptures have been lifted up, and the mind has often ascended to such heights. However, the eighteen-inch gap between the brain and the heart has been too often non-traversable.

There are many good members in the church, but they are not transformed. There is a large number of reputable and dignified members who know the right jargon, posture, and cues to respond to all that is offered. HPPC has an incredible amount of resources at its disposal, but, with all the resources also comes responsibility. The Christian culture, which has permeated Dallas for many decades, has made it easy for many believers to blend in and give some respectable lip-service to their faith. Yet, knowing the resources available here, the influence that could have been exerted on Dallas, Texas, and around the globe are remarkable.

Providing an obvious and clear pathway to maturity is on the horizon. Setting the target of discipleship as an expectation of church membership will make a difference in the lives of new members and eventually on the life of the congregation as a whole. Many people, myself formally included, do not know the pathway. Spiritual maturity is vague. Disciples of Jesus can make a list of behaviors that indicate spiritual maturity, but it is far more difficult to categorize the characteristics that generate the behaviors.

We currently have many people who have adopted a mature posture by the very habits that have made them acceptable in this church culture. However, they are missing the life of a disciple. They do not know that there is an urgency to discover what the life of a disciple is and how that is different from being church.

God and the staff of Highland Park Presbyterian Church love the members too much to let them remain as they are. God's will is for His children to be more like His son, Jesus Christ. The mission of Highland Park Presbyterian Church is "Making Disciples of Jesus Christ," and that mission will be served. To make it a reality, we must ask the question Greg Ogden asked, "One must decide where he wants his ministry to count-in the momentary applause of popular recognition or in the reproduction of his life in a few chosen ones who will carry on his work after he has gone? Really, it is a question of which generation we are living for."¹⁷ The challenge before the Church today is about the way in which to make the greatest impact. A long-term outlook will produce greater results. The institutional church and all disciples should have a big enough vision to start small. Through personal relationships and personal investment, an environment of

¹⁷ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 189.

spiritual receptivity is created whereby transformation is probable. That is liberating.

Through the focus of making a few disciples at a time can eventually revolutionize a congregation and make a whole church into a disciple-making church.

CHAPTER 2

PAST STRATEGIES FOR MAKING DISCIPLES AND MOBILIZING DISCIPLES AT HIGHLAND PARK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Strategies for Fostering Spiritual Maturity

Providing an obvious and clear pathway to spiritual maturity is exceedingly difficult. Spiritual maturity is a broad, vague target. Lists upon lists of behaviors, or markers which indicate spiritual maturity have been made, but it is far more difficult to categorize the spiritual characteristics that generate the desired spiritual behaviors, and ultimately direct the soul to fruition.

At Highland Park Presbyterian, there are currently many people who have adopted a mature posture as demonstrated by the very habits that have made them acceptable in this church culture. However, many are missing the life of a disciple. They do not sense there is an urgency to discover what the life of a disciple is and how that is different from being church-member.

Throughout the programmatic history of Highland Park Presbyterian, the unspoken value of excellence has prevailed, with the congregation enjoying the best programs a thoroughly staffed church could support. At one point in the mid- to late-1980s, the congregation enjoyed a record-setting number of people involved in Christian education with about two thousand in weekly attendance. The programs offered and the

events presented were of the highest quality. Virtually everything done in and around HPPC was successful by most church standards, especially by denominational standards.

However, the need to drive home spiritual maturity, or transformation, not information, has languished in recent history. For too many people, curriculum is a lesson or doctrine to be studied or a hurdle to be jumped. Michael Wilkins correctly criticized the method of allowing programs and information dissemination to replace discipleship. He wrote:

Programs can be effective in transferring knowledge, training certain behaviors, or producing other program leaders. But programs can also entice us to elevate methods and forms above the goal of transformed people. Programs can focus more on external behavior as a means of evaluating growth.... We expect people to perform according to the outcome that our program lays out.... Paul encouraged these believers to be serious about their everyday choices before the Lord, to accept the differences they found among themselves and then to collectively seek to glorify God. He offered himself as an example of a mature believer who had wrestled with these life issues.¹

For the most part, “church” (small “c” intentional) is not working. Church involves the gathering of people on a regular basis for worship, study or some activity with the intent of offering fellowship, fostering spiritual growth, or dispensing some information, which should lead to a sustained spiritual life. All of these activities, while they are helpful in some form or another, are very often weak when it comes to producing spiritual maturity, which is the result of discipleship.

For most of the activities promoted at Highland Park Presbyterian Church, there is a vast number of members who remain uninvolved. It would be easy to say that they are passive because they have never been asked personally to do more. However, with all the

¹ Michael Wilkins, *In His Image: Reflecting Christ in Everyday Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1997), 52.

sermons and lessons with action points, the life of discipleship has been eclipsed by “churchiness.”

Over the past couple of decades, the church growth movement has fostered the small group format as a way of promoting larger, healthier congregations. Highland Park Presbyterian has employed small groups as another offering among many in the life of the church. In recent years, after decades of promoting small groups, their attractiveness has diminished. Today, the role of small groups in the church has become a shadow ministry, even though small groups have been championed from time to time. Typically, the senior members of the church have resisted the small group ministry. The effort required to monitor groups, train leaders, and place interested individuals in open small groups has been too time intensive. Consequently, there is very little oversight to small group ministries. No one, except the Lord, fully knows what is happening in this area. The existing groups have a life of their own, and the staff has had great difficulty tracking the existence, let alone the progress, of this ministry. Since this church was built on a strong pulpit ministry and a vibrant programmatic format, the small group style has been cautiously experienced by a minority and embraced by a few.

Small group ministries across North America has experienced a tremendous popular push due to the church growth movements. Many have sung the praises of small groups as the ideal means of discipleship. However, there are no gimmicks, tricks or, secrets about discipleship. At the same time, there is nothing casual and nothing accidental. Highland Park Presbyterian Church’s current definition of a disciple reads: "Disciples are followers of Jesus who have accepted Him as their only Lord and Savior,

and committed their lives to: Intentionally deepening their personal relationships with the living Christ through worship, prayer, study of the Word, and fellowship, and Growing His Kingdom through passionate witness and service."²

This definition describes what a disciple looks like and what a disciple does, but not how one “gets there.” It is the “intentionally deepening” parts which are often lacking in the Christian’s life and are lacking at Highland Park Presbyterian Church. For example: There are around 4,500 members at Highland Park Presbyterian Church. On any given weekend, there are less than 1,500 in worship attendance. That is only 33 percent of the membership in corporate worship each week to worship God Almighty. At the same time, the average income in the surrounding community is about \$258,000 per household. The average charitable contributions in this same area is over \$17,000, which is 4.2 percent of the adjusted gross income.³ The average donation to Highland Park Presbyterian Church is around \$4,000. It can be extrapolated that the priority of the church and its mission is low in the lives of many who claim membership in the congregation.

A common question asked by political candidates around election time is: Are you better off now than you were four years ago? The question seeks to measure a previous condition against today’s condition, with the hope of pointing out the lack of progress in life governed by a particular party or candidate. If the question were to be asked of

²“An Operational Plan for Implementing the Integrated Discipleship Growth Model” (adopted 23 January 2006 by HPPC’s Ministry Matrix Team, Management Council and Session), 4.

³<http://www.city-data.com/zips/75225.html>, (Accessed April 13, 2009).

Christians, many would have no idea how if there had been any spiritual progress or how to measure it.

Too many members are not intentional about their discipleship. Consequently, these members never experience significant transformation. Many Christians do not sense in any degree being more like Jesus than months or years ago. Being a disciple has not cost us anything, and many Christians want to even avoid the slightest discomfort or inconvenience. To intentionally pursue a transformed life will cause us to lose the illusion of control that we enjoy wrapped around us.

Yet, the goal of a disciple should be transformation: to bear the image of the Master. As Wilkins put it, “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.”⁴

From Scripture, we have several promises regarding transformation for those who would be disciples. Jesus said, “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40).⁵ In Paul’s letter to the Romans, Paul stated, “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29).

Additionally, Titus received this allusion to the transformative power of the gospel, which Paul wrote in his letter. To Titus, Paul wrote, “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God's elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness—” (Titus 1:1). Also, the Roman saints were encouraged to hear of

⁴ Wilkins, *In His Image*, 54.

⁵ All Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version unless otherwise noted.

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

Transformation is the supernatural byproduct of the disciples' life. Discipleship is the process in which someone is learning, following, and reproducing Christ.

Discipleship is a lifelong adventure, not an event, program, curriculum, activity or threshold to cross. The process of being a disciple begets spiritual maturity.

Spiritual maturity is not a programmatic venture. Spiritual maturity through discipleship is personal, interactive, and participative, rooted in faith and blessed by the Holy Spirit. By intentionally incorporating effective components in our Christian life, apart from that which is God's influence, we can attempt to actively pursue discipleship.

Strategies for Mobilizing Members into Meaningful Ministry

Application has always been critical for every Sunday school lesson delivered and every sermon preached. As James says, "... faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17). Motivating and encouraging people from the pew has always been a challenge. Due to the low expectations for membership from the denomination, there is a priority placed upon a statement of faith, given verbally in the form of vows. However, that moment in the life of many members is the finish line of their spiritual journey. To many members, they have arrived at a spiritual destination when they become members. That moment is perceived as a moment of approval, as if

the spiritual hurdles of life have been cleared and initiation has been achieved. The reality is that membership is an acknowledgment of one's acceptance of Jesus as one's only Lord and Savior and the willingness to be a member of the Body of Christ.

When new members join without the expectation that transformation and discipleship should follow, a problem is created. Fostering the expectation that spiritual growth and ministry should commence after joining a church is crucial. Keeping new members moving spiritually forward becomes a crisis. As with many large churches, the size of the congregation affords a certain anonymous culture to those who want to escape accountability and authenticity. However, Paul's epistle to the church in Ephesus reveals that the role of the teachers and preachers was to equip God's people for works of service. Peter calls all believers to be the ministers. Moreover, due to the work of Jesus Christ, the role of the priest has been distributed to every follower of Jesus. All believers are bidden to do good works as a response to their love for and gratitude to their Savior.

In the Reformed tradition, all believers are called priests. The Heidelberg Catechism states:

Question 86. Since then we are delivered from our misery, merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?
Answer: Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by his blood, also renews us by his Holy Spirit, after his own image; that so we may testify, by the whole of our conduct, our gratitude to God for his blessings, and that he may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith, by the fruits thereof; and that, by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ.⁶

⁶ *The Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 2001), 43.

The role of every believer has been elevated before God our Creator. A priest as mediator is no longer required since the righteousness of Jesus is imparted to all who receive by faith, Christ's righteousness. We are all priests (1 Pet. 2:5,9).

Furthermore, "...as fellow priests with Jesus we offer up to God our sacrifices of praise (Heb. 13:15), our doing good and sharing (Heb. 13:16), and ultimately our present physical bodies in the interest of conforming to his standards (Rom. 12:1-2). It is important to observe that here the corporate priesthood of the church shades into the priesthood of the individual believer."⁷

For many members, involvement in a committee has been the extent of their ministry experience. The chance to serve on a board or within a group who make decisions and plans for others and their activities has stunted their own spiritual growth. The nature of our denominational system creates a hierarchy, while perpetuating an institutionalized spirituality. This system is impersonal with a false sense of ministry.

The "Attractional" Model of Ministry at Highland Park Presbyterian Church

In the movie, *Field of Dreams*,⁸ the main character, Ray Kinsella, played by Kevin Costner, hears a voice speak these words, "If you build it, he will come." The voice and the object of the statement remains a mystery for much of the movie until it is revealed that the person to come is Ray's deceased dad. He comes to life with other historic baseball players, who play for the glory of baseball in a cornfield in Iowa.

⁷Richard E. Averbeck, "Priest, Priesthood," in Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 637.

⁸*Field of Dreams*, directed by Phil Alden Robinson, Gordon Company Productions, 1989.

Throughout the years in the North American church, there seems to have been a similar philosophy about programs and buildings. “If we build it, they will come.” When a program was offered or a speaker was presented, people came. Either the hunger or the freedom to pursue that opportunity afforded a programmatic success for the church. The appeal to the current generation and the applause of temporary events lent to the vision of spiritual progress.

Strengths to Build On

Core Four Discipleship

In 2009, the Session of Highland Park Presbyterian prayed, studied, and eventually adopted the Core Four. These four activities were recognized as characterizing every healthy, faithful disciple. They are not unique to Highland Park Presbyterian but are evident in the description of the first-century Church and in the Church today. The Core Four, as outlined, help to provide a framework or a parameter for the members of the congregation. “Together, the Core Four overlap and intersect to provide a map, a guide, a focusing lens that brings into focus all dimensions of the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ.”⁹ The Core Four do not represent a linear path of discipleship, but they represent broad values that direct our efforts and resources. These are the broad spiritual characteristics of the disciple’s life, which foster spiritual growth and lead to a life lived for God’s glory.

⁹ *Core Four: Devotional & Prayer Guide* (Dallas: by the church, 2009), 6.

Worship God

The first core value is “Worship God.” It is the Holy Spirit who connects people with Jesus and a community of faith. Worship has two faces which every disciple reveals. The connection we enjoy through the Holy Spirit is first to Jesus. That connection is manifested daily. The apostle Paul encouraged us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1), and every behavior of the disciple can be one that brings glory to God (1 Cor. 10:31). Personal worship is expressed by one’s daily prayers, devotion to Scriptures, and love for God’s world.

Simultaneously, all believers belong to the body of Christ, and are not to live alone, but in community. Corporate worship is a manifestation of our unity in Christ and our mutual dependence upon each other as a part of the Body. Connection with Jesus and the community is demonstrated through individual and corporate worship, praise, and a love for God.

Grow in Christ

The church’s second core value is “Grow in Christ.” God loves His children too much to let them stay the way they are. The Holy Spirit seeks to transform disciples to become more and more like God’s son. Having been saved from sin and liberated from the sinful nature, believers are to be different people. Through the Holy Spirit, we are to put off the old self and be new creations. The works of the flesh are cast off, and the Holy Spirit can exercise its redemptive power over our lives, leading us to godly living.

The greatest thoughts any person can possibly have are their thoughts about God. However, the thoughts entertained are not as valid as the truth which is revealed to us by

God through His written word. The need to study Scripture, either individually or corporately, as well as to pursue the spiritual disciplines encouraged through Scripture, will captivate our thoughts and direct our minds toward eternal truth and ultimately a changed life.

To grow in Christ is to have our priorities and ambitions under the control of Jesus. To grow in Christ is not to grow ourselves, but to come more and more under the lordship of our Savior, minimizing ourselves and magnifying Him. The accumulation of information about Christ is not a substitute for having our lives transformed by the Creator of our soul.

Build Community

Another core value is “Build Community.” Community is important. We need to belong. In our ever-increasing consumer-based culture, individualism is a virtue, and community is sacrificed as an inconvenience of personal expression. For the Church, Christ prayed for her unity, and the gifts given to her members were not for personal glorification, but for the mutual edification of all the members of the body. The Holy Spirit empowers all disciples to use their time, talents, and treasures to build the community of faith.

Since we are inspired by God’s grace, we value a covenant community, which grows out of genuine loving relationships with Christ and one another and requires reaching out to and investing in each other. God’s love and grace flow into us and then out of us toward others. This natural process is expressed through forgiveness, grace,

care, encouragement, and hospitality. Caring communities are more readily experienced through small groups, where some level of intimacy can be experienced.

The key activity for this value is the individual's service toward the community. It is desired that this individual support of the congregation's ministry and embrace its ministry partners. Membership is not about the member, but membership is about Jesus Christ and those He lived and died for and for those to whom He will return. The church in the surrounding suburbs deserve our love and, as they are built up, we are blessed. As we raise the water level in the proverbial harbor, we are raised with it. Building the community, sowing generously with our time, talents, and treasure, will beget blessing upon the sower.

Bless the World

The fourth core value recognized by Highland Park Presbyterian is "Bless the World." Through the Spirit, disciples are not to remain isolated from the world. Because God loved the world, we are to be salt and light to the very same world for which Jesus died. Since the ascension of Jesus Christ, God has chosen to love the world through His Church. We are to manifest Christ to a lost and hurting world as repeatedly we are called to perform good deeds.¹⁰

Many individuals and whole congregations are focused upon their own fellowship and the comfort zone they enjoy. The internal focus subtly captures the full attention of many, eventually consuming their energies to the exclusion of loving the very world Christ died for.

¹⁰ Jeremiah 29:7, 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Corinthians 9:8, Galatians 6:9-10, Ephesians 2:10, James 2:14-18, 26.

Since we know that our experience and perspective as predominately white, Anglo-Saxon Christians in an affluent North American community can too easily prejudice us and cripple us in our attempts to express our faith, we value being intentionally open, demonstrably hospitable, and welcoming. We want to be a Christian community that intentionally embraces the diversity of God's creation.

The mature disciple can risk comfort, go beyond his or her own interests, and bless God's world with God's gifts. The gospel is the gift of God for all people. That gift is to be shared, and the Church is not only the medium to share God's written revelation, but it is to manifest God's love in the absence of the Incarnate Christ.

Mission of Highland Park Presbyterian

In many if not most churches throughout North America, there is an apparent paradox beneath our steeples. Many congregations are flourishing with activity, and there is a burgeoning supply of materials and resources for ministry professionals to consume and distribute among their respective flocks. However, there is a plethora of statistics and candid observations, which indicate that the North American Church is immature. "For many years, 25 or more, the church-growth school has been dominant. I rejoice in the statistics, but we must say it is growth without depth. I believe it was Chuck Colson who said the church is 3,000 miles wide and an inch deep. Many are babes in Christ."¹¹

The stated mission of Highland Park Presbyterian Church is noble and provides the strong foundation to build a new tradition for future generations. Highland Park

¹¹ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 22.

Presbyterian has enjoyed popularity and a very rich heritage for many years. The church has historically embraced a biblically-based, Christ-centered, Reformed posture, and its leadership since its incorporation in 1926 has consistently fostered evangelical missions. The millions upon millions of dollars and incalculable influence and resources brought to bear for the edification of the world and the expansion of God's kingdom are staggering. Only God can measure the spiritual blessing reaped from the support given to lift Campus Crusade for Christ's *The Jesus Film* off the ground, to the ushers' welcome in a worship service. However, Highland Park Presbyterian Church shares some of the same strengths and weaknesses which dominate the North American spiritual landscape. Over these many years, Highland Park has developed a "discipleship deficit."

Hurdles to Congregational Transformation

Comfortable Country Club Attitude

As a result of society's previous favor, Highland Park Presbyterian enjoyed a remarkable burgeoning membership in the 1970s and 1980s. These denominational membership standards present a low set of expectations and require very little from anyone wanting to maintain their membership.

An active member of a particular church is a person who has made a profession of faith in Christ, has been baptized, has been received into membership of the church, has voluntarily submitted to the government of the church, and participates in the church's work and worship. An active member is entitled to all the rights and privileges of the church, including the right to participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, to present children for baptism, to take part in meetings of the congregation, and to vote and hold office. Other conditions of active membership that meet the needs of the particular church and are consistent

with the order and confessions of the Presbyterian Church (USA) may be adopted by the session after careful study and discussion with the congregation.¹²

From this definition of an active member, it appears that there are really only two things expected of a member to maintain his or her status. Those two requirements are that the person participate in the “church’s work and worship.” Most often, that is only defined as attending something sponsored by the church during a calendar year and giving something financially to the maintenance or mission of the church. It is conceivable that a member may attend only on Easter Sunday and give one penny to maintain his or her active status as a member in good standing.

This low standard seriously hinders the mission of the church. Inversely, the church can take in many more members and thus inflate the roles too easily and devalue the meaning of being a part of the Body of Christ. Consequently, while mega-churches are growing larger and the plants are making bigger footprints on real estate, the spiritual impact upon our culture and society sometimes appears negligible.

According to Neil Cole, current trends actually indicate that the Church is receding in America.

Currently the US is the fifth largest unchurched nation in the world with over 187 million Americans who remain untouched by the gospel. Of the adults who do attend any given protestant church on a typical Sunday morning, half are not even Christians. Churches lose 2,765,000 people each year and between 3,500 and 4,000 churches close their doors each year for the last time; while only 1,100-1,500 churches are started. Not a single county in all America has a greater percentage of churched people today than a decade ago.¹³

¹² *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church*, G-5.0202.

¹³ Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 11.

The church in North America has become increasingly irrelevant to many. It appears to be a club to many people, and equally optional. The sad truth is that many clubs expect more from their members than some congregations do of theirs.

The Optional Attitude Many Have toward Church.

One of the most influential reasons many see the church as optional is that they do not realize their need. Many people are self-sufficient, especially within this community. The massive amount of resources available to the typical member is incredibly high. However, a spiritual desperation is lacking from most Christians' lives. The one ingredient that Neil Cole thought most important for those who would join one of his Life Transformation Groups was a sense of desperation. He has given seven important reasons why the disciple making process should begin with desperate people.¹⁴

Another reason many people do not recognize their need for the church is that they just do not recognize how great the love of God is. Part of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians was for them to know just how wide, and deep, and high the love of Christ was for them, and to know the power that we can have in Him (Eph. 3:18).

In Highland Park, it is a great temptation to pursue so many other activities. Because of the affluence in the community, many people have access to wonderful lake homes, ranches, and vacation destinations. These luxuries are often a short trip away from Dallas, which makes them convenient. The drawback to these luxuries is that many members are absent on Sunday mornings. With an optional attitude, they can enjoy these possessions too easily and miss out on the connection to the Body of Christ. While it is

¹⁴ Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 40-41.

true that Church is not limited to Sunday morning, in the minds of many that time appears to be the best chance to experience Church and enjoy corporate worship.

Another dynamic that makes it difficult to address the optional attitude is the great number of private schools in the community. There is an intense competition between students and education in this community. The immediate public school district is consistently rated very high nationally, and the private schools have to raise their expectations to stand out among their competitors. It is this same school district which receives the most attention from the youth ministry. Consequently, the overwhelming majority of students within the youth ministry are from this one school district, and those who are a part of a sizable minority attending the private schools feel like they are on the fringe. Accordingly, these fringe students, regardless of the strength of their faith, end up dictating the family involvement within the congregation. When the child feels marginalized, they cease to feel connected to the youth ministry and the parents oblige their child's perception and likewise, withdraw.

At the same time, part of the problem may be that many of these children attending Christian private schools "get church" at school during the week. In some Christian private schools, the children are spiritually enriched through their private education. The expectations are high for these children, and they are surrounded by great role models. Unfortunately, when these children come to Sunday school, the lessons and games that may be used to foster community and growth are lost on them, or the lessons may be beneath their training. The result of this great spiritual support in school is that corporate church is optional on the weekend. While it could be easily argued that Sunday

school is not paramount to one's spiritual maturity and development, corporate worship and involvement in the Body of Christ is nonnegotiable.

Consumer Mentality with a Full Calendar

The discipleship deficit at Highland Park Presbyterian is not too dissimilar from the aforementioned statistics. At Highland Park, we have about forty-five hundred active members on our rolls. On any given Sunday, among the six different worship services offered, we have only about thirteen hundred worshippers attending.¹⁵ Along the same lines, being a denominational congregation, we offer a wide variety of Christian education opportunities for our members of all ages. Altogether, there are about twelve hundred communing members who attend one of these Sunday schools or mid-week Bible studies. The end result is that less than 30 percent of our members are intentional about their membership on a weekly basis. To be optimistic, it could be surmised that closer to 50 percent of the active members attend worship and a continuing Christian education opportunity at least two times throughout any given month.

The result of the low membership expectations and the poor attendance at worship and Christian education opportunities has produced weak disciples. This weakness demonstrates a discipleship deficit. For various reasons, many members have made a temporary commitment to their involvement. From Sunday to Sunday, their involvement may depend upon their Saturday night activities, the schedule of their children's extracurricular events, the weather, or their mood.

¹⁵ 10 01 Current Information Packet.pdf p10 Session Packet for HPPC Elders, January 2010, p10

Few have the commitment to maintain the loyalty exhibited by the former Surgeon General Dr. C. Everett Koop and his wife, Betty, about their Church involvement. A quote attributed to him, but unsubstantiated is: "Betty maintained that no matter how busy we were, it was easier to go to church every Sunday than to choose which Sundays to go."

In today's North American culture, brand loyalty is diminishing among consumers, and that is equally true of church members. From personal experience, I have encountered more and more members who hold an additional membership in another congregation in town.

Spiritual Ignorance about Discipleship

While there are many wonderful people attending some form of continuing Christian education at Highland Park Presbyterian, a spiritual ignorance about discipleship persists. The congregation has enjoyed as many as fourteen ordained clergy at one time in its recent history. Wonderful studies have been offered over the years, and many lives have been blessed from their participation.

In spite of the abundance of spiritual resources available to all the members of Highland Park Presbyterian, there is a clear disconnection between membership and discipleship. As defined earlier, discipleship involves being a learner, follower, and reproducer of Jesus Christ. The opportunity to learn is great. To follow Christ through obedience is always a challenge for any disciple. The actual effort to reproduce discipleship in others is too often left to the professional. Rare are the people who accept the call and take the responsibility to be personally involved in others' discipleship.

A change that is needed for Highland Park Presbyterian is for the members to sense the urgency for discipleship. Too many people are busy with a plethora of good things. The good things are often an enemy of the best. These activities and opportunities are discreetly subversive. However, when disciples realize that the most important thing the Church should be about is discipleship, and those who call themselves disciples are too busy for that, then the disciples are just too busy. More members need to sense the urgency of discipleship and surrender their hearts to be transformed so that they, too, can make disciples. The call to carry the cross and eschew cheap discipleship is a line in the sand many members are not willing to cross.

Unconscious and Conflicting Values

Highland Park, like many churches, has an ethos. The ethos is culture and is intertwined with the congregation. It engenders a constant expectation from the members to maintain unconscious values which have not been formally recognized. These values include a strong leader, aesthetics, tradition, and respectability.

Because many influential members and leaders of the congregation are owners of industry and members of industry boards, the members of the church highly value decisive leaders who can help steer and guide ministries and meetings with authority. The corporate experiences of many members have created the expectation that the ministers of Highland Park should carry a commanding presence and yet a cooperative demeanor.

Aesthetics strongly influence the church culture. The flowers in the sanctuary, the bulletins, the brochures, the architecture of the church building and grounds all

demonstrate that Highland Park expects everything done in the name of “Highland Park Presbyterian Church” to be done with the utmost precision and with impeccable taste. While some would say this is an excessive value, as well as expensive, there is also the belief that this value reflects a desire to honor God with those physical things produced by the congregation.

The traditions, which are the habits and customs of many members, have galvanized them in their ways. Many have refined their spiritual expressions within this congregation, and they have created a reliable, comfortable and repeatable experience. The traditional expressions of worship have been refined and given a special place of honor.

With a new senior pastor and with the changing culture around the congregation, the accepted norms have been challenged. Programs have been abundant and well designed. However, the programs have left a few exhausted and many passive in their faith. The congregation’s growth has flat-lined, and the congregation is unaware that the Christian era is waning and that the traditional norms of Christian expression are not appreciated nor understood by outsiders. As many members cling to these traditions, they are realizing that their values are challenged.

Another unspoken value is the value of respectability, which ranks high in this community where sophistication is treasured. To try new ways of reaching people and exploring various ways of expressing and experiencing what it means to be a disciple may involve doing things that people will not understand. Presbyterians are known for being the “frozen chosen.” To remain staid and conservative in every expression of faith

gets old and stale, yet comfortable. However, to follow Jesus seriously means disciples have to die to ourselves and surrender even our respectability before the cross.

Evangelical Blinders

A church-made problem has become a prevailing hurdle to many in the church. Due to the overwhelming Christo-centricity of our institutionalized evangelicalism, church-sponsored activities and programs retain a high priority in our promotions and on our calendars. Consequently, an unintended, extreme attitude is disseminated which says that only church-sanctioned ministry is approved by God. The result is an increasing disconnection between ministry and work. A spiritual blind spot develops for many members because they do not perceive their work and volunteer efforts as ministry.

The membership of Highland Park Presbyterian is filled with leaders of industry and socially influential people. The social fabric in the community is so deeply intertwined with civic activities and volunteerism, that many do not connect these activities and positions of service as viable avenues of ministry. The infrastructures and base of dozens of service-minded and helpful organizations are readily available to members as ministry opportunities.

The unfortunate perceived gap between ministry and good works has handicapped the servants' understanding and appreciation of how God can and is using their gifts, talents and resources for His greater glory. This disconnection hinders disciples' appreciation of God's activity in their lives and short-circuits their spiritual participation as ministers in the world. A civic activity need not be compartmentalized from ministry. God is more than God of the denomination, the institutional church, and all that happens

on Sunday morning. God is sovereign over all. God is God over their jobs, carpool clubs, the economy, and NPO's (Not-for-Profit Organizations.) To limit ministry to that which is sanctioned by the congregation is to limit God's sovereignty, which cannot happen.

Summary

Many programs have populated the North American Church's landscape over the years. Programs have offered some good avenues for gaining information and expressing Christian faith. These manufactured curriculums and institutionalized behaviors greatly contribute to a desirable culture through the conveyance of expected norms. It may be better to have these than nothing at all, but the goal is "to be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2) with the intent of loving God with all of our mind (Luke 10:27).

Many of those programs have enjoyed a moment in the sun, some even can be embraced across North America, and some can cross the ocean to experience a form of popularity. The programs may speak to certain individuals temporarily, perhaps fostering growth and challenging them toward a greater spiritual awareness, until the programs are replaced with other programs that peaks one's interest. After marketing and after a certain degree of saturation, a program can fade into oblivion, being relegated to a shelf or archived for prosperity. Consumption of programs, especially in a market-driven culture, perpetuates consumption, leaving members with an inflated attitude of self and a diminished expectation to be used by God today.

Past strategies have served a purpose, but they have failed to effect institutional or community change. Programs are designed for groups, where numbers are counted and a linear system is employed for the many to embrace certain information or a vision of a preferred future. Some people are blessed greatly by programs. A colloquialism, which is often accepted is that 20 percent of the people do 80 percent of the service around a church. It is assumed that 80 percent of the work is getting done, therefore, the missing 20 percent is not a big loss. If only 20 percent is missing, then the church is doing pretty well. However, this is illogical and absurd. Twenty percent can only do 20 percent of the work. Eighty percent of the service for a church is left undone. No one person can do someone else's ministry. Each person has his or her own gifts, talents, and calling. No one can be replaced by another in the Body. Programs have a place in the ministry of the church, but their role is diminishing as their influence has apparently dissipated.

PART TWO
FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Throughout the New Testament, though the word *discipleship* is not used, the word *disciple* is used repeatedly. Most often disciple is a descriptor of those who followed Jesus and occasionally of those who were followers of John the Baptizer. The methodology for the important practice of forming disciples is absent from Scripture.

Grasping an understanding of discipleship is paramount to a fruitful ministry. Discipleship is “the process of growth into Christ-like maturity and reproduction, fruitfulness in quality and quantity.” “You become a Christian disciple by choosing to follow Christ in such a way that your core ambitions are changed, so you are no longer serving self first but God. Then your process of growth as a Christian is called discipleship.”¹ Discipleship is a command, and discipleship is the way of life for those who follow Jesus. Discipleship will happen in life; it is a non-negotiable fact. However, the important issue all people should settle for themselves is, discipleship to what or whom?

Definitions in Discipleship

Growth toward Christ-like Maturity and Reproduction

Discipleship is the process by which a disciple assists in the reproduction of making disciples. Discipling is the responsibility of disciples to disciple believers in their

¹ Garth Icenogle, “Growing a Disciple-Making Congregation” (Lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, August 2, 2006).

transformation into Christ-likeness. In a manner of speaking, C.S. Lewis said, “The church exists for no other purpose (mission) but to draw men into Christ, to make them little christ^s.”²

The process by which disciples become more like Christ is ignored or abandoned. Many Christians live out their lives, settling for a form of “fire insurance,” which is their ticket out of Hades. However, Jesus had greater plans for His followers. The disciple’s life is more than membership in a club, avoiding certain perceived cultural sins, and passing time until reunion with Christ. Discipleship is intended to be the means by which a Christian minimizes his or her own self and maximizes Christ.

Disciple: A Learner, a Follower, and a Reproducer of Jesus Christ

A disciple is a learner, a follower, and a reproducer, which results in a transformation in the disciple towards the life of Jesus Christ. Disciples love God with their mind. They also let Jesus take the lead in their lives in all areas. Finally, disciples seek to help others do the same.

In Jesus’ earthly ministry, he sought to make disciples of many more than the twelve apostles. Jesus focused His teaching on the Twelve while leading them for several years throughout His itinerant ministry. Yet, even in the midst of making disciples, many opposed Jesus during His ministry, and many misunderstood Him because He was popular and appeared to be a rising leader. As a way of drawing the distinction between Jesus and the world, Jesus occasionally created opposition. Following Christ can make all disciples discordant with the world. “Jesus uses the opportunity to lay out the problems with the

²C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: MacMillan, 1960), 163.

religiosity of his adversaries against his own teaching by giving a litany of shocking comparisons between various, apparent socio-political and socio-economic realities versus the meaning of being his disciple.”³ As Jesus led His disciples, Jesus presented some explicit teaching on discipleship when talking to the people around Him. In this way, those who chose discipleship with Him, would know that discipleship called for self-denial, denial to the point of death.⁴ “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”...“So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions...” (Luke 14:26, 27 and 33).

The greatest call to discipleship came soon after Jesus was resurrected, and after appearing to His disciples on numerous occasions. Jesus met His disciples again in Galilee. At that time, Jesus declared His final command to those who would follow Him right before ascending to Heaven. There Jesus said:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age (Matt. 28:19-20).

In classical Greek, the ordinary use of “make disciples” (*manthaénoæ*) means “to direct one’s mind to something. *Manthaénoæ* can be used to mean: first, “to accustom oneself to something,” second, “to experience,” third, “to learn to know,” fourth, “to understand,” fifth, “to learn under instruction,” and sixth, “to receive direction from a

³ *Wikipedia*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disciple_%28Christianity%29, s.v. “disciple (Christianity)” (accessed January 20, 2007).

⁴ Matthew 16:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23

deity by oracle.” In the phrase *tii mathoæÉn* it means “why?” (often with an ironical note).⁵ *Manthaénoæ* implies an intellectual process that always has expressible effects that may be initiated consciously or unconsciously. Even to Socrates, learning had a supra-personal accent, which was necessary to awaken a moral sense for one to deal with the issues of the day.⁶

Different cultures may approach making disciples in different ways. To the Greeks, there is an emphasis upon the intellectual accent, or learning of a truth, as opposed to the Jews who place a higher emphasis upon doing.⁷ While giving mere mental approval may constitute discipleship in one culture, another, like the Jewish culture, places a higher value upon action.

The explicit demand upon a disciple, to make disciples, is great. A disciple is a learner, a follower and a reproducer of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ command to make disciples comes before His ascension (Matt. 28:19-20) and is supported from His call to His apostles to follow Him (Matt. 4:19-20).

A Disciple Is a Learner

Jesus said that the people who are to be disciples, need to be taught everything He commanded. To learn *all* of Jesus’ commands and instructions is at the core of discipleship. God has chosen to reveal Himself through creation, through our spirit,

⁵ Geoffrey W Bromiley, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* – “Little Kittel,” Accordance Software Module, Version 1.5 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 553.

⁶ Ibid, 554

⁷ Ibid., 554.

through Jesus, and through Scripture.⁸ Among those four avenues of revelation, Scripture is one medium that may be the least subjective and the most reliable medium for communicating Jesus' teachings to the subsequent generations of disciples. Yet this aspect of discipleship is often ignored. In a survey on the primacy of Scripture, statistics revealed an appalling disparity between what disciples should consider their primary medium of Jesus' teaching, and what they have learned. The survey revealed:

“Americans revere the Bible-but, by and large, they don't read it.” According to Gallup, 65 percent of the adult population agree that the Bible “answers all or most of the basic questions of life.” Barna's surveys found that 60 percent of all American adults and 85 percent who described themselves as born again would affirm the statement “The Bible is totally accurate in all that it teaches.” In spite of these affirmations there is an appalling ignorance of the book we put on a pedestal. For example, 53 percent of the adults in Barna's survey believed that the saying “God helps those who help themselves” is a biblical truth.⁹

A recent survey, by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, further demonstrated the ignorance of the average North American respondent. The survey “aimed to test a broad range of religious knowledge, including understanding of the Bible, core teachings of different faiths and major figures in religious history. The U.S. is one of the most religious countries in the developed world, especially compared to largely secular Western Europe, but faith leaders and educators have long lamented that Americans still know relatively little about religion.”¹⁰ Ignorance about faith abounds, even in a country that may have once considered itself a Christian nation. The sayings

⁸ Psalm 19:1; Colossians 1:15-20; Romans 8:16, 2 Timothy 3:16.

⁹ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 34.

¹⁰ Pew Forum, “Survey: Many Americans Know Little About Religion,” <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2010/09/28/survey-americans-know-little-religion/?test=latestnews> (accessed September 28, 2010).

and truisms cast about by the tongues of many, which may be attributed to Jesus, are often wives' tales or colloquialisms.¹¹

Through biblical studies, the disciple looks to adopt the wisdom and lifestyle of his or her teacher. Too often, the North American church has focused upon the distribution of information and failed to emphasize the joy and hope of transformation. People are comfortable in their lives and have lost the sense of urgency to be transformed.¹²

According to Dallas Theological Seminary professor and author Howard Hendricks, there is more to discipleship than acquiring data. Hendricks says, "...a disciple is not simply an accumulator of information or one who merely changes moral behavior in regards to the teachings of Jesus Christ, but seeks a fundamental shift toward the ethics of Jesus Christ in every way, including complete devotion to God. In several Christian traditions, the process of becoming a disciple is called the Imitation of Christ, after the famous book of that title by Thomas à Kempis."¹³ Hendricks equates learning with change. "Essentially, learning means a change in your thinking, a change in your feeling, a change in your behavior. Learning means that a change takes place in your mind, in the emotions, and in the will."¹⁴

¹¹ While not immediately verifiable via statistics, but demonstrated in a small setting of adults, many people would also believe the Bible contains the phrase, "Neither a borrower nor a lender be." (Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, 1.3.)

¹² FoxNew.com, "More Americans Say They Have No Religion," http://www.foxnews.com/printer_friendly_story/0,3566,506849,00.html, (access March 9, 2009)

¹³ "Wikipedia, s.v. "*The Imitation of Christ* (book)."

¹⁴ Howard Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 1987), 124.

A Disciple Is a Follower

“Come, follow me.” According to Greenwold, in his contextual reflection on aspects of the great commission,

The Semitic understanding of ‘believe’ was not based on an intellectual assent to a creed, doctrinal statement, or series of faith propositions. Rather, to a first-century disciple believe is a verb in which you willingly submitted to your rabbi’s interpretive authority regarding God’s Word in every area of your life. Thus, to say you were a disciple in the name of Gamaliel, meant that you totally surrendered your life to Gamaliel’s way of interpreting Scripture. As a result, you conformed all of your life’s behavior to his interpretations.¹⁵

To surrender to someone’s teaching is equivalent to following someone. That person’s life, agenda, and vision become the life, agenda, and vision of the follower. That submission leads the disciple to conform to the likeness of the rabbi. The disciple followed, not just in the footsteps of the rabbi, but in all areas of the rabbi’s life. The rabbi led the disciple, as the disciple followed.

A Disciple Is a Reproducer

From the outset of Jesus’ ministry, He invited people to follow Him, but it was not merely to adopt some teaching, but to adopt His mission, which was to reproduce Himself in the lives of others. Just as Jesus was doing with them, they should in turn do with others. Jesus not only said, “Follow me,” but He added, “and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt 4:19).

As the Church grew in the first century, Paul was carefully discipling several young men like Timothy and Titus, as well as many others. As Timothy began to assume

¹⁵ Doug Greenwold, “Being a First-Century Disciple,” http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=4867, (accessed March 2007).

responsibilities for others in their faith, Paul encouraged him to disciple them. Paul said, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim. 2:2).

Reproduction is the litmus test of discipleship. To genuinely follow and learn from Jesus will automatically motivate the disciple to reproduce his or her transformation in Christ for the sake of Christ. A disciple cannot be satisfied with information and spectating.

Spiritual Transformation: Disciples Change into Christ-likeness

A Disciple Seeks Transformation

While it is true that transformation occurs wherever the Lord wills (John 3:8), transformation is also a blessing to be pursued by those who love Him. Far too many Christians approach Scripture, worship, church, fellowship and the programs most often offered by a church with a sense of resistance. There is an unwillingness to pursue transformation because the change may introduce unwanted change and sacrifices for the disciple. The change involved may become messy, and the Christian will lose control. A follower of Jesus, however, has to be willing to be transformed. The invitation to carry the cross of Christ and eschew cheap discipleship is a sacrifice many people are not willing to embrace.

Often, I have heard Christians share their unwillingness to take their faith seriously because they are afraid God would call them to go to the mission field. Such people would say that, if God can be approached with baby steps or be received in small doses, then the comfort zone of the Christian is not threatened.

However, God does not want to just realign our lives or tweak our schedules; God is in the business of renewing and transforming His disciples. From the Old Testament, God promises to give birth to a new spirit within His people (Ezek. 36:26). In the New Testament, God promises that those who are in Him are new creations, not just improved (2 Cor. 5:17).

This song has probably been sung by hundreds of thousands, if not by millions of Christians: “Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me. Mold me. Fill me. Use me.”¹⁶ However, to be melted and molded is most often not desired personally for fear of the pain and the loss of control over life and personal agendas. (Introduce

The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart. And when he began pulling the skin off, it hurt worse than anything I’ve ever felt. The only thing that made me able to bear it was just the pleasure of feeling the stuff peel off... [After he peeled off the skin], I [was] as smooth and soft as a peeled switch... He caught hold of me... and threw me into the water. It smarted like anything but... [then] it became perfectly delicious... I’d turned into a boy again... After a bit the Lion took me out and dressed me... in new clothes.¹⁷

When Christians pursues discipleship, they will seek to love the Lord with all their heart and with all their soul and mind; they are all in. Without reservations, transformation will take place.

For example, the disciples’ minds will be wholly different than they were before. Their minds will be set on peace (Rom. 8:6); their minds will be singularly devoted to

¹⁶ Daniel Iverson, “Spirit of the Living God,” copyright 1935, renewed 1965 by Birdwing Music, Admin by BMG Songs AAR, http://onelord.tripod.com/110_D.html (accessed July 9, 2007).

¹⁷ C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 109-110.

Christ (1 Cor. 11:3); humility will dominate their self-perception (Phil. 2:3); their minds will be pure (Titus 1:15); and their minds will be open (Luke 24:45).¹⁸

In an interview with Mark Galli, the Managing Editor of *Christianity Today*, he states that the more of the attributes of God a believer grasps, then the more transformation can occur.

And that, then, is the miracle that can actually begin to transform us from people who are living all about ourselves to people who can truly go out in the world to love and serve the Lord with "gladness and singleness of heart." Our work then becomes an act of gratitude and joy for the miracle of life—the miracle of forgiveness, mercy, grace, and a promised transformation in the Kingdom. The more we understand who God is, the more that understanding transforms everything we do.¹⁹

Living as a disciple, means following Christ's lead and not the world's. It has often been reported that the divorce rate among Christians and the addiction to pornography among Christians is equivalent to a corresponding rates among the people in the world.²⁰ The difference between the world and the Christian is indistinguishable.

Transformation, as it has to do with righteous behavior, is perceived as the result of living as a disciple. However, transformation may not always be the increased absence of sin and the prevailing victory over that struggle with our human nature.

¹⁸ T. W. Hunt and Claude V. King, *The Mind of Christ* (Nashville, TN: LifeWay, 1994), 13.

¹⁹ "An Interview with Mark Galli, Managing Editor of Christianity Today| <http://www.thehighcalling.org/Library/ViewLibrary.asp?LibraryID=5465> (accessed 5/10/2010).

²⁰ "The Barna Research Group's national study showed that members of nondenominational churches divorce 34 percent of the time in contrast to 25 percent for the general population. Nondenominational churches would include large numbers of Bible churches and other conservative evangelicals. Baptists had the highest rate of the major denominations: 29 percent. Born-again Christians' rate was 27 percent. To make matters even more distressing for believers, atheists/agnostics had the lowest rate of divorce 21 percent." *Dallas Morning News*, "Dumbfounded by Divorce," http://www.adherents.com/largecom/baptist_divorce.html, 2000 (accessed November 8, 2010).

Two good examples of those who were transformed in Scripture are the restless demoniac (Mark 5:5-15) and Paul (Acts 9:17). After the demoniac was with Jesus, he was in his right mind. Saul was a bloodthirsty nationalist, but he was transformed into a passionate follower of as well as an evangelist and apologist for Jesus. He sacrificed his life for the opportunity to present Christ where Christ was not known and to preach Christ crucified. This was his ambition, even as he approached his certain death.

In an article on the *Christianity Today* website, Mark Galli further explains the goal of transformation.

Was Paul not in fact transformed increasingly into the image of Christ during his life? Yes! ... But those who are truly being transformed into Christ find it fascinating to look not at what they've become (changed in this way or that) but at what they have yet to become. The so-called progress they've made is so paltry and so negligible compared to the surpassing worth of the vision that lies ahead of them—a vision of Jesus Christ in glory. That's the end of the road of transformation—to look like that!²¹

While transformation is often perceived as a change in moral behavior, the transformation desired by God in the believer has more of an eternal outlook, and not one of a temporal nature. To long to see God's face, to experience the unveiled glory of God without the constraints of time, the flesh, and the impeding sinful nature should be the desire of all disciples. To change from seeing and experiencing life from the perspective of a mortally depraved soul, to seeing eternity from a perfected and redeemed image of God is to know transformation.

²¹ Are we Transformed Yet? <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/februaryweb-only/15-41.0.html?start=1> Internet, Accessed 2/25/10

A Look at a Mature Disciple

Portrait of a Disciple

As was mentioned previously, the behavior of a disciple is more readily defined by a list of behaviors or accomplishments, than by spiritual characteristics. Yet that difficulty does not preclude an attempt to create a portrait of a disciple. While legalism is shunned, a disciple has these traits and behaviors:

A disciple knows Jesus personally; worships God in community with other believers; cares for and is a part of a community of believers; prays; studies Scripture and theology and is learning to obey Christ; discovers his or her spiritual gifts; practices spiritual disciplines and is developing the character of Christ and the fruits of the Spirit; serves the church through the use of his or her spiritual gifts; experiences and expresses the love and grace of God; serves and proclaims the good news of Christ to the world; and views all relationships as venues to call, grow, and send disciples.²²

All of these traits could be found in a disciple over time. Not every disciple has achieved a life in which these traits and behaviors are incorporated perfectly on a daily basis. The transforming disciple is pursuing these activities and is sensitive to daily surrendering their will to God's will.

Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35). Love should be the most defining trait of any disciple. However, what love looks like is dynamic, multi-faceted, and complex. Love requires one to pursue the best interests of others, even at the expense of one's own interests. A disciple will love God and others sacrificially.

²² "An Operational Plan for Implementing the Integrated Discipleship Growth Model" adopted January 23, 2006, by HPPC's Ministry Matrix Team, Management Council and Session, 3.

A Biblical Distinction between Being a Christian and Being a Disciple

Christian is the term used predominantly in North America to define those who have accepted Jesus as their Savior. However, in that simple comment, there may be the glaring omission that, while Jesus is Savior, He may not be the Lord of the redeemed.

The dominant word to describe those in the Church today is *Christian*. However, the word used most to describe those in the Church in the first century was *disciples* or *saints*. Throughout the New Testament, the word *disciple* was used 183 times, while the word *Christian* was used only three times. There is a difference between the two.

In the North American culture today, few people would define themselves as being disciples of Jesus. Yet, a great number of people would call themselves Christians. The disparity between these two groups, disciples and Christians, is of growing concern.

In a recent e-newsletter from the National Coalition for the Protection of Children and Families, Dr. S. Michael Craven states that “Most [teen Christians] have little idea why they believe what they believe or how to integrate these beliefs into a coherent view of reality that guides their lives in every area.” As a result, these teens have fashioned a new religion. Dr. Craven cites a book by sociologist Dr. Christian Smith, who wrote: “We suggest that the de facto dominant religion among contemporary U.S. teenagers is what we might call 'Moralistic, Therapeutic, Deism.'" This of course has very little to do with historic, orthodox Christianity.²³

An apparent disparity exists today. However, in the New Testament, there was little to no difference between the two terms. For example, in Acts 11, one reads about

²³ Michael Craven, “What Ever Happened to Discipleship?” [article on-line] available from <http://www.crosswalk.com/pastors/11529607/>; Internet; 5, February 2007.

the first time the term *Christian* was used. Disciples scattered in response to the persecution that broke out against the Church when Stephen was martyred. They went as far as Antioch. There, one sees those disciples described by four characteristics.

These first two verses state that those who traveled told the message to the Jews, while some others also shared the good news to Greeks. These disciples of the early Church could not refrain from talking about Jesus. Even in the face of persecution, they were compelled to share their faith. Their faith was something they could not contain. Their faith meant something to them, and they talked about it wherever they went.

In verse 21, there is evidence of the second trait. “The Lord’s hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.” In some instances of God’s redemptive plan, one reads of the Lord’s hand being against someone, yet here the Lord’s hand is with these disciples. The result is episodes of evangelism and conversion. Lives were being changed, and the Church was continuing on its growth model.

The third trait of a Christian is seen in Antioch, where the name Christian was first coined. A Christian experiences the “evidence of the grace of God.” There was something that the disciples were doing with their lives, which gave evidence that God was with them. In God’s wise ways, the “evidence” is vague. Maybe they were speaking in tongues and praising God like Cornelius and his household had done in Caesarea. Maybe these disciples were able to perform some miraculous healing, or maybe they were selling off some excess land and giving the money away as Barnabas had done

earlier in Jerusalem. Whatever was witnessed, the subsequent activity was evidence that God's love was extended through these disciples.

The fourth and final trait for these disciples was that they were learners. Verse 26 states that, for "a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people." The apostles were fulfilling Christ's instructions and began to teach the new believers everything Jesus commanded. An important hallmark of a disciple is learning, not for the sake of learning, but for the sake of knowing God personally and discovering what His will is for us and His Church.

In the New Testament Scriptures, there is not a viable biblical difference between the two terms, *Christian* and *disciple*. If there is a distinction, I believe the infrequent use of the term *Christian* prevents drawing a contrast between the two terms during the first-century Church. However, that does not prevent a contrast in today's use of these terms. The previously mentioned statistics indicate a gap between the two terms in the minds of believers and in the anticipated results of discipleship and reality.

The Low Level of Discipleship across America

Many Christians do not pursue discipleship in America because it is hard. When Jesus invited his disciples to take up their cross and follow Him, He was asking a lot from His followers. The cross was not a pretty pendant that hung around their necks as a nice decoration; rather, it was a humiliating and cruel form of capital punishment. The disciple was invited to hang upon it and die.

Disciples are called to die to themselves. Discipleship is not for the faint of heart. Life is tough, and the life of the disciple is tougher. The disciple will struggle in one or all of the following four areas in his or her Christian life.

A Disciple Will Struggle against the World

Paul told the disciples in Rome, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2a). To all the Christian Jews who had been scattered, he gave warning saying, “You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4). The world is a seductive choice for the disciple and serves as a distraction from the call of Christ.

Jesus warned on more than one occasion that one cannot serve two masters. A person will either love the one and hate the other, or hate the one and love the other. (Matt 6:24). The culture is against the Church. Being surrounded by a culture that accepts the Church, though, does not mean that the disciple will not have to fight against the surrounding culture.

A Disciple Will Fight against Satan

The apostle Peter warned his readers saying, “Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Immediately after Jesus was baptized but before He began His public ministry, the Spirit led Him out into the wilderness. It was there, even though the Spirit had led Him, that Satan came and

tempted Jesus. If Satan will not respect Jesus, Satan assuredly will not respect the disciple and give him or her the freedom to be a disciple.

In a Gallup Poll from 1992, only 52 percent of Americans believed in Satan. However, three years later, in 1995, after many natural disasters, more terrorism, and some sensational trials, the number had risen to 65 percent.²⁴ Regardless of the opinion polls, Satan is real, and Satan is powerful. Many pass him off as a caricature in red tights, holding a trident and sporting a goatee. Satan is the prince of Darkness and would love for Christ's disciples to live mediocre Christian lives and diminish our influence for Christ.

A Disciple Struggles against His or Her Own Self

Paul revealed the inward struggle he faced between his sinful nature and the desire to do what is righteous. He said, "When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members" (Rom. 7:21-23).

Too many times spiritual warfare is blamed for the woes and miseries of Christians. It is often assumed that Satan cares what a Christian is doing and wants to just make him uncomfortable. More often than not, it is the disciple who is wrestling against his or her sinful nature.

The struggles of transformation a disciple faces sometimes mean one's life can become dismantled piece by piece. A person's energy has been consumed by keeping life

²⁴ Leslie McAneny, "It Was a Very Bad Year: Belief in Hell and the Devil on the Rise but Heaven Reigns Supreme," *The Gallup Organization Beliefs Poll Newsletter*, Archive, 1995.

together, but discipleship can cause one to reassess priorities and focus more upon what is truly important in God's eyes. Howard Hendricks adds, "To be like Christ, life becomes unglued. We're busy trying to keep it together. Those things are often the very things we put our faith in. We rest in them, or cling to them for security, stability."²⁵ It has been said many times, "The only good disciple is a broken disciple." Too many Christians fear pain and failure. A myth that permeates Christendom is that pain and failure are signs of God's displeasure. The shame that accompanies these occasions exacerbates the struggle. When someone faces these setbacks in his or her faith, an inward journey results. In some regards, the transformation process is like a birthing process; once the person prevails in this stage, he or she is the richer for it, and transformation can occur.

Yet many believe that happiness is the result of a righteous life. Most often, when people experience pain and suffering, they wonder what is wrong with their faith, or they conclude that they are weak for experiencing such a problem. Wilfred McClay correctly summarizes this personal struggle with the self and the pursuit of happiness in his survey of some of the major approaches to happiness throughout history -- from the passive view of the Homeric era to the self-generated happiness of today. He also reflects on what he thinks are some of the distinct differences in a Christian approach to happiness, including the fact that disciples manage their expectations of "this life" very differently from the carnal person. Disciples should learn that happiness is not so much something one self-consciously watches happen to oneself as it is something that characterizes a life in

²⁵ Hendricks, *Teaching*, 58.

pursuit of the good of others, a life in which blessedness often comes in the form of God's redeeming our suffering.²⁶

The will of the disciple is in a contest with its old self. The disciple's sinful nature does not cooperate with what that disciple knows he or she should do, and the struggle continues in this mortal life. For example, some of Christ's disciples failed to keep watch with Jesus while He wrestled with His destiny in the garden of Gethsamane. They fell asleep and could not encourage Jesus by remaining attentive to His struggle. Jesus acknowledged their struggle by saying, "The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Matt 26:41).

The Disciple Strives to Be Conformed to Christ's Image

To be like Jesus is why God created us. This transformation process is God's idea and a part of His redemptive plan. Paul shares this revelation, saying, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (Rom. 8:29).

Allowing God to sanctify His disciples is a long and hard process in which God slowly reforms one's soul and refashions it more and more into the image of Christ. It is easy to think that, if God were a God of love, then He would make life easy for us. However, that is not a fair conclusion. It is because God does love His children that He often leaves the hardships in their lives, so that they can exercise their faith and have the sinful nature exposed and stripped away from their souls. Regardless of the difficulties a

²⁶ Wilfred McClay, "A Short History of Happiness: Fragile, but Not Illusory," <http://www.ttf.org/index/journal/detail/short-history-of-happiness/> (accessed February 2007).

disciple may be facing in his Christian walk, the disciple does not give up and is willing to press on.

The Role Pastors and New Member Mentors Have in Discipleship

Christ's mandate to make disciples is given to all followers of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is not a stage along the Christian life, nor is it relegated to a season of faith. Making disciples is continually pushed to the forefront of congregational ministry agendas. It is the role of the leaders to help reinforce the calling that making disciples *is* the mission of the church.

One set of leaders, other than the staff and pastors, is the new member mentor. In the setting of Highland Park Presbyterian, these leaders are referred to as the new member shepherds. Initially, they serve as greeters and hosts to those who are inquiring about membership with the congregation. These mentors are picked because of their unique gifts and personalities. Prior to the inception of a new members class, which is referred to as "Journey Into Discipleship," the mentors are trained to serve through the casting of a vision for their role as the shepherds. The role which is impressed upon these shepherds is to convey to the four or five new members they oversee that membership has expectations. Becoming a member is not a threshold to cross, but a platform for lift-off. Membership is not a destination, but the beginning of a relationship with the congregation and to the larger Church.

All too often, new members lose the motivation which led them to pursue membership. The intent of the mentor, who is in a better position than the pastors to nurture a relationship with the new members, is to come alongside the new members and

usher them into meaningful ministry experiences. This meaningful involvement in ministry will be its own perpetuating reinforcement for spiritual growth, fostered by the new member's own obedience to God's call upon his or her life.

As a pastor to a congregation, one senses that people need to see functioning discipleship, and, more importantly, many need to be actively engaged in discipleship. According to Ogden and Cole,²⁷ very small groups and one-on-one relationships can often serve much of the purpose for intentionally dialoguing through Scripture's claims. Greenwold states that "...those involved [need to] consistently ask and explore what it means to daily surrender every aspect of their lives to the Lordship of Christ."²⁸ The smaller the group, the more the members can share thoughts, feelings and spiritual experiences with one another.

It is intuitively understood that there is a limit to the number of relationships people can manage and maintain. The deeper the relationship, the more time is needed to maintain that relationship. People can have hundreds of acquaintances but cannot effectively invest in dozens of close friendships.

Jesus had many followers. Thousands followed Him into the countryside where He fed them some blessed loaves and fish (Matt. 14 and 15). At other times, Jesus appointed seventy-two people to go before Him to prepare towns for His visit (Luke 10:1). However, the bulk of Jesus' ministry in revealed Scripture was with the twelve disciples, but more specifically with three particular disciples – Peter, James, and John.

²⁷ See Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 10. See also Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 50.

²⁸ Doug Greenwold, "Being a First-Century Disciple," http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=4867 (accessed March 2007).

The best reproducible format which promotes discipleship and incorporates the most helpful components of discipleship is a very small group of less than four people who meet on a regular basis.

The masses heard from Jesus as He preached and as they witnessed Him move among the people and interact with the leaders of the state. The real ministry was in Jesus' investment of Himself with the chosen disciples. In the Gospel of Mark, it is revealed, "Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve—designating them apostles—that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach..." (Mark 3:13-14).

While an explicit methodology of discipleship was not prescribed in Scripture, some components of discipleship transcend culture, language, and time. Jesus' disciples lived in a different culture, and the lifestyle of a disciple may not translate to the lifestyle of a disciple in our occidental culture today, there are however certain ingredients which transcend both worlds, fostering discipleship. These will be discussed in the next section.

The Priority of Scripture, Obedience, Authenticity and Reproduction in Discipleship

Scripture Needs to Be Consumed

Scripture shapes, sharpens, and transforms. It is God's revelation to His own, to help them be reconciled to God and be transformed into the Master's image. God's living and written word is truth. A diet of God's Word gives disciples what they need for spiritual health and strength.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's

sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account (Heb. 4:12-13; c.f. Matt 4:4 and 2 Tim 3:16-17).

Scripture speaks into disciples' souls as nothing else can. Scripture can serve as a mirror to one's life, allowing one to see things in one's heart that may escape the detection of others. The conscience can be vulnerable to conviction when it is exposed to the accountable force of immutable truth. Through God's written word, the condition of the human spirit is revealed as lacking the purity, strength, and ability to be righteous. Through Scripture, the humbled soul sees the need for help and that person's faith is nurtured, bonding the disciple to God.

Obedience Has No Substitute

How to combine faith with obedience is surely the essential task of the Church as it enters the twenty-first century.²⁹ Jesus said a disciple is one who obeys His teaching. Obedience is the hard stuff of discipleship. Learning the precepts and complicated doctrines of the faith is milk while obeying what we have learned is meat.³⁰ Obedience is the crux of following Jesus. As Michael Wilkins said it, "The crux of biblical discipleship—that is, of forming the spirit of the believer—lies in the balance between God's operation in the disciple's life and the disciple's response in obedience to God's operation."³¹ That response in obedience to God's operation, aforementioned, is what is

²⁹ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 140.

³⁰ Hebrews 5:11-14. Through personal anecdotal observations over the years, Christians occasionally complain about a preacher or teacher saying they want more "meat" in their lessons. The craving for meatier information or more depth is not always what is lacking. While content, challenges, and encouragement exist in the messages, the hearer leaves empty and unchallenged. The lack of applying faith to their lives and circumstances is what leaves them spiritually starved.

³¹ Wilkins, *In His Image*, 59.

known as spiritual disciplines. These disciplines draw disciples closer to God, helping them to develop a greater understanding of who God is and what God has done for His children. They are not an obligatory practice, forced upon the disciple.

The habits or practices most often listed as spiritual disciplines and considered to be viable for spiritual growth include: prayer, Bible study, meditation, fasting, and fellowship.³² Richard Foster's exemplary book *Celebration of Discipline*³³ supports the practice of spiritual disciplines as a means to pursuing an intimate relationship with God. The practice of spiritual disciplines, as an act of obedience to God's redemptive love, puts a disciple in a spiritually receptive posture for spiritual transformation.

To obey God, a disciple is attentive and available to God's will. God's will cannot be realized by inactivity, but by doing God's will. James, the brother of Jesus, did not mince his words when he wrote, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22). Jesus also said that obedience is the way to show love. In Jesus' words, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him" (John 14:21).

Obedience has become a relative and subjective term. Now, terms like "real obedience," "radical obedience," and "active obedience" are used to reinstall the intent of

³² The list of spiritual disciplines varies from one authority to another and the explanation and benefits of each discipline is vast and beneficial. The intent of this focus paper is not to discuss spiritual formation with the use of spiritual disciplines as an individual's personal practice. Although spiritual disciplines are a very worthy topic and most useful for discipleship, the shepherds who serve as mentors for new members are not being trained to serve as Spiritual Directors.

³³ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1998).

Christ's command to obey. Too often, obedience has been replaced with subjectivism, selectivity, rationalism, and occasional obedience.

To delay obedience or exercise occasional obedience is not obedience. The Pharisees found numerous ways to delay their obedience to the Law or to justify their disobedience. Disciples will surrender their reservations and demonstrate their sincerity of love by doing what their master commands. Obedience to Jesus is the bedrock of our faith in Jesus. This is why Jesus concluded His sermon on the mount with the parable about two men who heard the same truth. One obeys and is safe and secure because of his obedience; whereas, the other hearer does not obey, and his life is insecure and destructive (Matt. 7:24-27). It is the life grounded upon obedience that is being preserved and transformed for eternity.

Reproduction Creates New Life

A great tragedy in the Church throughout the ages has been a failure to make disciples. The great commission from Jesus Christ was for His disciples to replicate themselves. They should make disciples. It was not a local command, limited to the first generation of apostles, but it was a universal command to all disciples. Making disciples is the work of the Church. Jesus said, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20).

Jesus spent about three years in public ministry. He had a lot of time to spend with the masses, but it was the time with his twelve chosen disciples, and especially the

moments with the three (Peter, James, and John), where Jesus truly invested His life. The invitation to be a disciple of Jesus requires reproduction.

Reproducing disciples is not an option for being a disciple. Many aspects of the Christian life are mandatory. The command to love God completely and to love one's neighbor are compulsory to the disciple. On the contrary, the dietary laws given in Leviticus are not. For some reason, the church culture of North America has considered the command to make disciples as optional at worst, and often at best a byproduct of impersonal church activity. The command to make disciples was not issued to the institutional church, but to witnesses of Christ's redeeming work. All those who have experienced Jesus are called to participate in making disciples.

Summary

Words alone can express incomplete meaning. The context in which words are spoken determine their significance. The context in which Jesus issued the call to His disciples to make disciples, was singularly unique in all of history. Prior to Christ's call, God Incarnate has reconciled the world for Himself by dying and conquering death. Coupled with the call, God Incarnate has declared all the authority in heaven and on earth are His.

What Jesus says next takes priority in every disciple's faith. The directives and instructions, which follow such accomplishments and accompany such revelations, become preeminent. The call to make disciples is the mission of the Church. There are many activities, which the Church can pursue to influence the world and to counter

Satan's destructive efforts. Concurrently, the world itself and sinful nature can encumber us, leaving Christ's disciples ineffectual.

Christ's words in that context set the mission for each believer and for the whole Church. The primary activity of the Church today should be discipleship. A congregation can be consumed with fellowship, church growth, and a host of other wonderful activities, but, if these activities are not a means to discipleship, then the Church's effort is less than the best.

CHAPTER 4

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR MINISTRY

Definition of Ministry

It appears to many Christians that ministry is an activity set apart and removed from everyday life. Ministry is limited to being an organized service toward an underprivileged segment of the community. It is also often believed that ministry is only a real ministry if it is sponsored by a congregation or a para-church group, as long as it supports the visions of a better life for others or corrects an injustice in society. However, these perceptions are too restrictive and, thus, handicap most believers, inhibiting their role as ministers in God's kingdom. Ministry is not limited to sanctioned programs in the church, nor organized and repeatable activities. Ministry in New Testament terms is much broader by definition.

The most common word used in the Greek New Testament for ministry, is *diakonia*.¹ This word, "ministry," means "to render assistance or help by performing certain duties, often of a humble or menial nature"² Elsewhere, the "concrete sense is basic: a. 'to wait at table,' b. 'to care for,' and c. (comprehensively) 'to serve.'"³ While it may not seem that the meaning is complicated, the word and its role in the believer's life

¹ Kurt Aland, et al., eds., *Greek New Testament*, Accordance Software Module, version 1.0 (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1975).

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, Accordance Software Module, 2nd ed, version 3.6 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), Section 35.19.

³ Bromiley, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 153.

is all too often misunderstood and hence not fully embraced. This lack of understanding leaves some Christians with the belief that they are not involved in ministry and thus not as engaged as they should be in their spiritual responsibilities.

A better understanding of ministry and a broad definition of our calling as ministers can bless each member of the congregation, the whole Body of Christ, and ultimately the world. Ministry is defined as: using whatever God has supplied His people to serve Him and others. Ministry is not limited to sanctioned programs in the church, nor organized and repeatable activities. Ministry is broad in its application, open to transient moments and long-term commitments. The youngest in age as well as the feeblest in faith can minister in the name of Jesus. In Paul's letter to the Corinthian Christians, he told them, "So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31). With such extensive means for glorifying God, a broad avenue lies before all believers to minister in Jesus' name through expressions of love in faith.

Ministry: The Faithful Expression of a Disciple as an Act of Obedience and Worship

Ministry involves using anything which God has supplied, be it health, spiritual gifts, money, muscles, personality, talents, or life itself to the service of God or the benefit of others. Ministry could thus be the preacher in the pulpit who uses education, oratory skills, and preaching gifts to exhort a congregation. Ministry is the compassion a seven-year-old girl shows when she donates her long hair to cancer patients.⁴ Ministry is also the believing trash collector who uses his good back, tolerance of rotting garbage,

⁴ *One Magazine* (Published Highland Park Presbyterian Church, Dallas, TX), Issue #6, Fall 2010, 20.

and perceived low-social status to haul trash from the neighborhood. Ministry is not limited to the activities within a congregation, but can be engaged in by all redeemed individuals, every place they are, regardless of their vocation, as long as their employment does no harm to others or creation.

Ministry as service always has as its goal the glory of God's kingdom. Acts of service toward others are ultimately an act of love to God. H. W. Beyer further expressed his understanding of service as:

Here service of others is service of Christ and involves personal commitment. Worldly rulers lord it over their subjects but the concern of the disciples is with God's kingdom, the way to which leads through suffering and death that has service as its point. Hence the only path of greatness for Christians is to become the servants and even the slaves of all (Mk. 9:35; 10:44). More than table service is now involved; all kinds of sacrificial activity on behalf of others, as exemplified by Christ's own self-offering, are required. Service of others is service of God, and it may entail service even to the point of death itself (Jn. 12:25-26).⁵

Service of others can be broadly expressed. The work of the laity is often misconstrued as secular, not sacred. Yet, at the beginning of creation, before sin interfered with all that God created, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it" (Gen 2:15). Work is good. All people are created to do things, to labor, to care for God's creatures and creation.

All disciples need to understand that their work is not divorced from God's sovereignty and redemption. Elton Trueblood raises the concern of how our vocation has been devalued as a means of ministry. In *Your Work Matters to God*, Sherman and Hendricks admit "...we never think of our everyday work as part of God's work. Instead,

⁵ Bromiley, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 154.

over time we have gradually equated God's work with church work. Consequently, we assume that serving God only means serving the church."⁶

Along with work, as part of God's design, God further commands us to work. In fact, the command to work is part of the Ten Commandments, but it is often ignored.

When God issued His commandments to Moses and His people who were chosen to be holy, God told them to set the Sabbath apart as holy by resting on that seventh day.

However, that is only part of the fifth command. In that command to honor the seventh day, God commands, "Six days you shall labor and do all your work" (Exod. 20:9).

While the seventh day was made holy by God, He did not by default declare the other six days profane. The work a person engages, can legitimately be credited as viable ministry.

If a businessman creates widgets and employs a dozen people in the manufacturing process (which in-turn gives them an income, which supplies food for their table, roof

over their heads, and clothes on their back), that is a good work. If a farmer produces food, which ends up on people's tables and satisfies their hunger, that is also a good

work. A counselor listens with concern and provides wisdom and encouragement –

another good work. A lawyer aids the oppressed and helps bring God's justice to the

people – also a good work. The work people do is not profane, but a part of God's plan,

and even those jobs and careers can be redeemed by His love and viewed as ministry by believers.

Work remains a part of God's plan for His creation. Infused in our lives and, thus, through work is Jesus' greatest command to love God first and our neighbor as ourselves

⁶Doug Sherman and William Hendricks, *Your Work Matters to God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1987), 217.

(Matt. 22:37-39). Jesus emphasized this command for us with a new command that overrides, if not incorporates, the intent of all the Law. Jesus said, "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

We are further encouraged to let love be the motivating catalyst of the Church. In Paul's letter to the church in Rome, he said, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8).

We are called to love as God has loved us, and love is expressed through good works. Good works are the desired result of God's written revelation. The verse most quoted to refer to the inspiration of Scripture is the very Scripture that admonishes us toward good works. Paul tells young Timothy, "All scripture is God-breathed is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16).

To do good, is God's desire for us. To follow through with God's desire, God will use His powers to make that possible. To the Church in Corinth, Paul revealed, "God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Cor. 9:8). And it was for these good works that we were created, from the beginning (Eph 2:10), and we should endeavor to never tire of these good works, toward our brothers and sisters, nor to anyone (Gal. 6:9-10).

In Jesus' parable about the servants who were entrusted with some talents, the servants who received praise were the ones who faithfully responded to their master's

trust with a good work. The master praised them saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt 25:23). Not that one should make too much of an argument out of silence, but the master does not praise them for a good plan, great intentions, wonderful committee work, or their attendance record. It was their faithfulness to the master's expectations that they would do something good with what had been entrusted to them.

In Rev. Bob Thompson's sermon on this passage, he said, "The second clear message of this parable is that we are accountable to God to do our best with such gifts and talents as God has given us. Our duty in life is not to envy someone else their skill, but to make the very best use of our own."⁷ Making the very best use of those resources is our ministry.

Further Thompson explains that the servant who received only two talents was praised just as highly as the one who received and doubled the five. The widow who gave her last two mites to the Temple treasure was also highly praised. The one thief who reprimanded the mocking thief and then asked to be remembered was given the promise of a place in the Kingdom. It is observed that all these "were rewarded because, though their opportunities were meager, their responses were faithful." "In a sense Jesus introduced a whole new system of valuation. The crucial question is no longer, "How many talents do you have?" or "How many have you earned?" It is, "What have you done with what I have given you?"⁸

⁷ Bob Thompson, *Clay Pots: A Collection of Sermons and Meditations* (Dallas, TX: by the author, 2008), 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

While what we say can reveal what we believe to be very important, what we do comes closer to revealing who and where we really are. With our words we may declare what we believe to be true, and with our lips we can proclaim hopes and dreams. However, to act on what we believe and to perform speaks louder than words. Our behavior can betray mere words. That is why ministry is so important. Our ministry – the things we do – demonstrates the faith we have. What we do reveals who we are. When Jesus said, “The spirit is willing, but the body is weak” (Matt. 26:40-41), He underscored the problem that good intentions are not enough. To move the body to do good works shows good intentions, but also demonstrates the love God intends us to show others.

The great value of all these good works performed by disciples is that every good work is an act of faith by the believer. James argued in his epistle that many may claim to have faith, but it is the good works that demonstrate real faith, and not the mere claim of a belief. In fact, faith if not accompanied by good works, was considered dead and of no value (James 2:14-18, 26).

In John’s letter, distributed to the early Church, he shared a similar admonition to all who followed Christ. Their call was not to follow Jesus by merely giving lip-service to the Redeemer. John said, “Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:17).

Ministry, as service, is the faithful response of one who claims to be a learner, follower and reproducer of Jesus Christ. To give mere mental assent to Jesus, and not

respond in love towards our Redeemer and to His world, is to deny Christ. For when God's people do good (minister) they do unto Jesus, whom they follow.

Every Disciple Called to Ministry

From the beginning of the Church, as described in the book of Acts, the Church was dedicated to worship, spiritual instruction, fellowship, prayer, evangelism, and mutual service (Acts 2:42-44). It could be argued that when the Church was in its infancy, the Church was in its purest, most undefiled state. Before human nature contaminated the Church with organizational layers and with systems placed upon programs, the Church was spontaneously responding to needs and demonstrating love proactively.

Today, in the North American Church, it appears that not only is ministry often restricted to church-sanctioned activities, but it is limited to an organized program or calendar. Ministry is far more than what the local church can do. All believers are called to follow Christ, to love their neighbor, and to excel in demonstrating their faith in a gracious God. Each individual represents the Church, regardless of how organized the affiliation is with a congregational activity.

A problem exists for many in that ministry finds its sanctification only when there is an explicit gospel presentation or when it is preceded by prayer. If Jesus is not explicitly given credit, then the act is considered a form of humanism. A perceived lesser form of ministry is performing a good deed, for that good deed to be qualified as ministry, it must be endorsed by the leaders of the congregation. If the church has not sanctioned the act, it is perceived as secular.

Highland Park Presbyterian has dozens upon dozens of ministries and programs where people can serve. However, that is not enough. There are many more places outside the church where people can serve and probably should serve. This is important to communicate to members because there is not enough room in the church for everyone to serve. People need avenues outside the church where they can contribute. Many avenues for ministry are offered for consideration through the many information media at our disposal: worship bulletins, weekly church newsletter, website, announcements in worship as well as in classes, pamphlets and fliers around the church, and more importantly through personal invitation.

There are not enough ministry opportunities within the walls of the church to help all members fulfill their mission. Members need to look outside the walls of the congregation and into the world for places and times to serve. To restrict the ministry moments within the Church is to reduce the love God intends for us to demonstrate and share. B. Clayton Bell has shared the following.

According to a study which I read several years ago, no church can create enough meaningful jobs for all of its members to do something in church. In fact, only one-third of the membership of a local church can be given a job doing church work. So if you think that serving the Lord means doing some work in church, then two-thirds of you are doomed to frustration and disappointment.⁹

Disciples Minister in One of Three Directions

Every disciple is called to minister in at least one of three avenues. As a part of the Church, we all minister to God.

⁹B. Clayton Bell, from a sermon preached at HPPC, Dallas, TX, September 22, 1985.

In relation to Christ every member of Israel or the church has a ministry of serving the Lord by proclaiming the Word of God by word and deed both inside and outside the people of God. In this sense all are royal priests. Further, in relation to Christ there are specific or particular forms of ministry within and for the sake of the church in its mission for God in his world. These are given only to a few and they include the callings of prophet, priest, and king in the Old Covenant and apostle, evangelist, presbyter, and deacon in the New Covenant.¹⁰

Additionally, as the author of Hebrews reveals: “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe” (Heb. 12:28-29).¹¹ God’s glory deserves the ministry of His people, and the disciple cannot follow Jesus if ministry to God is neglected.

Concurrently, all believers are called to minister to the Body. Paul teaches the Ephesian church this truth in regards to the purpose of the spiritual gifts believers received upon their conversion. Paul said the gifts were given “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:12–13).¹² As members of Christ’s body, we minister in ways that support, build-up, encourage, and bless the very body to which we belong. In the same manner in which we feed and care for our physical bodies, we also tend to the spiritual body of Christ, who are our brothers and sisters in faith.

The third direction of ministry is focused away from the congregation toward the world.¹³ The world is the object of God’s love and should not be abandoned by those

¹⁰ Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary*, s.v. "Ministry, Minister," by Peter Toon.

¹¹ See also Acts 13:2, 1 Peter 2:9, and Romans 15:5-12.

¹² See also Hebrews 6:10.

¹³ See also Luke 24:48; Acts 5:32; Philippians 2:14-18.

who know God's grace. The layman's word and work often has greater influence than that of the clergy. Elton Trueblood wrote in *Your Other Vocation*, "Most words of a clergyman are minimized (by non-clergy) simply because he is supposed to say them....The contrast in effect is often enormous when a layman's remarks are taken seriously, even though he says practically the same words. His words are given full weight, not because he is a more able exponent, but because he is wholly free from any stigma of professionalism."¹⁴ When disciples carry the redeeming love of Christ into their office, neighborhood, clubs, and families, they magnify God's love exponentially. The world is lost; it does not know God, and it needs to experience some sacrificial love. Yet it was the world that God loved, and it was for the world that God sent His son to die. The disciple should not seek to hide in a safe harbor, sheltered from the cares and troubles of the world. Believers are called out of the world to be holy and should not turn our backs on the world.

Every Disciple Is Equipped to Minister

Paul confirmed to the Church, that each and every believer is equipped by and through the Spirit to minister; there is not one who is exempt or ill supplied to serve in Christ's kingdom. "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (1 Cor, 12:4-7). God does not call and not equip; rather, God equips those He has called.

¹⁴Elton Trueblood, *Your Other Vocation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952), 40-41.

Not only is God working in all to ensure all can serve, but each person is to also be equipped to minister. With the unique way in which God calls His children, He also calls some of His children to further equip the saints for service. The church in Ephesus learned from Paul, "It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become more mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:11-13). As a ship is equipped with the gear and supplies placed on board, so also some members of the body are gifted by the Holy Spirit and called to further equip other disciples so that they may have the tools and develop the skills necessary for the ministry which is before them.

Every Disciple Is Unique in His or Her Capacity to Minister

While it is true that no two fingerprints are the same, underscoring everyone's individuality, it is also true that every disciple is unique in his or her capacity to minister in God's name. Not everyone can share in service as preacher, usher, or choir director. However, not everyone serves in the same place, at the same time, nor in the same way. For each disciples, education, experience, personality, passion, location, and talents are woven together to fashion the individual to serve in ways that would not suit others as well.

The local church can only do so much. The church often treats the members as sheep that need to be herded in a direction, en masse. However, that is often too controlling and too narrow-minded. God has a wide-open world out there with more

avenues for ministry than a committee can imagine. Each person has inroads to places and faces that a church cannot navigate.

As an anecdotal illustration, in April of 2010, when a volcano in Iceland spewed ash into the atmosphere, causing flights in Europe to be grounded temporarily, at least five members of Highland Park Presbyterian were stranded. Additionally, in reviewing the statistics of viewed email from a mass email to several hundred members of the Sunday morning communities of the same congregation, evidence showed that some recipients received and opened their email outside the United States. The evidence revealed that the places that Christ's disciples, just from Highland Park Presbyterian, can go to on any given week far exceeds the ability of church staff to organize the potential programmatic ministry opportunities.

Disciples need to minister everywhere they go, wherever they happen to find their neighbor. A major avenue of ministry to be embraced is their vocation. Their job is an area where God has placed them for a reason. God is the God over the Church and Sunday mornings. He is also the God over every day of the week and over each business, the retail industry, and all commercial endeavors. Whether the participants in the job world acknowledge it or not, God is still sovereign and lord over all. Therefore, we minister everywhere God has us.

Having a healthy theology of work, vastly broadens the horizon of ministry for all of the laity and gives every disciple a unique place and manner in which to minister. We are not disciples only on Sunday mornings while attending worship and Sunday schools, but we are disciples all the time, everywhere, and disciples' lives are lived out, even

through their career. The practice of our faith, should not be compartmentalized, but instead, our faith should permeate all of who we are, and where we are. As Trueblood explains, “It is a gross error to suppose that the Christian cause goes forward solely or chiefly on weekends. What happens on the regular weekdays may be far more important, so far as the Christian faith is concerned, than what happens on Sundays.”¹⁵

Since disciples can live their faith in places that would not accommodate a church group, the lone disciple then has greater abilities to reflect Christ to the world. Through God’s providence, every disciple could approach a co-worker or the office water-cooler like a divine appointment, trusting that God has distinctively placed him or her in that unique setting to be light in the darkness and to demonstrate love then and there.

Ministry Is Messy and Involves Some Risk

To be in ministry, to do God’s will, is messy and involves some risk. All disciples may become sidetracked from our agenda for the moment to attend to a need, which ruins our calendar. Someone may be in a crisis and need extra attention, which puts us in an uncomfortable situation where sacrifice is needed. There are an inestimable number of scenarios. Coupled with that, the unknown consequences for being involved in ministry seem daunting and often create the appearance of complications and a loss of control. That would be messy and very risky.

When a disciple intentionally chooses an avenue for ministry, it would be nice for God to provide a blueprint with one’s name on it, or maybe a billboard with some explicit instructions, which tells the disciple what to do. When faced with decisions, or that

¹⁵ Trueblood, *Your Other Vocation*, 57.

proverbial “fork-in-the-road,” many believers worry about making a bad choice and suffering some unforeseen consequences. Decisions about what college to attend, whom to marry, and what career path should be taken can confound many. The greatest concern most often is: What is God’s will for my life?

Many people think God’s will is closely associated with destiny and some form of a static life map. Joseph dreamed at a young age that he would one day be a leader, whose brothers would eventually bow down to him. Esther was forced to ponder if her rise to a royal position was orchestrated for a singular event. Much of Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection was foretold. Paul was specifically chosen to minister to the Gentiles.

There are many examples of events in some people’s lives being orchestrated through God’s providence. Apart from these examples, most disciples do not know what God has placed in their future. Discernment is often sought, and wisdom from counselors is pursued at great lengths in an effort to know God’s will.

While volumes have been written and preached on the subject, God’s will is straightforward. God’s will is for us to love Him with all of our heart, soul, strength, and mind; to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt. 22:37-39); to love our brothers and sisters (John 13:34); to make disciples (Matt. 28:19); and to be a witness all over the world.

In the North American church, there is an over-abundance of resources; our proverbial cup runneth over. The spiritual resources, material resources, creative resources, and more are in such abundance that it is an embarrassment of riches. The number of sermons, lessons, lectures, books, and freedoms to use these resources is an extraordinary blessing.

As vast as the resources are in North America, the declining influence of the church is due to some other reason. Disciples can soak up all these mediums of spiritual nourishment, but so much of the North American church seems to be ineffectual. This problem of impotence is not due to the lack of information; it has to be the lack of application. Many know enough about their faith, but they do not apply what they know to their relationships and life around them.

Dying to oneself may often be at the center of every disciple's reluctance to be in ministry. Between the risks, inconveniences, mysteries and discomforts, following God's will to minister is eschewed. Paul admonishes all Christians, in response to God's mercies, to offer their bodies as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). This was Paul's personal struggle as well: to surrender to Christ's will, while forsaking his own agenda (Gal. 2:20). With such spiritual struggles of the will and ultimately for lordship, ministry is the intersection of personal life and faith in the goodness of God for all disciples. Every disciple, who approaches with anxiety the opportunity to minister, harbors fears about faith in God's call upon his or her life. God's sovereignty is greater than the change of circumstances that may occur. Trusting in God to see the disciple through that potential change is a test of faith.

Ministry Begets Blessing and Initiates Transformation

Faith in a loving God calls for action, which is the nature of ministry for the disciple. Ministry is the application of faith in life. Too often, the dispensing of information has been the greatest effort toward transformation. "The most common mistake made by well-intentioned leaders, particularly acute in the Global North, is

turning discipleship into a curriculum that a serious disciple completes and then graduates from. Instead of supporting an ongoing process, a program focuses on finishing the material, learning the information, and developing certain skills such as giving a testimony or using different methods of Bible study."¹⁶

While absorbing information from the Church is indeed a blessing, it is the application of that information that will lead to ministry and ultimately a transformed life. As the disciple ministers, hopefully the recipient of that ministry experiences the love of God and is changed by being more favorably disposed to God's blessings and His redeeming love.

In a completely different realm in life, Ivan Illich, the Roman Catholic priest and critic of western educational systems, shares a strong conviction about the best ways for students to learn in the public education system. Illich said, "Most learning is not the result of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting."¹⁷ While Illich's criticism was directed toward Western cultures' educational systems, his observation and criticism equally applies to many in our churches and discipleship methods today. Many traditional denominations, including Presbyterians among others in the Reformed tradition, have fostered the lecture-based format. This format depends on students sitting passively in class with occasional questions and discussion. This passive format has greatly contributed to the widespread problem that spiritual understanding among Christians in the northern hemisphere is seriously lacking.

¹⁶ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2006), 36.

¹⁷ Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (Rantoul, IL: Harrow Books, Doubleday & Company, 1971), 18.

When disciples put into practice what they know by faith, they introduce experience with faith and love. That combination of ministry and experience touches the soul in a manner that mere education and theory cannot.

Along similar lines, at the crossroads of ministry and faith, disciples find themselves experiencing God's promises. God's promises may be memorized and clung to for hope and reassurance, but when someone experiences the fulfillment of God's promises, they feel in their soul God's unusual and holy presence. As Corita Clarke said, "The mystery of ministry is that the Lord is to be found where we minister."¹⁸ As faith is exercised, the Lord is present, and no one stays the same as he or she spends time in the presence of the Lord.

In a recent sermon, Dan Scott made an illustration out of the elements during the celebration of the Lord's Table. He remarked how God makes the wheat, and God provides the grape juice. However, humans must take what God has given, the wheat and the grape juice, and from their own labor, make something. Then, as something else is made, and as the words of institution are declared and the Body approaches the table, the Lord is met. "God blesses this bread and wine to be something that is not merely bread and wine."¹⁹ Such is the case with all opportunities the disciple turns into ministry. God can turn the ordinary into the extraordinary; the mundane into the sublime; the irreligious to the sacred.

As has been stated and demonstrated in chapter 2, programs tend to fail in the area of discipleship, and ultimately transformation. Programs tend to create smarter sinners

¹⁸ Corita Clarke, *A Spirituality for Active Ministry* (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward 1991), 44.

¹⁹ Dan Scott, from a sermon preached at Christ Church Nashville, Nashville, TN, August 22, 2010.

and “fatter” members. Program-based discipleship encourages attendance and consumes the time of members, but it often fails to generate the desired outcome: ministry. The lack of accountability and the impression by many that mere attendance will win the day, falls short. The consumption of programmatic fodder, while helping many to love God with their mind through education, does not mean that meditation, biblical world-view, and transformed thinking has eclipsed the carnal mindset, which plagues our memberships.

Active ministry is needed. Ministry represents the soul of the Church. Without ministry, the Church is vacuous and without persuasion. Ministry is thus the catalyst for transformation in the community, the church, and specifically for our purposes, the disciple. As God’s people minister, in their unique ways through God’s resources, the Lord mysteriously manifests His presence in powerful ways that cannot be denied.

PART THREE
DISCIPLESHIP STRATEGY

CHAPTER 5

STRATEGY

The Leadership Roles for Mobilizing Members for Discipleship and Maturity

As with any large institution, it can be confusing to separate which individuals lead what tasks and where responsibilities lie. The same applies to large churches, but it is often more confusing and difficult to understand how a church's structure works since it is a not-for-profit organization and is built on volunteers.

At Highland Park Presbyterian, the staff in the church offer support, training, and tools for the members so they may be equipped for ministry. Currently, the associate pastor over discipleship offers pastoral support and guidance in this area of ministry. A part-time staff member leads the efforts to coordinate each new member class, supplying the classes with the appropriate teachers and shepherds. Another part-time staffer serves with the Connect and Serve program as the volunteer coordinator.

Primarily the new member coordinator and volunteer coordinator are responsible for recruiting the new member shepherds, sharing the vision of their mentoring role, and training them to walk alongside and coach the new members into their next step of discipleship. As this initiative is set into place, the role of the associate pastor will decrease as the responsibility of training mentors is passed on to other ministry leaders. A healthy pastor has a philosophy of always working his or her way out of a ministry

when possible as it is passed onto others who need an avenue for ministry. This builds others up and fosters their spiritual and character development as they seek to be faithful stewards of the gifts and talents God has given to them.

The New Member Shepherds will be the primary people who build relationships and offer personal leadership to the new members. The shepherd is committed to the six-week new member class series as a mentor, and then longer as the need presents itself. These shepherds will receive training prior to the start of the new member series. They have the gifts which predispose them to feel fulfilled and fruitful in this mentoring ministry role; they possess the skills and the temperament necessary for success; and, finally, all the shepherds will have ministry experience and spiritual maturity to enable them to lead others to their next step of discipleship.

The staff provide a high-level view of this ministry and offer support to the members who minister through the class to the new members. The staff can offer the class program, but it is the shepherds who will serve as the mentors, carrying the new members over the threshold of membership into further discipleship.

The Pastor Casts a Vision for a Brighter Future, Laying a Foundation for Change

The mission of the Church has been cast. Jesus tells us that we are His witnesses (Acts 1:8), we are to make disciples everywhere we go (Matt 28:19), and that He desires all to be saved from sin (1 Tim. 2:3-4). From day to day, this is what the Church is to be about. To be on the road to a realized vision, ministry leaders have to be willing to share leadership and pass on this vision to others.

The vision, then, is on that positive image of a preferable future. Vision will be the result of our dreams acted out through the aforementioned mission of the church.

When the vision is embraced, it then becomes the staging ground for the future.

Vision is a preferable future that is so grand, it is impossible to achieve apart from God's intervention. If it is achievable under our own efforts, it is merely a goal or measurable results. To have a vision is to see a far larger and grander view of what could be as a result of God's direct participation.

One way of casting a vision for the church is by asking the question, "If we could be doing anything in five years, what would it be?" Putting aside all the little hurdles and immediate circumstances, it becomes easier to imagine a better future five years from today. That imagined future seems more real when some new member statistics are gathered. The reality is that in the past six years, Highland Park Presbyterian has received over six hundred adults by Profession of Faith, Letter of Transfer, and ReAffirmation of Faith. (This number does not include children joining through Confirmation class.) With an average of just over one hundred new adult members each year, we could expect to have five hundred new members sharing a similar expectation of ministry involvement in five years' time.

Assuming the present day membership remains stable, and five hundred new members are added to the church rolls over the next five years, those new members would account for 11 percent of the current membership. However, a brighter vision may interpret those numbers in light of the average active membership. The congregation currently has on average of fifteen hundred worshipers on any given Sunday. In five

years, again assuming current membership remains static and an average of one hundred adults are added each year, in five years, there could be a 25 percent increase in worship attendance, with that new 25 percent holding on to a higher expectation of membership and a broader grasp of ministry.

The increased ratio of healthier members could raise the bar of expectation for all members. As the proverbial water rises in the harbor, all the ships rise in that harbor. With the raised membership expectations in a few new members, the critical mass achieved could then help provide a tipping point so that all members would sense a similar need to be better stewards of their God-given resources.

In five years, the congregation may have a stronger biblical worldview. The members could become more generous with their resources, and there may be a greater investment of time, money, and resources for the kingdom of God. With the effort to raise expectations, provide accessible discipleship resources, and offer personal mentors for the new members in the church and ministry experiences for all disciples, it is possible that, in five years time, Highland Park Presbyterian may have five hundred healthier members and thus be a greater influence for God's kingdom as we seek to worship God, grow in Christ, build community, and bless the world.

Mentors Are Recruited and Trained to Shepherd New Members into Ministry

The key link in this vision is the all-important shepherd. These shepherds are the hands-on, relational component who will maintain the guided contact over the new members' training and transformational progress. The shepherd bridges the gap between what currently is and the brighter future of what could be. In Scripture, a number of New

Testament passages use the image of shepherding and refer to the value of shepherding.¹

The use of new member shepherds seeks to build on that valuable image and role.

In Dr. Timothy Laniak's recent Convocation Address to Montreat College, he shared about his search for better leadership training and believed it comes from the metaphor of shepherding from his sabbatical days spent with Bedouin shepherds in the Middle East. He said:

My self-appointed task was to discover what made shepherding the primary and most resilient metaphor for leadership in the Bible and throughout the kingdoms and literatures of antiquity. Why has the image of a herder, often an occupation that exists on the periphery of civilization, been used for kings, generals, governors, law-givers, prophets and teachers? Why were the three most significant figures in the Old Testament - Abraham, Moses, and David - all shepherds? Why did Jesus use the image of a shepherd for his own mission in the gospels? And why does God judge leaders on whether or not they have been good shepherds?"²

The questions are vital and the answers even more telling. Shepherds are stronger than the flock and see more clearly what the sheep do not see. Shepherds offer a means of defense for the vulnerable sheep, and a shepherd's role is not unapproachable for the non-shepherd.

The same can be true for the shepherds of new members. Our shepherds need a number of important qualities to help determine their success in this role. The first quality they need is experience. A new member shepherd needs to speak from experience about how God has gifted and used him or her for ministry. Shepherds need to be able

¹ For example, John 10:1-8; Ephesians 4:11-14; 1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:1-3.

² Timothy S. Laniak, "Spiritual Shepherds: An Ancient Image for Future Leaders," Montreat College Opening Convocation Address, Montreat College Opening Convocation Address 24, August 2010, <http://www.montreat.edu/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=59fnlfy9gEs%3d&tabid=2194&mid=4501> (accessed October 18, 2010).

to say where they have been in the spiritual journey and explain how experiences have shaped or transformed them.

These experiences should start with their testimony. Each shepherd can share about how his or her faith in Jesus began, how that relationship has grown and been tested, and where the person is today because of that faith. The shepherd emphasizes the relationship with Christ and not membership with a congregation. Additionally, the experiences the shepherd has had and how God has used these or redeemed them for His glory helps to keep the focus on God and off the shepherd. Through these testimonies, the shepherd demonstrates the reality and viability of a relationship with Christ and the benefits of being a steward of His gifts.

In Peter's first letter to the Church, he encourages the elders to be examples to the flock which is entrusted to them (1 Pet. 5:3). Peter knew people needed examples and role-models. An example is not one who merely shows someone how a function is performed. Mimicking the activity is not the same as living the faith. Shepherds, however, show others by example how faith is lived. Because of their faith in Jesus Christ, they do something. The power of that example can be transformative. As Robert Coleman says, "One living sermon is worth a hundred explanations."³

In modern terms, another way to define a shepherd is mentor. "Mentoring is a broad term describing the process of assisting a man or woman to develop his or her maximum potential in Jesus Christ regardless of vocation."⁴ In their book *The Mentoring*

³ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1964), 39.

⁴ Ted Engstrom and Ron Jenson, *The Making of a Mentor: 9 Essential Characteristics of Influential Christian Leaders* (Federal Way, WA: World Vision, 2005), 8.

Relationships You Need to Succeed In Life, Paul Stanley and Robert Clinton correctly describe three different styles of mentoring, each style having multiple levels. Mentoring is very effective in the church today among members of differing ages and stages of life. They describe mentoring as “a relational experience in which one person empowers another by sharing God-given resources....The God-given resources include wisdom, experiences, patterns, habits of obedience, and principles, as well as a host of other things.”⁵ “Mentoring provides modeling, close supervision on special projects, and individualized help in many areas-discipline, encouragement, correction, confrontation, and a calling to accountability.”⁶

The relational experience through mentoring, builds the Body of Christ. New members need that connection, which the mentoring relationship provides. Stanley and Clinton reveal the breadth of benefits from mentoring structures in the church. “We are convinced that if more Counselor connections were made, both informally and formally, the Body of Christ would be healthier, wiser, and more powerfully growing and affecting lives than it is today. If you are in a place to influence the generational flow of relationships in your church, fellowship, or organization, then do it. You will be blessed by it.”⁷

Finding the best population of new member shepherds includes more than embracing a mentoring philosophy. Those who would serve as a mentor will provide a crucial link in the vision of a changed church. “Anyone can mentor, provided he has

⁵ Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed In Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1992), 33.

⁶ Engstrom and Jenson, *The Making of a Mentor*, 7.

⁷ Stanley and Clinton, *Connecting*, 93.

learned something from God and is willing to share with others what he has learned...

Whatever God has given you that has enabled you to grow and deepen your relationship with Him, you can pass on to others.”⁸

Mentoring offers a methodology of discipleship, which has more intentionality than a disciple merely looking to be an example for those who may be looking. Bill Hull rightly acknowledges that setting an example of discipleship has a strong influence on other Christians. Hull recognizes that discipleship is more than “soldiering forward in a mechanical strategy of reproduction and multiplication. Additionally, discipleship does not involve developing a well-trained, elite sales force. Rather, discipleship occurs when a transformed person radiates Christ to those around her. It happens when people so deeply experience God’s love that they can do nothing other than affect those around them.”⁹ Intentional mentoring new members, is a great way to affect those who are around. New members see this is a means of joining the church, accepting the relationship more readily and adopt the mentor’s influential role readily.

The best shepherds to pair with new members will be the ones who are spiritually disposed to a relational ministry with the opportunity to provide some spiritual oversight. The members to be recruited as shepherds for new members need to have the right spiritual gifts for their role. Since their function is to care for the spiritual needs of believers and to assist in a manner similar to that of a congregational pastor, then the spiritual gift of pastor should be the primary gift of our shepherds.

⁸ Stanley and Clinton, *Connecting*, 28.

⁹ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 28.

The gift of pastor is the ability to care for the spiritual needs of a group of believers and equip them for ministry. This gift helps one to be able nurture some disciples in their spiritual growth while the pastor assumes some responsibility for their welfare.

To discern this gift for our shepherds, the right demonstration of these traits is sought. The shepherds will enjoy working with new members whether these inquirers are facing good or tough times in their life. While someone with the gift of mercy is drawn to people in crisis, the disciple with the gift of pastor will be drawn to the new member regardless of that person's circumstance. The shepherd will also take the time necessary to truly know those whom they will guide and help. Many previous shepherds have played the role of host and have been a presence in the class, but they have failed to be engaging and if the new members are new in their faith or even if they have strayed from their relationship to Christ and the Church, the shepherd will be able to assist in restoring that relationship. The shepherd is also willing to be available for these new members.

New Member Class Content Will Be Redressed to Fit the Long-Term Discipleship Strategy

The setting in which the mentoring begins is in our new member class. A goal is to have one shepherd for every four to five new members, and adding two more new member classes a year helps retain a lower mentor/new member ratio. The six-week interactive series has a very strong class format, which lends itself to building relationships and absorbing necessary material. Each class, lasting ninety minutes, includes a presentation and discussion time, with the shepherds playing host to their small

group while facilitating discussion based upon the previously presented topic. This format was inherited and perfectly serves the purpose for which it was created.

The changes recently made to the new member class were primarily centered around the Core Four¹⁰ content, the expectations for both the shepherds and the new members, but not so much the format. As was addressed in chapter 2, the Core Four serves as the overarching pursuits in a disciple's life. The Core Four has the common language desired for the church membership as we seek to establish a shared ethos, which builds unanimity while raising expectations.

Over the course of the six weeks, the new member becomes familiar with the mission, vision, and values which Highland Park Presbyterian holds to be paramount and which make Highland Park Presbyterian unique in its mission within God's kingdom. The programs, activities, and topics introduced and highlighted are intended to demonstrate how all that we do at Highland Park Presbyterian grows out of the Core Four. The topics in the first class offer an introduction to the congregation and explains the assurance of salvation to those who believe. The four subsequent classes highlight the Core Four with lectures and discussion based on the four pursuits. For the sixth and final week, there is an emphasis on application, with a review of the applicable material which helps new members narrow their attention to areas of ministry appropriate for their unique calling. The new members will understand how their gifts, talents, personality and passion are all used by God in His kingdom. Pooling this information together, the

¹⁰ Worship God, Grow in Christ, Build Community, Bless the World

new member and shepherd evaluate the results with prayer and wisdom to discern the next step in discipleship.

CHAPTER 6

PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION IN NEW MEMBERS CLASS

Training for a Journey of Discipleship, not a Destination of Membership

A church of the size that makes it is nearly impossible to create a homogenous ethos, requires a strong and steady approach to change. A vision is cast for the involved staff to raise expectations for new members and their involvement in proactively seeking out ministry opportunities. Instead of requiring active elders to serve as shepherds when their gifts and interests do not lie in that area, there is intentional recruitment of mature disciples within the church membership with a few necessary tools. These mature members, who will serve as the new shepherds, will have experiences in a number of ministries, preferably having settled into one place where they experience fruitfulness and fulfillment. These shepherds will have scored high in spiritual gift inventories¹ for having the gift of pastor and they will be able to commit to shepherd training and to the necessary time it takes to follow-up with the new members under their care. Casting a vision for both the shepherd associated staff who will be prepared to carry that vision long enough to build a perceived critical mass, where the expectation of ministry is the norm among all members.

¹ Mels Carbonell and Stanley Ponz, *Uniquely You: Personalizing My Faith* (Blue Ridge, GA: Uniquely You Resources, year).

As the critical mass is reached, which should be around 25 percent of the worship attendance, a sweeping sermon series across the different life-stages and through the multiple worship services is likely to further the vision and capture the soul and passion of a congregation. This tack for changing the church culture takes time and, if the course is held, will help foster a healthier congregation, which is more generous with its time, talents, and resources.

The whole congregation may not experience an awakening to discipleship as previously described, but, by addressing the new members and changing their perception of church membership – the high calling of discipleship, the congregation can change in time. As more brothers and sisters catch the vision and intention of discipleship, Christ's commission will be a reality in and around Highland Park Presbyterian Church.

In 2008, Beijing was hosting the Olympic games. The USA track team fielded an impeccable foursome for the men's 4x400m relay race. The gold medal was basically a guarantee, and so was a new world and Olympic record. The only real question was by how much this elite field of runners would be able to break the record. The anticipation was very high.

After the gun was sounded, the runners began their race with the batons in hand. Somewhere along the way, during the expected exchange of the baton between runners, the US baton fell to the track. In an instant, the fastest relay team ever assembled was disqualified. The expected world record and gold medal disappeared like a vapor in a hurricane.

In a way, that failure to achieve the desired outcome too easily describes many in our new member class and the congregation. The new member class has a very strong format with rotating teachers and interactive time built into the format. This format fosters relationships and healthy opportunities to engage the topics presented by the teachers. The church is strong in that it has a long history of being involved in missions, raising up new leaders and holding to a high view of Scripture with a Reformed theological heritage. Highland Park Presbyterian is also strong in that its potential is great. The number of people and the resources represented is almost overwhelming. The congregation has a very large number of people who know how to be successful in the world. The level of commercial, economic, social and industrial success is extensive. There are many in the core of the membership who are engaged in the church body and in ministry. However, a gap exists between where the congregation is and where the congregation should be.

Given the great resources that exist at Highland Park Presbyterian, there is so very much more that the members could be doing to be actively engaged in the body and in ministry. New members too often fail to minister once they join the congregation. Consequently, the opportunity to run the race has become clouded by the sense of having arrived. Members do not realize the benefits and blessings of membership. Having their names on the roles seems vain, and being engaged in the Body and activated in ministry remain a vague memory of someone else's experience in the church.

Evaluating Strengths and Weaknesses of New Members

The Shepherds receive training before the start of the new members series. The shepherds learn about the overall content of the class, the vision of the new member ministry and how it dovetails with the vision and mission of their church home at Highland Park Presbyterian. Integrated into that is the vision for the role the shepherds play as mentors to new members and the expected spiritual fruit of a sustaining high expectations over five years. The shepherds learn what will happen from week to week, and they understand their role, far more than only as hosts, but as coaching shepherds who steer the attention and the discussion toward further discipleship. The shepherds, coupled with their training, their ministry experience and the content of the weekly lessons, spend time with the new member, looking at how the new member's passion, spiritual gifts and abilities line up with potential avenues of ministry.

Regardless of any previous training and experience the shepherds may have had over the years, their spiritual pastor gift is encouraged and exercised before, during, and after the new member series. The intention here is to encourage the shepherd's pastoring nature to persevere alongside the new member so that the new member either experiences ministry for the first time, or can claim identity as a minister of Jesus Christ. That is a powerful step in discipleship as it means the disciple is putting faith into practice, exercising gifts, and allowing God to love others through him or her.

One passage of Scripture is emphasized as a lens through which the shepherd should look. In Peter's second open letter to the Church, he encourages the Church to grow in seven areas. Peter says the saints should make every effort to increase in faith,

goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. If the disciples have these attributes in increasing measure, their lives will be productive and effective (2 Pet. 1:5-8). The shepherd uses this passage as a way to evaluate the growth of the new member. This lens is not a means to judge someone, but a way for the shepherd to emphasize that progress is to be made by all disciples. We never arrive, but are continually on the journey toward holiness.

The shepherd also evaluates the results of each new member's spiritual gifts inventory. While each believer receives a spiritual gift, the believer may often remain ignorant about this grace from God and the value of such a gift. Through class resources, the new members not only discover what that spiritual gift may be, but they learn from their mentor about ways in which that gift may be applied to ministries within the congregation and out.

Equally important to the discernment and coaching process, the shepherd also seeks to understand and encourage the role personality plays in the new member possesses. Personalities are God given and should not be forsaken as something of the flesh and unspiritual. When God redeemed us, He redeemed the whole person. Personalities are at the center of who we are and how we express ourselves and how we perceive life. The personality can compliment the manner in which disciples use their spiritual gift. Just as a square peg does not fit neatly into a round hole, the personality that is mismatched with a particular ministry may be ill-fitting and fruitless.

Shepherds also keep in mind, as they visit with the new member, that people's talents offer a more unique avenue of ministry, while narrowing the field of opportunities.

Athletic talents or oratory skills will open options for some believers that would remain shut for others. Many people have obvious talents, which they have developed, but, for some reason, they have discounted the talents' value for some personal reason. The professional with an education may take the education and acquired skills for granted. However, that education is a resource which, in God's hands, can lead to an avenue for ministry.

At the same time, a particular interest a disciple may have will also provide a motivation unlike anything else. Some disciples may claim to have a burden for a people group or have a passion for something known to them. Few could venture to say with authority whether that burden or passion is not of the Lord.² That special interest can be redeemed as well. No disciple can perform all the good works needed to express his or her love for God, nor can the disciple express enough good works so that the whole world experiences the Divine. However, there may be some, a select group, which will be the recipients of God's grace because one disciple had the interest.

During the course of the six weeks, as the Core Four is expounded, the shepherd and new member together explore through the lessons, the small group discussions, and the resources provided, what ministry would be most helpful to the new member. The format of the class and the content provided help the new member explore with his or her shepherd what the next step of discipleship should be.

Not all new members who join fit neatly into the plan. While it would be nice that all who attend the new member class are intrinsically motivated to serve God

²The useful acronym, SHAPE, standing for Spiritual Gifts, Heart, Abilities, Passion & Experience, has an unknown source, but was popularized most recently by Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, Orange County, CA. The acronym is not copyrighted.

wholeheartedly through Highland Park Presbyterian, that is not always the case. Many attempt to join, and do join for less than the best reasons. Training the shepherd to respond to the unhealthy new members is a part of the training process.

The shepherd understands that not all new members are cooperative or honest. The top ulterior reason some join is to keep a spouse happy, and another reason is to gain access to a sanctuary for a wedding. Apart from the ulterior reasons, some new members appear to be unresponsive to the encouragement and challenges. The shepherd is trained to respond to these different situations with grace and patience.

In addition to these challenges, sometimes the shepherds are not always equipped with the right answer. Teaching them that they do not have to know all the answers is a liberating lesson. Having the freedom to admit ignorance and promising to follow up with an answer frees the shepherd and reduces his or her anxiety.

Mentor's Role in Customizing Discipleship Plans

The value of the relational mentorship has tremendous potential for the shepherd, the new member, and ultimately the congregation. As Engstrom and Jenson put it, "We can teach what we know, but we reproduce what we are."³ Each shepherd has experience in ministry. With a worksheet the new member receives, the new member collects his or her thoughts and perceived results from the different classes in the membership series. While Highland Park Presbyterian, like many other churches, has pet ministries, which are supported by the benevolence of the members, it is too easy to funnel new members toward what is already known. The goal for the mentor is to look at the worksheet of

³ Engstrom and Jenson, *The Making of a Mentor*, 142.

each new member, evaluate that person for whom God made him or her, and prayerfully help the new member discern God's call to a ministry. Because the shepherds have seasoned experience in their own ministries, they have the freedom to encourage new members to follow their example of being in a ministry that suits them. That personal assistance and customization will help the new member to experience some fulfillment and some fruitfulness more quickly. If the new member were left to their own efforts, they would not receive the encouragement and accountability of being a responsible steward of God's resources.

Mentoring is likened to ushering in many ways. Just as an usher might greet someone at the door, share a worship bulletin and lead someone to their seat, the shepherd hosts the new member, assists in sorting and filtering God's design for disciples to be in ministry and then helps in leading that new member into active ministry. According to Cloud and Townsend, mentoring "is best done with the context of the 'church' for two reasons. First, it makes the character issues which drastically affect a person's work life, grist for the mill, and, second, it helps to integrate a person's life by eliminating the all-too-common split between work and spiritual life. It is a good thing for a person to be mentored by someone who can see what is happening in his or her overall work of faith and growth in Christ."⁴ The shepherds may not have the window to look into the character issues of the new member, but the opportunity to help the new member to bridge the gap between Sunday morning and the rest of the week is real and promising.

⁴Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *How People Grow: What the Bible Teaches about Personal Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 134-135.

As has been mentioned before, there are not enough ministries within the church to occupy every member. Concurrently, not every disciple is in the same spiritual place, needing the same resources to spur him or her on to love and good deeds.

As Joshua challenged the Hebrews, when they were in the proverbial “fork in the road” (Josh. 24:15), a choice needed to be made. Each new member has chosen the new member class as an avenue for discipleship. As the series concludes, each one is at a place not only to declare verbally before a congregation that Jesus is his or her Lord and Savior, but also to make a decision to choose to do something for Jesus as a result of this faith.

Discipleship Plans Including One or Several Components

Not all disciples are equal in their spiritual formation. God’s grace intersects with His children at different times and to different degrees. There is no linear path to spiritual maturity. However, the Spirit is not without a witness. While Scripture explicitly reveals God’s expectations for His children,⁵ the ways and means of obedience are known only to God. So, through wise counsel provided by the shepherd, discernment, prayer, and with knowledge of available resources, new members choose ministry paths with the shepherd’s assistance.

Plans to Incorporate the Ordinary Means of Grace

While the emphasis of the Shepherd is to assist the new member toward ministry activity, the spiritual foundation needs to be assured and affirmed for the new member.

⁵ See Micah 6:8, Matthew 28:19, John 13:34, Acts 1:8.

To have zeal for ministry but have no spiritual knowledge would be detrimental to the new member.⁶ As was explained in chapter 2, programs often fail as a means of discipleship. God calls people from different stages of life, with different talents, experiences, and circumstances. A “one-size-fits-all” institutional approach, which depends upon programs, often fails to address the individual needs of all involved. At the same time, allowing God to deal with an individual through His Holy Spirit and the ordinary means of grace is encouraged. Shepherds will encourage with the best wisdom and intentions, but the dynamic influence of God’s Spirit may lead the new members in ways not perceived by the Shepherds. The personal spiritual responsibility each new member has to grow in Christ⁷ can be fulfilled through these ordinary means.

It is always appropriate for a disciple to embrace the ordinary means of grace, as it is expressed in the Shorter Catechism. “The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.”⁸

Each disciple is encouraged to take advantage of Scripture, the sacraments, and prayer as a means of learning and growing in the faith. Some disciples are young in their faith, and leadership and responsibility pose too great a burden of responsibility for their young faith. The ordinary means of grace are a safe practice and are always suited for personal spiritual growth.

⁶ See Romans 10:2. If a new member is not ready for some spiritual responsibilities, then their knowledge and understanding of God’s grace and their spiritual maturity needs to be pursued appropriately.

⁷ The second Core Four priority.

⁸ Shorter Catechism answer 88, *The Book of Confessions* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 2004), 183-184.

Involvement in a Ministry That Suits the Individuals' Calling

A perfect fit may not be achieved at the end of the six-week course. However, a plan is desired for all new members. A plan, albeit imperfect, is better than lingering in indecision, which all too easily leads to inactivity and an ineffectual membership. The conscientious attempt to discern a proactive step is important. The intent is to encourage the new member to get out of the pew and into the arena.

As Theodore Roosevelt once said,

It is not the critic who counts. Not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause. Who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at the worst, at least falls while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.”⁹

Incorporating Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Formation

While an active ministry plan is greatly desired for all new members, that external expression of faith is not the end. All disciples are invited to deepen their understanding of God and their spiritual dependence upon God, and the spiritual disciplines are a way to do just that.

Each spiritual discipline, as adequately described in Richard Foster's book, *Celebration of Discipline*, is a spiritual touchpoint with God's grace and the disciple's connection to God. As each discipline is pursued, not as a punitive exercise for the sinful

⁹ http://www.saidwhat.co.uk/quotes/famous/theodore_roosevelt/it_is_not_the_critic_who_1476, (accessed October 12, 2010).

nature that plagues our earthly stay, but as a spiritual exercise that draws upon our freedom in Christ, the disciple is drawn more and more into communion with God. This communion brings a greater freedom of the soul and releases a joy known from experiencing the presence of Christ.

There is a great divide between how we perceive God and how we perceive our selves. We too often have such a diminished view of God and an overinflated view of our selves that the need for God and an appreciation for what God has done for us in and through Jesus, is lost on us. The prophet Isaiah faced a nation who had a small god. Little did they know God's true greatness and sovereignty. Isaiah invited Israel to have a fresh view of God. As all people grow in their knowledge of God's greatness, a sense of awe overwhelms them. Richard Lovelace affirms this truth in writing, "Knowledge of God and knowledge of self are preconditions of spiritual life because revival involves awakening."¹⁰ When disciples incorporate spiritual disciplines in their ministry plan, it can be likened to bending the knee of the soul to the Lordship of Christ. In those disciplines, transformation can occur through His grace.

Mentors' Follow-up with New Members

Under the direction of the Connect and Serve Ministry Director¹¹, each shepherd commits to fostering an intentional mentoring relationship with three to four new members until the new members are secure in their chosen ministry path. The Shepherd

¹⁰ Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), 82.

¹¹ The Connect and Serve Director is the formal title given to the lay ministry coordinator. This ministry position serves in the same capacity as a Member Mobilization leader or Lay Ministry Director might serve.

commits to attending the six-week New Member Class series, hosting and facilitating small group discussion in the series. They also help to establish a plan with the new member to take the next appropriate step in their journey in discipleship. Considering the life-stage of the new member and the complexity of their desired ministry, the shepherd will follow up with the new member over the course of time at their discretion. The purpose for the follow-up attempts is twofold. On one hand, there is the purpose to demonstrate commitment on the shepherds behalf toward the new member. That commitment reveals the shepherds' support and follow-through toward the new member's continued spiritual growth. That commitment holds the bar of expectation aloft and underscores the priority placed upon spiritual growth. The second purpose for Shepherd commitment is to provide a measure of accountability. The temptation for many disciples is to take the path of least resistance. There may be great intentions on the new member's behalf at the moment of his or her inclusion into the visible Church, but where the spirit is willing the flesh may remain weak. So, the friendly reminder and nudge of a shepherd is offered to remind the new member that he or she is not alone and that there is someone who will walk alongside them in this journey of faith.

In *Renovation of the Heart*, Dallas Willard rightly criticizes shallow intentions. "Such may have *wished* that what they supposedly intend would happen, and perhaps they even *wanted* to do it (or for it to be done); but they did not decide to do it, and their intention - which well may have begun to develop - aborted and never really formed."¹² (Italics his) He further adds that the reason transformation does not happen is not

¹² Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting On the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2002), 88.

because transformation is impossible, nor are the effectual means not available. “The problem is that it is not intended.”¹³ Just as Jesus’ disciples wanted to stay with Jesus, their flesh was weak, and so they slept. The young and the mature disciple continue to battle their flesh (will) on a daily basis. The shepherd, therefore, comes alongside the new member, not as an authority or source of answers, but as a supportive friend on the same road as a fellow disciple of Jesus.

Shepherd Ministry Assessment Plan

A vision of a preferable future has been cast for the congregation, and more specifically, the new and future members of Highland Park Presbyterian Church. Many steps have been taken to facilitate that vision towards its reality. To boldly go forward, leading the way does not guarantee everyone is in step with the leadership, no matter how much the staff and officers understand the formal vision and mission of the church. Therefore, good leaders need to occasionally view what’s behind them to confirm that there are indeed some followers. With that wisdom, there will be an annual review of the overall New Member Shepherding ministry by the Connect and Serve Ministry Director.

The shepherds recruited to serve in the New Member classes are under the leadership of the Connect and Serve Director. The Shepherds’ training is also under this directors’ purview. Annually, a review of the New Member Shepherding ministry will evaluate three primary areas of the ministry: 1) The shepherd’s effectiveness with the new members; 2) The effectiveness of staff’s role in leadership and facilitation of the

¹³ Ibid., 91.

Shepherds; 3) The viability of the overall effectiveness of the mentoring endeavor with regards to achieving the goal of furthering personal discipleship.

Assessment of Shepherds

The primary goal of the Shepherds in the New Member class is to assist the participants along the path of discipleship. Prospective members come from many different spiritual places in life. There are some who are mere infants in Christ, while others have transferred their membership from another church after years of faithful discipleship. Without the Shepherds, the class would be primarily content based, with little community and few lasting relationships. The Shepherds personal relationship with three to four new members within their small group is key to the success of the mentoring efforts.

Measuring this success is helpful. How well the shepherds mentor the new members can go a long way in cementing the intent and longevity of discipleship efforts promoted in the class and throughout the various ministries. Once the shepherds are trained and the first class is completed, the introductions will have been made and the new members and shepherds will have grouped together for the remaining five weeks. From that moment on, the shepherd will have the sole responsibility to provide intentional oversight of those few new members as they take their next step in discipleship.

One area where discernment is exercised and evaluated is the use of some ministry projects.¹⁴ These projects, or ministries, can be embraced by the whole class, a small group in the New Member Class or by an individual. Every new member will be strongly encouraged to choose to be involved in one of these ministry experiences. The Shepherds should seek to have 100% involvement in ministry from those new members they mentor. These choices are measurable and their fruitfulness are subjectively measured by an evaluation form completed by each new member at the end of the New Member series.

In addition to this ministry experience, the shepherd will help discern the new member's next step in ministry, which is ideally a more permanent choice. Until that choice is made, the shepherd maintains contact and encourages the new member until a firm direction in ministry is chosen. Once discernment is achieved, the choice will be reported to the Connect and Serve Director, recorded in a database.

One subjective, yet critical method of evaluating the mentoring ministry will be the use of an anonymous online survey. This survey will be distributed among the new members after membership to the congregation. The answers of the new members to this survey will shed some much needed light on the perceived benefit of the role of the Shepherds.

¹⁴The intention of these New Member projects serve two purposes. One purpose is to build community among the new members as they share a common ministry experience. This shared experience will build community among the new members. The second purpose of the service project is to expose the new members to a need. A crisis of some sort most often seems to foster transformation in an individual's life, but a crisis should not be manufactured by a church. However, to expose a disciple to the needs around them, and helping them to recognize the role God has for them can induce a positive response toward discipleship and ultimately transformation.

Assessment of Director and Shepherd Training

The second area to review in the Shepherd ministry is the effectiveness of the Director's role in leadership and facilitation of the shepherds. Evaluation of the shepherds is the staff's spiritual responsibility to God and a matter of stewardship. One goal of any healthy Protestant church is to engage and involve the laity. Helping the laity to be busy does not mean the laity are fruitful.

An annual review of the Connect and Serve Director, by their supervisor, will include a review of the Director and the shepherds' ability to move new members into effective ministry opportunities. The Director will keep an active list of potential ministry opportunities which are readily available to the Shepherds and the new members. This list, while obviously not exhaustive, will be updated and maintained by a missions ministry team. The opportunities list will reflect the ministries in the congregation that are actively supported financially and have a sustained relationship among some members of the staff or laity within Highland Park Presbyterian Church.

An annual review of the Shepherd training material will be included. Results from the new members' online survey and feedback from Shepherds will inform this annual review for the Director. Assessing the success rate in which Shepherds help the new members engage the ministry experience, as well as the reported number of new members who choose their ministry destination will reveal how well the Shepherds are achieving the desired goals for their role as trained mentors.

At the conclusion of each New Member class, the Connect and Serve Director will personally and formally evaluate the Shepherds' effectiveness in a feedback meeting.

The Director meets with the shepherds of the class and solicits feedback on the class, the new member process and individual performance. The Director will be informed from interviewing the Shepherds about these areas: the adequacy of their training; the personal follow-up efforts; the level of participation in small groups; the new member ministry experiences; and the perceived difference being made through the relational discernment process.

Additionally, an online survey will be distributed to the new members, soliciting their anonymous responses to questions about the class and the shepherds' helpfulness as mentors. While many questions could be asked, the succinctness of the survey will foster greater participation, helping to gain insights into the effectiveness of this ministry effort.

In one such recent online survey¹⁵ of new members from the four New Member Classes of 2010, 45% of the new members responded. Of the 46 respondents, 76% felt the New Member Class itself was helpful in the spiritual journey. Additionally, 66% of the respondents felt they had a clear "next step" in ministry due to the class. Of the same 46 respondents, 56% felt their shepherd was helpful in furthering their journey in discipleship. Regarding the area of the Core Four discipleship model, when asked "What area of the Core Four did the New Member class help you the most?" 23.9% responded Worship God; 19.6% responded Grow in Christ; 43.5% responded Building Community, and 45.7% responded Blessing the World. Finally, when asked, "In what area of your discipleship are you taking your next step in discipleship?", 19.6% responded Worship

¹⁵ Survey was electronically distributed to 102 new members of Highland Park Presbyterian Church in early February 2011. The 102 new members surveyed, had joined in one of four classes throughout the prior year, which was the first year with Shepherds as active mentors in the membership class series. Multiple online survey resources are available. We used SurveyMonkey.com, which calculates the results instantaneously and provides a wide variety of resources to customize the desired survey to be used.

God; 39.1 responded Grow in Christ; 45.3% responded Building Community, and 23.9% responded Blessing the World.

Recent Evaluation Results

At the moment, the Shepherding ministry is showing signs of promise and is bearing fruit. While the initial efforts are formative, early indications are that this ministry is on the right track. More than half of the new members within the past year indicated their shepherd was helpful in mentoring them toward their next step in discipleship. It is apparent the Shepherding ministry complements the robust New Member class, making the class more relational and affording the Connect and Serve Director a more personal means of accountability and encouragement.

The ongoing efforts to find the best Shepherds, who will find this form of ministry fulfilling and fruitful will further enhance the new member experience and further aid them in discipleship. The current direction of the Shepherd ministry has shown some intangible success. Numerically, the new members recognize that the church is providing the means for spiritual growth through discipleship. The congregation is not content with passive membership, but is investing in ministry as a means of fostering spiritual maturity. With over 50% of the new members acknowledging that Shepherds was a blessing to them personally, the way is made more clearly to further invest in this form of ministry.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this endeavor is to increase new member participation in their faith and in the life of the church through new member mentors, called shepherds. The obstacles to achieving this vision are high, but, with God's help through some pastor-minded disciples, the goal is not insurmountable. All too often, new members fail to catch the vision of the joy-filled life won for Christ's disciples because they are not sufficiently challenged through appropriate expectations, nor are they properly guided. The new member may remain disengaged and wander into obscurity, fall through the proverbial cracks, or drift into the status quo, if left to his or her own devices. The mentors will be relational coaches who will personally assist new members on their next step of discipleship.

Apart from the intrinsic motivation provided by the Holy Spirit, the new member will greatly benefit from personal shepherds, training, and resources from the church. A relationship with a shepherd, who serves as a coaching mentor, fosters a bond which can help a new member stay the course of discipleship. That shepherd can be the personal contact and the go-to person a new member may need as he or she navigates the large church setting, and finds a way in God's kingdom.

The new member also will be blessed by having a spiritual "next step" in the journey as a disciple at Highland Park Presbyterian. The new member class provides the catalyst, introducing the inquirer to several critical themes and topics, which are held as

high values for the Church. These topics introduce the inquirer to the resources God provides for increasing effectiveness as ambassadors for Christ, and for spiritual development. The plans mutually formulated by the new member, with the assistance of the shepherd, give the new member direction as to where to go and apply his or her gifts, talents, and experience.

New Members Face Unforeseen Obstacles in Membership

The story is told that three pastors once gathered for a time of fellowship, commiserating over their staff, flock, and the pressures of pastoring. The subject of taking care of the facilities came up, eventually leading to the topic of their problems of bats in the church belfry. One pastor said they had tried a plastic owl to ward off the bats, but that was to no avail. The other pastor said he had hired the local exterminator; however, the bats seemed to remain ensconced in the belfry. The third pastor laughed at their struggles and shared his perfect solution. Based upon new membership trends, their elders simply baptized the bats and let them join the church as new members. Now they never see the bats!

The humor is easily found in this story because there is a touch of ironic truth attached to it, like most jokes. A common experience from many church leaders is to have someone join the church and then not see that person for some time. Joining a church can often be due to the good intentions. People want to return to their spiritual roots, or they are entertaining the pretense of making a spiritual connection for the sake of family or friends, or even clients.

It is a puzzle what it is about membership that leaves some people with the notion that technically having their names on the church rolls is equivalent to salvation, the abundant life, fruitfulness, or fulfillment. None of these values is synonymous with church member rolls. While membership is one human attempt to set some visible boundaries on who is among the saved and who is not, membership may propagate the illusion that maturity is achieved and transformation is a non-issue.

Some problems are obvious. Being a member can be spiritually misleading to many. A sense of spiritual security someone may have due to official membership does not equate to living the abundant life God intended, with a peace and contentment free from circumstances.

The culture which permeates the community can be very problematic as well. Comfort and appearances rank very high among the cultural values. The ethos of the community greatly influences Highland Park Presbyterian in these adverse ways. The affluence in the surrounding neighborhoods creates unique problems that most other churches do not experience. With all the resources and opportunities at the disposal of many members, members can find themselves very distracted from making the church and their faith a priority in their lives. The ranches and lake homes are frequently a weekend retreat, pulling people away from making weekly corporate worship a regular part of their spiritual diet. Financial resources are continually perceived as a way of keeping score in life and falsely determining God's favor. These same resources also perpetuate a false sense of security for many. With all that surrounds the flesh, the soul is smothered and may be lost in cacophonous opportunities.

Many in the congregation struggle with an over abundance of materials.

Regardless of someone's financial status, whether they are poor or rich, materialism can be a stumbling block. Materialism is an idol which is not exclusive to the wealthy. One does not have to be rich to wrestle with that temptation. All humanity is tempted to bow the knee to materialism. While materialism is not limited to the wealthy, there is in the surrounding community, a conspicuous consumption of wealth.

The bottom line for many is whether or not they will be givers or takers. The consumer mentality can be overwhelming. With the latest in fashion represented in the pew and the newest model cars parked along the streets, "having" is a paramount value for many. Having a membership, having a place among the people in the community church, and "having it all together" are praiseworthy. To have these things on one's dossier is perceived as virtuous.

For all those who have responded on some level of faith to join the church body, a spiritual foothold exists. Many have proactively accepted God's grace and, moment by moment, they seek to be faithful in life. They know that the disciple's life is hard and they know the risks. The disciple has three main struggles. The disciple struggles against the world, which is always seeking to press upon people its ideals, gods, and values. Conforming to the world's standards is a relentless foe. As long as disciples live on this side of heaven, the world will not surrender the fight.

Disciples also fight against Satan and his schemes. While Scripture reveals small glimpses of Satan, we have an incomplete picture of Satan's influence. Satan is a defeated foe, who is not divine, and thus not omnipotent, nor omnipresent. However,

Satan is real and dangerous. Satan has the means to cause harm, and Christ's disciples are not impervious to Satan's attacks.

The third arena of conflict for disciples is their own flesh. The fallen human nature within every person is real. Disciples have, by faith, crucified the sinful nature, yet the struggle for dominance remains a daily battle for all believers. The disciple's battle against the flesh, the world, and Satan is daunting.

Transformation of New Disciples through Church Membership

The Church is not looking for a draw or a stalemate. In Jesus Christ, we have victory. As the Church continually prays for God's kingdom to be realized in its full glory, we can reasonably expect the Church, and the individual members of the Body of Christ to experience transformation. Transformation is promised by God and should be sought by all disciples. Disciples should be changing throughout their lives to be more like Christ, adopting His mind, while resisting the world's efforts to conformity.

To transform the disciple, the Holy Spirit will work as the Spirit wills and at a perfect pace known only to God. The resources for transformation at God's disposal are limitless. God may use circumstances, a crisis, or any of a number of means as a catalyst for transformation. Apart from the grace of God, transformation cannot be experienced. Yet, with God's direction, His disciples are commanded to use their spiritual gifts to build each other up in the body. Disciples are called to be a blessing to disciples. Disciples are also commanded to make disciples by teaching them to obey all that Jesus instructed. As the individual disciple seeks to be faithful with that responsibility, the church has turned

to programs to foster that transformation, and Highland Park Presbyterian is no exception.

Highland Park Presbyterian has created or adopted many programs with the purpose of fostering transformation from babes in Christ to spiritually mature disciples. The primary philosophy used has been the “attractional” model of ministry. Sunday schools for all ages have been the longest standing tradition and means used by the Presbyterian denomination and this congregation. Small groups have been pursued over the decades and many event-driven methods of discipleship and spiritual formation have been promoted likewise. The programs and events were hosted at the very nice church facilities. People from all degrees of spiritual maturity were invited to come to the church plant for instruction and fellowship. All of these programs are a means to bless the family of faith, and they were intended to foster spiritual maturity and fulfill the Great Commission.

A role the pastors play in discipleship at Highland Park Presbyterian is to consistently press home the point that disciples learn, follow, and reproduce disciples. Without the constant push for discipleship and the need to remain faithful and obedient, it would be all too easy for Christians to become lazy and remain uninvolved. The new member needs that priority established for him or her at the time of joining the church. The pastor helps model discipleship and seeks to make every opportunity within the church complement the mission of the church – to be about the ministry of making disciples.

Christian Education and Obedience in Transformation

One of the long-standing, underlying beliefs in denominations with Christian education is that the instruction received and the fellowship enjoyed is sufficient for spiritual growth. The philosophy of dispensing information so that the members may have knowledge does not equate to transformation. Jesus' command was to teach obedience, not to merely teach content. The estimated eighteen-inch gap between the brain and the heart is an almost impassable gap, which information alone cannot bridge. The accumulation of information may lead to understanding, but with no guarantees that it leads to wisdom. Many times, the acquisition of biblical knowledge leads to a smarter sinner, not a transformed disciple. More is needed for transformation to occur, but not necessarily more education.

The central ingredient lacking most of all is obedience. Just as Adam and Eve had the information needed to remain in the garden of Eden, they failed to exercise the obedience expected from God. Disciples most often fail to live the righteous and abundant life God offers, not because they do not have all the information needed, but because they do not apply to their lives the Christian education they have already received. Putting into practice what we already know somehow escapes many disciples today. It is easier to remain passive than to risk a mistake or to sacrifice comfort. Yet God's clear call is for each of His children to demonstrate undivided love to Him and to neighbor. Love is a verb, and for love to be real, action must be present, which is favorably disposed towards other's best interests.

To remain unmoved or lukewarm towards God's grace by remaining inactive is to deny the effectual love of God. A disciple who is aware of the cost of God's grace toward His children cannot remain dispassionate, but will respond with service.

With the effectual call of God in the air, the disciple seeks to be a learner, a follower, and a reproducer of Jesus Christ. The disciple learns what God has revealed about His plan of redemption, His kingdom, and how to live as a child of the King. The disciple seeks to honor the savior by following in the steps of Christ: to live like Him. Many disciples may go this far, which is respectable. However, the goal of a disciple is not to personally learn and behave as Christians, but to also help others, too, to be learners, followers, and reproducers of Jesus Christ. The call to action has sounded. To hear is to obey the call, surrendering to the will of Him who does the calling. To hear and not respond, like learning but never applying, is to miss the point.

The quantity of information determined to be sufficient for action is not qualified. For example, the command to love need not be parsed and dissected laboriously, but it can be treated thus to the point of inactivity. To learn to love requires a demonstration of the acquired education. A lecture on love may penetrate the ears, but to experience love transforms people. Applying what God commands changes two people, the one who acts on the command and the recipient of such action. When life touches life, the lessons heard and applied ultimately mean a soul is touching another soul. That degree of spiritual involvement brings about real change.

Statistics typically reveal that people retain anywhere from 6 percent to 15 percent of what they hear in a lecture. However, people retain as much as 90 percent of what

they experience. Experience continues to be a more powerful shaping tool in the lives of people than a book or lecture. To move people toward action, where they experience the transforming power of God through their faithful obedience, is a never-ending task. Just as every good lecture or sermon should contain action steps or application points, every disciple should have ministry, not only on his or her heart and mind, but in hands and feet.

Ministry through the Church and Well beyond Its Doors

The good news for many disciples is that ministry is not limited to the events and programs promoted by the church staff. Ministry does not need to be a 501(3)C, not for profit organization. God has redeemed our lives and He has commanded us to work. Ministry is using whatever God has provided to bless Him and the world around us. Creating jobs, even if the “bottom-line” is for profit, is a ministry for all those involved. The good that comes from the good that is done is a blessing. Ultimately, more disciples can be in ministry than is realized by the majority of members. The avenues for ministry are exceedingly diverse, and the ways disciples can minister are unique for them.

Currently, the numerical impression is yet to be calculated, with the shepherd leading and serving as mentor. The vision casting and the recruitment and training of shepherds is an ongoing process. The roll of shepherds as mentors is a work in progress with great promise of a fruitful harvest.

The immediate impression of the shepherd as mentor is that the shepherds are greatly appreciated and are relationally making a difference. The reduced ratio of

shepherds to new members is reducing the load upon each shepherd, which will correlate to better relationships and more follow-up.

There will be an effort to reduce the ratio of six new members to one shepherd, down to three or four new members to every shepherd. Many current prospective shepherds are thoroughly involved in the life of the church and in ministry. Having shepherds give up their community and put their other interests and ministries on hold for six to seven weeks is a sacrifice some do not want to make. Along the same lines, having shepherds trained often takes more than one experience of shepherding. The training in the classroom in preparation works to some degree, but, until the shepherd experiences the mentoring role, it is difficult to grasp the role. However, the more the shepherds are equipped on the front end the better. It would be easy work if new members were all 100 percent willing, wanting, and just waiting to be shepherded to the ministry God has for them, but they are not. There is some progress, in that we see a trend towards more involvement from the new members, but, prior to this increased effort to offer mentor training, there are no statistics available for comparison.

There is a desire for a healthier congregation. The resources are abundant, which also means God's expectations are high. God knows what the congregation of Highland Park Presbyterian Church is capable of. Yet the resistance to change is high. Over time, as the vision for every member to be in ministry is pursued, starting with the new members, the ethos and culture of the congregation will change. As the Lord brings new members into our body, in several years' time, a congregational transformation will occur, by God's grace.

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