Covenant Strategy through Community, Spiritual Formation, and Mission for Renewal at Clear Lake Presbyterian Church

Stephen P. Oglesbee

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Website: [www.tren.com](http://www.tren.com)
E-mail: [rwjones@tren.com](mailto:rwjones@tren.com)
Phone# 1-800-334-8736
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COVENANT STRATEGY THROUGH COMMUNITY, SPIRITUAL FORMATION, AND MISSION FOR RENEWAL AT CLEAR LAKE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Written by

STEPHEN PRESTON OGLESBEE

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A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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BY

STEPHEN PRESTON OGLESBEE
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ABSTRACT

Covenant Strategy through Community, Spiritual Formation, and Mission for Renewal at Clear Lake Presbyterian Church
Stephen Preston Oglesbee
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2012

This ministry focus paper presents a process for session and staff to create a leadership team covenant that will lead to a sustained missional, communal, and spiritually formational culture at Clear Lake Presbyterian Church (CLPC) in Houston, Texas. The congregation is forty-five years old and has 1,100 members. Located near the Johnson Space Center, CLPC is faced with the challenge of exploring new ways to be faithful to the mission of God in an increasingly postmodern society. It is confronted with the challenge of a nearly complete turnover of program staff coinciding with the arrival of its new lead pastor.

The paper has three major parts. Part One examines the critical leadership issues facing CLPC and the church’s ministry context. This section also assesses the shortcomings of the missional church and spiritual formation literature that CLPC leaders have studied. Part Two analyzes four major covenants in Scripture and presents the three theological themes that are present in all of them. Part Three applies these biblical and theological conclusions to a specific plan to develop a leadership covenant at CLPC.

This project assumes that the culture of an organization, shaped by its formal and informal agreements, is foundational to effective goals and strategies. It also assumes that organizational leaders play a critical role in shaping organizational culture. Finally, it is important to clarify that the project provides an informational and theological framework to design a process of covenant making as opposed to determining how a covenant ought to be written.

Content Reader: George Cladis, DMin
Words: 250
To my wife, Kendra, who is a daily demonstration of covenant grace by
loving me and believing in me far more than I deserve
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INTRODUCTION

Clear Lake Presbyterian Church (CLPC) is on the cusp of rebirth. The key to rebirth does not lie in developing a new mission statement or creating another new program. Instead, the first step lies in gaining fresh clarity of identity as the people of God in covenant relationship with one another, with God, and for the world. Embracing this collective identity entails being communal, spiritually formational, and missional—which this project soon will show.

As CLPC ministry leaders grapple with this covenantal identity as their first task, they in turn will shape the entire organization. The expected result will be a congregation that changes the world not only by who they are as a people but also by what they accomplish as an organization. This ministry focus paper presents a process for session and staff to create a leadership team covenant that will lead to a sustained spiritually formational, communal, and missional culture at Clear Lake Presbyterian Church in Houston, Texas.

Several factors combine to make this a particularly strategic time of rebirth for this forty-five-year-old congregation of 1,100 members. First, membership and worship attendance have waned in recent years. From a peak membership of 1,474 in 1997, CLPC lost over four hundred members by 2008. Worship attendance tells a similar story. Average weekend worship attendance reached the church’s lifetime high in 1998 with an average attendance of 625 but dropped to just fewer than five hundred in 1997. While

\[1\] Lisa Jacobson, reference archivist for Presbyterian Historical Society, email to author, June 9, 2010.
church membership and worship attendance may be poor indicators for overall church effectiveness and health, these statistics nonetheless tell a story of fewer people choosing to formally affiliate with the congregation.

A second factor that makes this an especially critical season for CLPC’s rebirth is the significant influx of new staff at the church. Coinciding with my arrival as the new lead pastor, CLPC experienced a near complete turnover in staff. The associate pastor and four ministry directors serve in roles that are completely new to them. Furthermore, four of the five are ministering at CLPC as their first full-time call. A team new to the congregation—and, in large part, new to ministry—gives these staff ministry leaders, along with their elder ministry leader counterparts, the chance to forge a covenantal identity that will impact current and future ministries.

Finally, the current cultural milieu and specific community context make this a particularly important time for CLPC to re-examine its core identity. The Clear Lake area, home to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA) Johnson Space Center (JSC), is dominated heavily by the aerospace industry. In practical terms, wide-scale job loss within the industry raises questions about the church’s long-term ability to support its burgeoning facility, full array of paid staff, and vast range of ministry programs. However, the waning economy and job cuts for NASA contractors point more importantly to issues of purpose and identity. JSC’s historic mission of human space flight no longer seems relevant in light of the current administration’s space priorities. In a startling and similar way, CLPC is struggling to find footing in a culture that increasingly presses organized religion toward the fringe in lieu of more
individualistic pursuits of spirituality. The displacement of Western enlightenment thinking pushes both the greater JSC-influenced community and CLPC to explore new ways of being effective and relevant in a postmodern world.

Establishing a leadership covenant is a primary step toward CLPC’s renewed relevance for effective ministry since the culture of an organization, shaped by its formal and informal agreements, is foundational to effective goals and strategies. The spoken and unspoken promises of a given organization necessarily affect its behavior and function. Furthermore, the leaders of an organization play a critical role in shaping a sustainable organizational culture. Therefore, the specific target for this ministry focus project is ministry leaders at CLPC.

Ministry leaders are defined as actively serving session members, the called pastors, and full-time program staff. Collectively, this group sets vision and direction for the church. They also are charged with implementing programs according to that vision. The CLPC church session is comprised of fifteen elders in three classes. Elders are assigned in pairs to a specific ministry area, and each pair of elders is “yoked” to a program staff member. The program staff team consists of me as lead pastor, an associate pastor of spiritual formation, a director of outreach, a director of young family ministry, a director of student ministry, and a director of worship.

This ministry focus paper presents a strategy for this new team of staff along with the session to create and commit to an intentional ministry covenant. The ministry covenant will lead to a sustained culture of community, spiritual formation, and mission at CLPC. The specific objective of this project is to provide an informational and
theological framework to design a process of covenant making for CLPC ministry leaders.

Chapter 1 presents the crisis and opportunity facing CLPC and frames the project in the congregation’s specific historical and cultural context of Houston’s Clear Lake area. CLPC has had a rich and successful history following a familiar pattern of success. Historically, the congregation has relied on a vast array of staff-driven programs to attract new membership. In order to house these programs and provide room for future growth, CLPC followed a well-executed succession of building projects. This formula for “success” proved reliable and resulted in steady numerical growth and community impact. However, recently CLPC has fallen into steep numerical decline. It is saddled with significant financial debt from its last building project and has had unprecedented turnover of paid staff since my arrival as senior pastor in March 2008. As Chapter 1 will demonstrate, CLPC is not alone in discovering that past methods of success are unreliable for a changing cultural environment.

Chapter 2 examines two bodies of literature that CLPC congregational leaders have explored to find answers to the present ministry crisis. The missional church movement, as characterized by Reggie McNeal in The Missional Renaissance, promises the answer is to engage the surrounding community with outreach.² The spiritual formational movement, characterized by Dallas Willard and James Bryan Smith, seems to

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suggest that the answer is an inward focus on a congregant’s individual spiritual maturity.\(^3\) Chapter 2 demonstrates that both of these movements, as they have become popularized, tend to make the other approach secondary. Instead, CLPC seeks to find a biblical and relevant model for ministry in the theology of covenant which equally and collectively affirms God’s agenda for community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement.

Chapter 3 begins the theological reflection section of the paper and starts by analyzing four major biblical covenants: the Noah covenant, the Abraham covenant, the Sinai covenant, and the Last Supper covenant. Drawing upon this biblical analysis, Chapter 4 demonstrates three consistent themes present in God’s covenant making. It will show how every covenant reflects the Trinitarian and inherently relational character of God, since God’s covenants are communal. Second, it will illustrate how every covenant is for the purpose of shaping a unique people set apart for God, since God’s covenants are spiritually formational. Third, it will argue that each covenant reflects God’s desire to bless and redeem creation, since his covenants are missionally engaging. Ultimately, this project considers how a CLPC covenantal identity reflecting these themes can impact and engage contemporary culture.

Part Three unfolds the strategy for creating a covenantal identity at CLPC by establishing a ministry leadership covenant. Chapter 5 begins with an overview and timeline of the leadership process. In this plan, church leaders will study and experience

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community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement as these relate to covenant making. It provides the basic building blocks from which a leadership covenant will be formed.

Chapter 6 presents a specific plan and sequence for developing a CLPC leadership covenant. This final chapter also considers ways the leadership covenant is promoted to the congregation as well as a plan for renewing the leadership covenant annually. The chapter concludes with a measuring tool to determine the ongoing effectiveness of the covenant.

As CLPC ministry leaders embrace the three-fold covenantal identity of community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement, it is hoped that they will begin to transform the congregation into a world-changing organization. The church has the potential to become a witness to the world of God’s grace and transforming power through changed lives. In this way, the Clear Lake congregation will be able to demonstrate how people can live together in redemptive community and serve as an instrument to heal brokenness in local neighborhoods and on a global level.
PART ONE

CRITICAL ISSUES AND CONTEXT
CHAPTER 1
CRISIS AND OPPORTUNITY FACING CLPC

This chapter analyzes methods upon which CLPC has relied for accomplishing ministry success. These methods include attractive facilities, programs, worship events for new-member recruitment, and then taking care of the emotional needs of church members once they join. Such an approach to ministry heavily depends on staff and facilities. However, when the physical campus is compromised or the paid staff team is in flux, this kind of ministry success wanes.

After examining CLPC’s approach to ministry in the past, this chapter will analyze broader cultural trends that contribute to contemporary disillusionment with the institutional Church. Younger generations increasingly are disaffiliating with traditional local congregations, and long-time church involvement alone offers little guarantee of genuine spiritual growth. Forty-five years into its life, CLPC is on the tail end of a seven-year transition of staff and facility renovation. The congregation exists in a cultural landscape radically different from the one in which it was birthed. CLPC cannot simply repeat a cycle of staff-driven and facility-driven approach to ministry. It must address more fundamental questions of identity, in order to aptly confront its current situation.
As past methods of ministry success no longer fit a changing cultural and community environment, Clear Lake Presbyterian Church faces a crisis. Despite the difficult predicament, this crisis is actually an opportunity. The arrival of an entirely new staff team offers a unique chance to launch a freshly relevant and biblically faithful approach to ministry.

**CLPC’s Past Ministry Success**

Clear Lake Presbyterian Church began in the mid-1960s as NASA’s Johnson Space Center was taking shape nearby. The barren Texas Gulf Coast prairie land surrounding the sleepy resort area of Clear Lake gave way to a burgeoning suburb of Houston. Early in its history, CLPC set its sights on acquiring property and building facilities. The initial methods of ministry success included building solid structures to attract people, implementing programs, and providing effective congregational care.

**Build Buildings**

According to church historians Connie Nyquist and Byder Wild, CLPC first began by meeting in the home of one of its founding members.¹ After it outgrew that space, the congregation worshipped in the basement of a local bank, whose president was also a founding member of Clear Lake Presbyterian Church. Barely two years old on July 2, 1967, the fledging congregation of 152 members voted to begin construction on a $150,000 multi-purpose sanctuary/fellowship hall. Six years later, for a cost of $120,000, the original structure was expanded to include a Christian education wing. In 1981 CLPC

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¹ Connie Nyquist and Byder Wild, *Forty-Year History of Clear Lake Presbyterian Church* (Houston: Clear Lake Presbyterian Church, 2005), 1. All church history is taken from this document, unless otherwise noted.
broke ground on a dedicated sanctuary. A short time later the congregation began feeling overcrowded with inadequate program space for youth, choirs, nursery, and toddlers. In 1989 the physical campus expanded again with the construction of a “Church Life Center,” which included a gym, commercial kitchen, and expanded choir rehearsal space. Most recently, in 2005, the original multi-purpose fellowship hall building was razed to make room for a new administrative and children’s education building. This project accompanied the renovation of the main sanctuary and completion of the previously unfinished second floor of the Church Life Center. The total cost of this project was more than $4 million.

While this most recent renovation and expansion project is examined at length later in the chapter, it is significant to note here the important role facility expansion played in the history of CLPC. In this era, no one thought seriously about not having a physical campus affiliated with the congregation. Early on, the congregation abandoned the ministry strategy of meeting in people’s homes or in leased business space in favor of constructing a gathering place for members and prospective members. They reasonably assumed that a legitimate church would need a physical campus.

This ministry strategy succeeded as the community expanded rapidly. A high percentage of new residents relocating from other parts of the country had belonged to traditional congregations. In this era, when people thought of looking for a church, they usually thought of an address and a building. To emphasize, this is not intended to criticize the “build to attract” ministry strategy. Rather, CLPC ministry leaders intuitively understood the importance of buildings in shaping an identity toward the community. With
the exception of the most recent expansion, the need for more space to accommodate those who had been and who would be attracted to the church drove every building project.

Implement Attractive Programs

CLPC’s past success was not merely due to timely and successive building campaigns. To a greater extent, CLPC was successful because it created and sustained an ever widening array of programs designed to attract new members to the congregation. CLPC did not blossom into a full-blown “program church” until the arrival of its third senior pastor, the Reverend Doctor B. Jay Cannon in 1976. With the exception of a preschool that started in 1969, CLPC focused more on member care and internal programs of Christian education until Dr. Cannon arrived. Under his leadership, the church experimented with “Backyard Bible Schools.” These were regional vacation Bible schools for children throughout the Clear Lake Community. Each “Backyard Bible School” was sponsored by church members and held in the backyards of homes. CLPC also began an after-school tutoring program for families with working parents called Volunteers Insuring Success In Our Neighborhood Students (V.I.S.I.O.N.S.).

During these years, Clear Lake Presbyterian Church attracted the attention of the community with numerous musical productions including Godspell, Celebrate Life, Amahl and the Night Visitors, and The Maastricht Easter Play. A clown ministry called “Kingdom Kids” performed at community events throughout the area. The program that best typifies this era of ministry success is “The Joy of Sharing Christmas.”

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2 “Insuring” should be “ensuring,” however founding partners apparently thought the acronym was better off preserved with the word “insure.”
As the brainchild of Dr. Cannon, The Joy of Sharing Christmas had success as an attractional program at his previous church. Cannon sought to reproduce the program at CLPC. Its expressed purpose was to “draw the community in at no charge.”\(^3\) The Joy of Sharing Christmas ran annually each December from 1977 to 1994. For one weekend each year, just a few weeks before Christmas, dozens of volunteers transformed the CLPC church campus into an interactive Christmas display. Workers converted the large fellowship hall into one of four different Christmas Village scenes: an international village one year, a Western village the next, followed by a small-town American village, and the last in the rotation was a reproduction of Bethlehem and the first Christmas. Artists from the congregation painstakingly painted all the sets. Craft work stations for children were set up in every room throughout the Christian education wing. People dressed in costume. Various drama and musical groups from the congregation performed during the two-day event.

Preparation for The Joy of Sharing Christmas began each year in May. During this time, the congregation collected all the necessary craft supplies, made costumes, and organized volunteers. While admission to The Joy of Sharing Christmas was free, church members opened a Christmas Store to sell donated crafts, desserts, and cookies in order to underwrite some of the expenses.

The Joy of Sharing Christmas typifies CLPC’s attractional approach to programmatic ministry in many positive ways. The congregation quickly rallied around the senior pastor’s vision for this event and worked tirelessly every year for seventeen years to make it happen. As the congregation delivered a reliably excellent product year

after year, CLPC’s reputation in the community grew. Touring Clear Lake Presbyterian Church’s Christmas extravaganza became an annual tradition for many families in the Clear Lake Community. While there are no specific statistics about how many of the estimated one thousand guests to The Joy of Sharing Christmas translated into active membership at CLPC, the congregation believed that providing young families positive exposure to the church would lead them to seek it out, if they decided to look for a church home. In short, CLPC gained a positive reputation in the community for the event.

When the Reverend Jack Haberer was called to CLPC in 1994, he capitalized on the success of CLPC’s attractional programs approach to ministry. Under Rev. Haberer’s leadership, the church intentionally sought to expand the number of programs offered. According to *CLPC History*, Rev. Haberer said he “set about to turn CLPC into a ‘supermarket church’ with lots of options for involvement by busy people.” While Rev. Haberer recognized the value of the attractional program approach to ministry success, it was his leadership in two other arenas of ministry which stands out: “seeker sensitive” worship, which targeted those unfamiliar or uncomfortable with traditional church worship services, and a “100% Care Goal” which aimed at providing comprehensive pastoral care to every member of the congregation.

Design “Seeker Sensitive” Worship

CLPC was an early pioneer in the Saturday night worship genre when the church’s second pastor, the Reverend Jim Simmons (1970-1975), worshipped informally with congregants the evening before the “main” worship services Sunday morning. Rev.

\[\text{Ibid., 32.}\]
Simmons also introduced an informal guitar-led Sunday morning worship service. This “folk service” of the early 1970s was an early precursor to the contemporary “seeker sensitive” worship approach that was adopted formally under the Rev. Haberer’s leadership in 1997. The atmosphere was casual and informal. Worshippers sang from song sheets or an overhead projector, and prayers were unscripted.

While the Sunday morning folk service continued, Rev. Haberer and the session charged associate pastor Reverend Craig Goodwin with beginning a worship service on Saturday night that specifically would attract the “unchurched”—those unaffiliated with a church because they are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with traditional forms of worship. Church members who regularly attended one of the Sunday morning worship services committed to attending Saturday Night Worship (SNW) for six months to help start the program. The “seeker sensitive” approach used contemporary music and a highly casual environment to attract attendees who might not be comfortable with traditional church environments. SNW leaders avoided using traditional church terminology. They referred to the “narthex” as the “lobby,” the “chancel” became a “stage,” the “sermon” was called a “message,” and it was delivered from a “lectern” rather than a “pulpit.” Traditional Presbyterian liturgical elements also were eliminated from the worship order. There was no formalized unison prayer of confession, affirmation of faith, doxology, or Lord’s Prayer. A more casual environment was encouraged as worship leaders and attendees dressed casually and enjoyed Starbucks’ coffee before and during the worship service.

Again, these combined elements were designed to attract people searching for a spiritual connection with God but who had no previous experience with church and who, presumably, would not be attracted to a traditional Presbyterian worship experience. To
date, the attractional worship approach proved only moderately successful for drawing in those with little or no previous church experience. Rather, SNW mostly attracts regular church attenders who prefer the more contemporary music, the casual atmosphere, or an alternative worship time to Sunday morning.

Care for Church Members

In addition to instituting a “seeker sensitive” worship service, Rev. Haberer initiated the “100% Care” goal for CLPC to ensure that every member of the congregation received pastoral care in times of emotional crisis, personal loss, or hospitalization. While this goal was formally expressed under Rev. Haberer’s leadership, this ministry value actually reaches deep into CLPC’s history. From its earliest days, CLPC placed a premium on making members feel cared for. Originally, the Saturday night gathering mentioned above was a small group gathering for prayer. Essentially, the group sat in a circle singing songs accompanied by Rev. Simmons on the guitar. Individuals came forward to sit on a chair in the center of the circle to receive prayer. The same pastor closed each service with the entire congregation joined together arm in arm.

In the early 1970s when congregational membership grew larger than one pastor could care for individually, the church instituted an “every member a minister” campaign—a training program for lay members in congregational care. The program arose from an awareness that “the needs of persons in every congregation were too numerous for one pastor to care for adequately.” The expressed purpose of the effort was to “help the pastor manage his usual load of caring calls.” The implication is that caring

\[5\] Ibid., 9.
for the emotional needs of congregants is essential and that while the caring role of the pastor may be managed or delegated to others it is nonetheless the pastor’s “usual load.” Accepting the mantle of responsibility for congregational care as a means of ministry success, Rev. Haberer instituted the “100% Care” goal. The session expended significant time and financial resources addressing the goal. These efforts included reorganizing the deacon board, training “Stephen Ministers,” hiring a full-time care coordinator, and calling a part-time visitation pastor.

**Past Ministry Success in Crisis**

Focusing on facility expansion, programs, and congregational needs worked especially well in a community that was rapidly growing within a cultural milieu that valued formal religious affiliation. As the Clear Lake area grew along with the Johnson Space Center and other supporting industries, it attracted from other parts of the country a percentage of people who were members of a church. In making their lives in a new part of the country, it was natural for those who previously had church affiliation to seek out a church experience similar to the one they had left. Successful churches in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s had attractive, well-maintained facilities, programs for all ages, and a professional staff to run these programs and care for church members. For many years, CLPC effectively reproduced this pattern. Eventually, however, worship attendance and membership began to wane, the church facility fell into crisis, and there was a massive

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turnover in paid staff. These combined factors began to indicate that past methods of success may not prove as relevant in the current and future ministry context.

Early Warning Sign and Statistical Trends

An early warning sign of impending crisis appeared very literally in the health of the senior pastor. Ironically, the senior pastor who most embodied the aggressive programmatic church model for CLPC suffered a heart attack in 1991. Apparently, the very ministry approach that had given such vibrancy and life to the church was taking a physical toll on its leader. The health crisis for Dr. Cannon signaled the end of his pastoral career, and he resigned the following year to enter into retirement. However, even before Dr. Cannon’s heart attack, warning signs were surfacing that CLPC could not effectively maintain the pace of church programs it was trying to sustain. The iconic church program, The Joy of Christmas, was demanding more and more resources from the congregation. After seventeen years “The Joy,” as the event came to be known, was anything but joyful. Preparation for the event began earlier each year as the congregation felt pressure to produce a bigger and better production. In the words of one long-time member, “The program wore people out.” Furthermore, some began to question whether the event was playing into the commercialism of the holiday.

Trends in membership and worship attendance served to mask the impending crisis. CLPC experienced its most intense period of numerical growth during Dr. Cannon’s leadership tenure. In a speech announcing his retirement, Dr. Cannon noted that

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Connie Nyquist interview by author, Houston, October 7, 2010.
during his sixteen years at CLPC membership had grown by 250 percent. Membership growth continued under Rev. Haberer’s leadership until CLPC reached its lifetime peak of 1,474 members in 1997. While CLPC worked to purge its rolls of inactive members, worship attendance continued to increase. In 2003, CLPC reached its lifetime peak average weekend worship attendance of 633. With such impressive numerical growth, there was little reason to believe anything was wrong with the current mode of ministry success. Little did the congregation know it was on the cusp of a steep decline. In a seven-year span, upon entering the new millennium, CLPC faced successive crises with its facility and its church staff, leading to significant loss of overall participants.

Facility Crisis

In October 2001, the same year that CLPC was at its all-time highest level of official membership, the congregation voted to begin a relatively modest $120,000 remodeling project of the sanctuary. The congregation was following the conventional wisdom that had guided it successfully in the past. Members continued to believe that a plan for facility expansion and renovation to accommodate church programs would attract new members to the congregation. However, as work began on the sanctuary, contractors discovered toxic black mold. Insurance adjustors advised the church to make a thorough search of the entire facility since an insurance claim for mold only could be made one time. As a result, contractors discovered more mold in the original building on campus which housed CLPC’s early childhood program, fellowship hall, and Sunday School classrooms.

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Two years later, after having considered various alternatives—including selling the property and relocating to a completely new campus—the congregation voted to continue with the sanctuary remodel as well as to raze the original Christian education facility and construct an entirely new building. The original $120,000 proposal now had ballooned into a $4.4 million project. From 2003 until completion of construction in 2005, the congregation worshipped in the church gym. Affected staff offices relocated to spare closets and shared classrooms. The congregation’s early childhood program used the ladies’ parlor as one of its pre-school rooms.

Many of those who were with the congregation and who remain with CLPC today look back on that time with affection. The construction period was inconvenient and stressful, but many believe God strengthened the congregation’s collective faith and resolve through that experience. Unfortunately, a number of families did leave the church during the renovation and construction project. In 2003, the year that the project began, CLPC’s average worship attendance stood at an all-time high of 633. By the time the construction project was completed, average weekend worship attendance had dropped 13 percent.

Staffing Crisis

CLPC had grown not only dependent on facilities to house programs to attract new members, but it also depended on staff to create and sustain these programs. Before

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9 Bill Parker, Nellie Carr, Melba Heselmeyer, and Will Groten, interviews by author, Houston, January 22, 2008.

the renovation and expansion was completed, CLPC endured a period of staff transition that proved even more detrimental to the congregation in terms of membership and worship attendance. Ultimately, the staffing crisis created more harm than the facility crisis.

As beloved associate pastors, Rev. Goodwin and his wife served alongside Rev. Haberer for nearly eight years. Again, it was during this time of stable staff leadership and effective facility usage that CLPC reached its zenith in terms of worship attendance and membership. These pastors left CLPC early in 2004 to pursue another call. A year later two new associate pastors, fresh from seminary, were called to replace Rev. Goodwin and his wife. However, only months after the new associates were installed and the building renovations were complete, Rev. Haberer resigned his position to take a new call. The two rookie associates provided leadership to the congregation during the three-year transition between Rev. Haberer’s departure and my arrival as the current lead pastor. When I arrived, the CLPC session and congregation had hoped to begin another long chapter of sustained stable leadership using its newly renovated facilities. Instead, CLPC faced what arguably would be its most tumultuous leadership transition.

In May 2008, less than two months after my arrival, a series of turnovers and traumatic events took place for various reasons. First, the associate pastor for congregational care and discipleship left CLPC to take another call. The following month, Reginald Brown, a beloved director of music for nearly twenty years, died of cancer. Hired as part of Dr. Cannon’s vision to broaden the scope of programming to attract the community to CLPC, Brown had been the architect of many of the successful musical programs that drew large crowds from the community. Just one month after Brown’s death,
the second associate resigned to assume another call. The following month in August, the
director of children’s ministry resigned her position to pursue an advanced degree.

Hurricane Ike struck the Clear Lake area nearly one month to the day after this
fourth successive staff vacancy in as many months. It served as an apt metaphor for the
storm of transition facing CLPC. In total, there have been thirty-one staff transitions to date
since March 2008. While church programs survived during this transition, it largely has
been a time of maintaining the status quo as the congregation waited for the new staff to
arrive and give direction. Hurricane Ike gave the congregation a temporary sense of
purpose and mission serving its members and the community in need, but there was no
sustained sense of larger purpose. Morale among members was low. Some felt betrayed
while others wondered if something was wrong with the church because so many staff had
left it.

Now, the arrival of an almost entirely new staff team provides opportunity for
CLPC ministry and its leaders to make deep change in the way it approaches church and
embodies God’s call as a congregation. While there is good hope that the current positive
staff arrangement can stay in place for a few years, CLPC now must grapple with larger
cultural issues that affect how the Clear Lake community engages spirituality and
perceives the traditional mainline Church. Unless these issues are addressed, the
congregation is doomed to repeat a more frequent cycle of staff transitions, facility-
dependent attractional programs, and declining membership and worship attendance.
However, what is truly at stake goes far beyond institutional survival. CLPC must
grapple with what faithful witness and ministry to the Clear Lake Community and to the
world looks like in the broader emerging cultural context in order to thrive as a church.

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Broader Cultural Trends

The landscape of twenty-first-century Christianity in North America is changing. The Christian faith is expanding throughout India, China, and Indonesia. Africa was 4 percent Christian at the start of the twentieth century and is now 47 percent Christian.  

McNeal says, “The bottom line is that the church is exploding all over the world except where a Constantinian brand of Christianity has had a lock as in the United States, Australia, and Europe.” In short, the epicenter of Christianity is no longer in the West, and “it is by now a truism to speak of North America as a mission field.”

Along with these global changes, the institutional Church in the United States is in upheaval having lost its once privileged status within the culture. Craig Van Gelder notes that between the early seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries churches assumed a position of expected privilege in public life. Congregations “attempted to influence policy, morals, and institutions, while building a host of private institutions under their control.” While the U.S. Constitution’s separation of church and state guarded against formal establishment of a state religion, it nonetheless fostered the formation of a “functional Christendom” as the nation’s founders “clearly expected the church to play

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11 Reggie McNeal, “OD724: Missional Leadership” (lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, August 2009).
12 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 51.
a primary role in shaping the social order.”\(^{16}\) Even the theological controversies of the early twentieth century, including two world wars which caused great debate about the Church’s precise agenda in shaping social order, did not stop what came to be described as “the full development of civil religion.”\(^{17}\)

However, the privileged position held by the Church well into the 1950s began to crumble in the social unrest of the 1960s. The civil rights movement, women’s movement, environmental movement, anti-war protests, and sexual revolution called into question the validity of civil religion. Furthermore, enlightenment thinking left society convinced that there was no authority beyond personal experience for moral truth. It did so by driving a wedge between facts, which were understood as objectively true, and values, which were understood to be subjectively true. As a result, people no longer assumed the Church had anything relevant to say on matters beyond personal faith. “Public policy became increasingly secularized, as public morals became increasingly personalized and privatized.”\(^{18}\)

These broader shifts in the Church’s relationship to culture in part may explain why fewer and fewer people today look to the institutional churches like CLPC for answers to their spiritual questions. Roughly 40 percent of Americans tell pollsters they go to church, but only 26 percent of those respondents actually attend. At CLPC only 32 percent of active members attend worship half time or more.\(^ {19}\)

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 53.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 54.

\(^{19}\) Linda Fouty, *Church Database Report* (Houston: Clear Lake Presbyterian Church, October 2010).
Younger generations of adults increasingly are drifting away from the institutional Church at an alarming rate.\textsuperscript{20} McNeal cites how 90 percent of teens active in high school youth groups no longer will attend church by their sophomore year of college. A third of these never return to the Church.\textsuperscript{21}

Membership demographics at CLPC tell the story of an increasingly aging congregation. Of the 880 active members who have birthdates on record, just under three-fourths (68 percent) are age forty-one or older. Only 155 are age twenty to thirty-five. While this accounts for an encouraging 17 percent of the total, only 6 percent of them attend worship half the time or more. In other words, these younger members in their twenties and early thirties are affiliated with CLPC in name only and do not actively participate. The aging trend of CLPC membership shows little sign of changing. CLPC added 205 new members in the last three years, but only twenty-eight of them are in their twenties or thirties.

The younger generations falling away from the church, in large part, embrace a postmodern worldview. According to Stanley J. Grenz, professor of Theology and Ethics at Carey Theological School, the term “postmodern” was coined in the 1930s. However, it was not until in the decades between 1960 and 1990 that postmodernism took hold as a broader cultural phenomenon.\textsuperscript{22} Those born during these decades tend to embrace this

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Ibid., 4.
\item[22] Stanley J. Grenz, \textit{A Primer on Postmodernism} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 16-17.
\end{footnotes}
view of reality which is more pluralistic, relativistic, and with no overarching or center of knowledge.²³

Another cause for waning church involvement is that many churchgoers are becoming disillusioned with the institutional Church. “There is widespread confusion about both the purpose and the message of the church of Jesus Christ.”²⁴ Churchgoers have been led to believe that if they fully invest in congregational activities by attending Sunday worship, joining a Sunday School class, and participating in church committees “they would experience a full and meaningful life.”²⁵ However, rather than producing more mature followers of Jesus, many churches simply produce “many tired, burned-out members who find that their lives mimic the lives and dilemmas of people in the culture who don’t pay all the church rent.”²⁶

While the Church’s position in Western culture has changed and church-going believers increasingly are disillusioned with the institutional Church, this does not mean that people see themselves as less spiritual. Rather, postmodern culture embraces an epistemology that calls into question “the Enlightenment’s confidence in empirical reason as the basis for knowledge.”²⁷ Postmoderns do not see truth limited to facts that can be proven through scientific discovery. Along with embracing ambiguity and mystery in

²³ Ibid., 20.

²⁴ Guder, “Missional Church: From Sending to Being Sent,” 2.

²⁵ McNeal, Present Future, 8.

²⁶ Ibid.

their quest for truth, postmoderns no longer embrace the enlightenment idea of the autonomous individual. They discard Western individualism in search of meaningful community.\textsuperscript{28} When it comes to Christianity, today’s postmoderns do not object to Jesus as much as they object to the Church. “People may be turned off to the church, but they are not turned off to Jesus. Jesus is popular.”\textsuperscript{29}

These realities have lead McNeal to conclude that “the current church culture in North America is on life support. It is living off the work, money, and energy of previous generations from a previous world order.”\textsuperscript{30} As that “previous world order” gives way to a new reality, followers of Jesus will find themselves either in denial while attempting to preserve the past or in abandoned trust to God’s agenda for the world. Thankfully, CLPC has resources available to sustain itself while seeking new direction. However, the crisis of opportunity is now.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 42.

\textsuperscript{29} McNeal, \textit{Present Future}, 12.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 1.
CHAPTER 2

THE SEQUENCE OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND MISSION

Ministry leaders at Clear Lake Presbyterian Church sense that the cultural landscape for ministry is changing and that past methods of success are no longer relevant. Expanding and renovating the physical campus and adding a greater variety of programs and worship offerings have not led to sustained increase in membership and worship attendance. More importantly, CLPC ministry leaders question the assumption that increasing membership and worship attendance are good indicators of ministry effectiveness. In the search for a biblically faithful and relevant model for ministry, CLPC ministry leaders face practical organizational concerns as well as more fundamental questions of identity and purpose.

Consequently, this chapter begins by briefly elaborating on the critical organizational issues facing new staff as they work with their elder ministry leader counterparts. Next, it explores two bodies of literature from the spiritual formation and missional church movements that CLPC ministry leaders have reviewed in search of a new model for ministry. Literature from the missional church movement suggests a model for ministry that focuses on outreach, while literature from the spiritual formation
movement advocates concentrating on individual spiritual growth. Finally, this chapter reviews how the themes of spiritual formation and missional engagement are ideals rooted in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), CLPC’s denomination.

The current chapter proves the need for a mechanism that deals with practical organizational questions as well as an ideological framework that addresses more fundamental questions of identity and purpose. This mechanism needs to work within the theological and organizational structure of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). As leaders of Clear Lake Presbyterian Church, the new staff team and their lay elder ministry counterparts need to know what they are doing and why they are doing it.

**Organizational Issues for CLPC Ministry Leaders**

CLPC ministry leaders need clarity about their roles in, and the purpose for, their “yoked” partnerships. They struggle to know how to effectively work together as cohesive teams. Due to this lack of clarity, the staff-elder partnerships have been unbalanced and ineffective. There are many practical issues that reflect this dynamic.

One of the practical issues facing CLPC ministry leaders is how to organize working relationships among its leadership teams. As mentioned earlier, each elder is assigned to a ministry area that is also the responsibility of a paid staff person. The ministry areas are discipleship, student ministries, worship, outreach, congregational care, finance, young family ministries, and personnel. Two elders are assigned to each area with the exception of the personnel ministry area, which only has one elder. Assignments are based on an informal negotiation process between the elders’ preferences and the needs and
preferences of the staff person. Some elders serve in the same ministry area for all three years of their term on session. Others rotate to different ministries each year of their term.

Specific expectations for the elders’ involvement in the ministry areas vary widely. Some elders only meet occasionally with the staff person associated with the ministry area and are only vaguely aware of the specifics of the ministry. In other cases, elders are highly involved with significant hands-on leadership roles. CLPC uses the term “yoke” to describe the ministry area assignments and the relationship that elders have with their designated staff member. However, neither current elders nor the newly hired program staff team know where the term originated. More importantly, staff and session members do not know what the “yoking” relationship is supposed to look like. CLPC ministry leaders need a process that can help yoked leaders of each ministry area define practical, specific expectations of the partnership.

Together with these organizational issues, issues of theological identity are important as well. CLPC ministry leaders must understand the fundamental identity and framework for their work. Even with all of the organizational issues addressed, CLPC ministry leaders still need to identify the purpose for which the yoked ministry partnership exists. This is why CLPC ministry leaders turned to literature from two different contemporary movements. Each promised a way forward.

**The Tension between Missional and Spiritual Formational Movements**

Like many mainline protestant churches, CLPC currently grapples with a growing self-awareness that past ministry success no longer fits this changing environment. In response to local challenges of declining membership and worship attendance, and in
response to more global cultural challenges to traditional mainline church expressions of Christianity, CLPC has been drawn to two streams of popular literature promising the way toward ecclesiological reform: the missional church movement and the spiritual reformation movement.

CLPC leaders first turned to literature from the missional church movement. This literature promises that ministry relevance and effectiveness lie in reaching out to the community. However, the literature from the spiritual formation movement that CLPC ministry leaders began reading later seemed to suggest that ministry relevance and effectiveness mean focusing on one’s individual spiritual growth. Both bodies of literature affirmed the importance of community in either spiritual formation or missional engagement. The emphasis on community resonated with ministry leaders, but they felt caught in the tension between missional and spiritual formation and which priority should come first.

Literature from the Missional Church Movement

The missional church movement has been called “the single biggest development in Christianity since the Reformation.”\(^1\) It promises a way forward for churches like CLPC that are experiencing declines in worship attendance and that have grown disillusioned with the promises of the church-growth movement. As illustrated in Chapter 1, for the past ten years CLPC failed to increase participation with attractive programs, buildings, and worship services. The 1998 book edited by Darrel L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America*, explains the reason for such decline. Essentially,

\(^{11}\) McNeal, *Missional Renaissance*, xii.
churches in North America are held captive to a “Christendom model” of Christianity.\(^2\) This model, which extends back to the fourth century when Emperor Constantine established Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, puts the Church in service to the culture. In a culture dominated by a Christian worldview the Church has become internally focused and mostly concerned with maintaining its privileged position within society. The various authors who penned the chapters compiled as *Missional Church* explain that North American culture increasingly is less influenced by Christianity.\(^3\)

Today the relationship of the Church to contemporary culture is more like it was in the first century, when Christianity was one among many religious options for people to choose. The ideals and values of contemporary culture are more foreign to Christianity. In this environment, mission is no longer something a church does in far-away places where people have not heard the gospel. Neither should mission be understood as a program of the church with a separate budget and committee. Rather, the entire congregational life should be seen “as an exercise in mission.”\(^4\) Drawn to these concepts, CLPC ministry leaders began a study of McNeal’s *Missional Renaissance* in early 2010. *Missional Renaissance* was a helpful guide to CLPC ministry leaders, as it presents the concepts of the missional church movement in a way that is theologically accessible for lay and clergy CLPC ministry leaders.

According to McNeal, the missional revolution begins by understanding that Jesus’ followers are the Church as opposed to belonging to a church. “Wherever

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\(^2\) Guder, “Missional Church: From Sending to Being Sent,” 5-6.

\(^3\) Ibid., 2.

\(^4\) Ibid., 6.
[missional followers of Jesus] are, the church is present.” For McNeal, and other missional church theologians, “the notion of ‘sentness’” lies at the heart of the Church’s identity. God is by nature a sending God. The Father sends the Son (John 3:16). Together the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17). As a continuing part of this sending movement, God sends Israel among the nations to be God’s agent of blessing (Is 42:6-7). In the same way, through Christ, God sends the Church to redeem and heal brokenness in creation (Acts 1:7-8). The local church then is not a place “where certain things happen,” like Bible study, worship, prayer, and programs. Rather the local congregation embodies “the people of God partnering with God in his redemptive mission in the world.”

According to McNeal, the way for CLPC to be a church in the world today is to redefine its place in the community “through service and sacrifice.” Even as the early Church was characterized by serving the community, CLPC must understand its essential identity in these terms. Missional Renaissance maintains that this new identity involves three fundamental shifts. First, CLPC needs to shift from an “internal focus to an external ministry focus.” Instead of focusing on internal needs and structures, CLPC needs to concentrate on the needs of the community. Instead of thinking of the church as a destination for people, CLPC may need to start thinking of itself as a “connector, linking

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5 McNeal, Missional Renaissance, 19.
6 Ibid., 21.
7 Ibid., 22.
8 Ibid., 24.
9 Ibid., 6.
10 Ibid.
people to the kingdom life that God has for them.”

To illustrate, a good airport does not try to keep planes full of passengers on the ground. Rather, it wants people to leave the airport and arrive to their destinations. Ultimately, the first shift requires CLPC to find a way to stop trying to attract people and start taking the church to people where they are in the community.

The second shift CLPC has discovered it needs to learn is how to transition “from program development to people development.” A people development approach to being a church looks for ways to customize the journey toward personal growth. Coaching is no longer limited to the sports arena or business executives. Spiritual life coaches are trained to come alongside others in creating specific goals and spiritual disciplines for individual growth. The church culture of a congregation focused on human development takes seriously the important role of members’ conversations that encourages one another to intentionally reflect on daily life. It is not enough to simply impart information. “Intentional debriefing should be part of our routine gatherings, whether in worship experiences or in small group encounters.” In the absence of this second shift, the first shift results in mission being just another outreach program.

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11 Ibid., 45.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 89.
14 Ibid., 95.
15 Ibid., 102.
Finally from McNeal, CLPC ministry leaders have understood their need to shift from “church-based to kingdom-based leadership.”\textsuperscript{16} Church-based leadership makes the clergy role about institutional preservation and therapeutic congregational care. The clergy’s role is to manage programs and to care for the members of the church. Kingdom-based leadership understands participation in the kingdom of God as the goal rather than institutional preservation. Church-based leadership is focused on denominational loyalties and the clergy’s status within the town or city. On the other hand, kingdom-based leadership is focused on the reign of God throughout the world. McNeal says this kind of leadership is “mission-centered, kingdom-focused, entrepreneurial, profoundly spiritual, reproducing, and culturally connected.”\textsuperscript{17}

CLPC ministry leaders found other concepts from McNeal especially helpful. For instance, much of the congregation’s vocabulary reflects a view that the church is somehow distinct from its members. CLPC members speak more naturally about “church” as a location, a building, or an organization rather than as being the people of God. Furthermore, CLPC ministry leaders adopted the idea of redefining an identity in terms of God’s mission to bless the surrounding communities instead of defining itself in terms of attractive programs. They liked the idea of trying to be “the Church” where people are, rather than trying to draw people to a building or program. Finally, they appreciated McNeal’s emphasis on redefining measurements for success in light of a missional identity. As a result of the book study, the session rewrote the facility usage policy to reflect a missional focus. The revised statement begins with this: “CLPC facilities are a

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 129.

\textsuperscript{17} McNeal, \textit{Missional Renaissance}, 132.
gift from God entrusted to our care for the purpose of welcoming, blessing and serving the community.\textsuperscript{18} While the original facility usage statement suggested that the purpose of the facilities was mostly to serve the ministries and members of CLPC, the new statement reflected the session’s desire to redefine itself in terms of an outward focus.

As a result of the missional church literature, CLPC ministry leaders became convinced that an outwardly focused, missional identity was the most important starting place. Now CLPC ministry leaders found themselves with a problem: how to help CLPC congregants enthusiastically reach out and bless the community. If only this could happen, they felt everything else would follow. People would “meet Jesus” in the faces and lives of those served, and this naturally would lead to increased spiritual hunger and spiritual growth. However, this conviction waned as CLPC ministry turned to a second body of literature that prescribed a different starting point.

Literature from the Spiritual Formation Movement

In addition to literature from the missional church movement, CLPC leaders also considered resources from the spiritual formation movement in an effort to discover a relevant and biblically faithful identity for a changing ministry environment. In a similar way that McNeal’s \textit{Missional Renaissance} provides a theologically accessible treatment of the missional church movement, Smith provides an accessible treatment of the contemporary spiritual formation movement. Smith is influenced heavily by Willard and

\textsuperscript{18} Clear Lake Presbyterian Church session, \textit{CLPC Facilities Usage Purpose Statement} (Houston: Clear Lake Presbyterian Church, September 28, 2010).
Richard J. Foster, both of whom have written extensively on the topic.\textsuperscript{19} Smith’s *Apprentice* series develops the ideas of spiritual formation presented in the ninth chapter of Willard’s *Divine Conspiracy* into a curriculum, which promotes growing in Christ-likeness for individuals and churches.\textsuperscript{20} In February 2011, Smith presented a weekend conference for CLPC. Many CLPC ministry leaders attended the conference and have studied his first book in their small groups.

In their respective approaches, McNeal and Smith observe a similar failure for the contemporary Church. McNeal says church members “wonder when. . . . they are going to experience the changed life they’ve been promised and expected to experience in church.”\textsuperscript{21} Again, according to McNeal, these disillusioned church attenders would experience “the changed life” once these congregations begin engaging their neighborhoods missionally. Smith notes a similar kind of cynicism as McNeal but offers an alternative prescription. Smith observes that “after years of trying and failing, [church members] lead a Christian life of quiet desperation, longing for change and yet certain it will never happen. So they sit in their pews each week, sighing silently, resigned to their fate.”\textsuperscript{22} According to Smith, however, the root cause is not due to the church’s lack of outreach. Instead, this sense of desperation lies in that the Church has failed to teach that

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{20}] Ibid., 12.
\item[\textsuperscript{21}] McNeal, *The Present Future*, 8.
\item[\textsuperscript{22}] Smith, *The Good and Beautiful God*, 19.
\end{itemize}
The key to helping church members shake their “quiet desperation” is to focus on their personal spiritual growth. The Apprentice series teaches that soul transformation involves four components. The first step is to replace the false narratives that shape our worldview with the narratives of Jesus Christ. This is the essence of Jesus’ invitation to “repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand” (Mk 1:15 KJV). Repentance literally means to change one’s mind. “Jesus understood that transformation begins in the mind.” The second step to soul transformation involves practicing spiritual disciplines, which Smith refers to as “soul-training exercises.” Spiritual disciplines are to the Christian what physical workouts are to the athlete. Soul-training exercises are specific physical and mental practices that help the Christian live naturally in the ways of the kingdom of God. The third step to soul transformation is participating in community. Spiritual formation is not an individualistic effort. Smith insists, “Spiritual formation happens most profoundly in the context of a group.” The final element to spiritual formation is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit helps change the believer’s narratives to those of Jesus and makes effective the

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23 Ibid.
25 Smith, The Good and Beautiful God, 19.
26 Ibid., 26.
27 Ibid., 27.
28 Ibid.
practice of spiritual disciplines. When it comes to community, the Holy Spirit is “like a symphony conductor, orchestrating our communal life of prayer and worship and prayer.”

As CLPC ministry leaders delved into the spiritual formation literature they became confused about their original conviction to focus primarily on outreach. The spiritual formation literature said that personal spiritual growth should be the primary sense of identity. It was clear from literature in both movements that community and relationships were fundamentally important, but it was confusing whether the CLPC community should be first and foremost about mission or first and foremost about spiritual formation.

On the one hand, McNeal states emphatically “that [missional] service to others is the first step, not some later expression of spirituality. We all know that we grow the most when we are helping and serving others.”

McNeal’s second missional shift, “people development,” is really more a commitment to relationship building than it is an agenda for progressing one’s own spiritual transformation into Christ-likeness. When he speaks of spiritual transformation, it is related to those outside the missional community. He makes the following claim:

We should feed hungry people. But when their stomachs are full, we should also teach them or mentor them or find them word, whatever we can do to elevate their capacity to provide for themselves. This moves them from being mere charity cases to being people. This turns our external ministry from being just another program of engaging church people in activity into engaging them with people as God’s partner in his redemptive mission. God is not more interested in developing people inside the church than those outside it.

29 Ibid., 30.

30 McNeal, Missional Renaissance, 105.

31 Ibid., 91.
On the other hand, Smith and the spiritual formation literature say focusing on personal spiritual growth is of first importance. The premise of the three-volume *Apprentice* series is that transformation begins with a correct understanding of the character of God and not with service to the community. As Smith puts it, “It all starts with knowing the God Jesus knows, and loving God with every fiber of your being. This is the spring and the foundation of . . . the entire Christian life.”

The first two volumes of the *Apprentice* series address the character of God and the character of the believer. It is not until the third volume, once these issues are presumably undertaken, that Smith turns to the question of how a Christ follower changes the world in which he or she lives. Smith even acknowledges that the sequence of his books may not hold completely true. “I am not saying,” Smith writes: “that unless you have mastered the first two books you ought not attempt this one. Sometimes we learn how to love by loving, how to forgive by forgiving and how to serve by serving.”

He lends credence to the idea that spiritual growth may take place as a result of serving and reaching out. For Smith, however, this goes against the normal pattern of spiritual growth. The first step normally is to grow “in intimacy with the God Jesus is and reveals,” and then the rest will follow.

Having explored literature from these movements, CLPC ministry leaders found themselves in a quandary. They identified with the challenges that the approaches from both movements seek to address. Fewer people are affiliating with formal institutional mainline congregations. The way people think and perceive the world is radically

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32 Smith, *Good and Beautiful God*, 14.

33 Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community*, 19.

34 Ibid., 18.
different than it was forty-five years ago, when CLPC was started. Many who participate in church programs do not see it making any real difference in their lives. However, embracing the approach of either movement to address these issues seemed to require making the other approach secondary. If CLPC ministry leaders buy into the premise of the missional church movement, then they must focus on reaching out to the community rather than helping people grow spiritually. On the other hand, if CLPC ministry leaders embrace the approach of the spiritual formation movement, then they must focus on helping people grow spiritually rather than serving in soup kitchens. What is needed is a way to bridge the best of both worlds into a single vision and focus for themselves and the congregation.

**CLPC’s Denominational Perspective: Spiritual Formation and Mission in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)**

Since its formation, Clear Lake has formed part of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), or PC(USA). Spiritual formation and missional engagement have been longstanding PC(USA) themes. These ideals form the core identity for the denomination and even are stated in its constitution. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) continues to express these commitments today in the face of a changing cultural environment.

The constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is predicated on a call to spiritual formation and missional engagement. The first chapter of the *Book of Order*, entitled “The Foundations of Presbyterian Polity,” acknowledges that Christ’s redemptive work through the ministry of the Holy Spirit calls every believer and the Church to “holy
living.” For Presbyterians, holiness is a gift from God and not something attained or earned. Nonetheless, God’s call to holy living means that the believer strives toward “purity, righteousness, and truth.”

The same chapter in the *Book of Order* states that the mission of God in Christ is what gives Presbyterians “shape and substance [to its] life and work.” Presbyterians believe the Church’s existence is rooted in God’s purposes for the world. The Church is “sent” into the world to participate in God’s mission to “care for the needs of the sick, poor, and lonely; to free people from sin, suffering and oppression; and to establish Christ’s just, loving and peaceable rule in the world.” Being sent into the world as partners in God’s redemptive work for the world stands at the heart of what it means to be Presbyterian.

The themes of spiritual formation and mission continue to find ample expression in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) today. A publication from the denomination’s *Office of Theology and Worship* called *Hungryhearts* offers assistance to congregational leaders and church members for spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is defined as “the activity of the Holy Spirit which molds our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ.” Presbyterians continue to explore ways to cooperate with the Holy Spirit’s work of holiness through spiritual disciplines like contemplative silence, Sabbath keeping, and prayer.

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36 Ibid., sect. F-1.01.

37 Ibid., sect. F-1.0302d.


In January 2008, the moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) convened a gathering of sixty individuals and twenty-six groups to discuss the denomination’s ongoing commitment to mission in the face of a changing global context.\(^{40}\) The gathering acknowledged that “the world has changed” because the world’s Christians are now mostly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America rather than in Europe and North America.\(^{41}\) The global context of Christianity is changing. However, Presbyterians continue to find their identity as the Body of Christ in the form of the Church “sent into the world to join God’s mission.”\(^{42}\)

Seven years of numerical decline, facility crisis, and staff upheaval—combined with the awareness of a changing cultural landscape—makes this present moment a strategic opportunity for Clear Lake as a PC(USA) congregation. CLPC needs a new approach to ministry that is relevant for today, historically congruent with PC(USA) tradition, and does not simply retread past methods of success. Biblical covenants equally uphold the importance of community, spiritual formation, and mission (Gn 6:1-9:17; 15, 17; Ex 20:1-17; Jn 13:31-35). As CLPC ministry leaders are shaped in their identity as covenant people of God, they in turn will influence the culture of the entire congregation with this same covenantal identity. A sense of covenantal identity for the Clear Lake congregation is the first step toward rebirth and renewal. Part Two will lay the foundation for this perspective both biblically and theologically.


\(^{42}\) Ibid.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 3
ANALYSIS OF MAJOR BIBLICAL COVENANTS

Aside from theological discussions and scriptural studies in the Old Testament, the word “covenant” is not used much in everyday conversation. In non-religious circles the word “covenant” most often refers to a legal agreement among homeowners in a suburban subdivision. Homeowner covenants specify deed restrictions and policies that homeowners in the neighborhood agree to abide by when they purchase a home in that community. These covenants protect property values by regulating architectural modifications and by ensuring a uniform standard of care and maintenance. Most covenants do not allow cars on cement blocks in the front yard or boats and RVs parked permanently in the driveway. Homeowners have to keep their lawns mowed, their sidewalks cleared, and the exterior of their homes in good repair. In short, covenants regulate a standard of behavior within a mutually agreeable value system.

This chapter begins with an overview of the Greek and Hebrew terms used in Scripture for the word “covenant” as well as the term’s various usages in the Old and New Testaments. After a brief review of Ancient Near East covenant-making practices, the bulk of the chapter considers four major covenants which serve as a framework for all
the major covenants in Scripture. This analysis will show that the essence God’s character and God’s central purposes for humanity are revealed in covenant making.

**Terminology**

Understanding scriptural covenants begins with an overview of the associated terminology. While the word “covenant” appears hundreds of times throughout the Bible, very little is revealed about the meaning of the term by studying its etymology. Rather, “covenant” as a biblical term is best understood as it is applied.

The Old Testament word for “covenant” is בְּרִית, while the Septuagint uses διαθήκη to translate the term. The word בְּרִית appears 284 times, while διαθήκη occurs only thirty-three. The term διαθήκη refers to the covenant at Sinai eight times (2 Cor 3:14; Gal 4:24; Heb 8:9; 9:4, 15, 20); four are references to the covenant with Abraham (Lk 1:72; Acts 3:25; 7:8; Gal 3:17), and three make reference to covenants between people (Gal 3:15; Heb 9:16-17).

The meaning of the word “covenant” itself is difficult to pin down. Rekha M. Chennattu of The Pontifical Institute of Philosophy and Religion in India points out that the Akkadian word for “bond” or “binding” has a close association with בְּרִית. This may indicate the idea of the “bond” of relationship that occurs between covenanting partners. However, other scholars such as Steven L. McKenzie conclude that academic study of the etymology of בְּרִית is inconclusive and offers little help in understanding the meaning.

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of the term.\textsuperscript{3} The late D. J. McCarthy, former professor of Old Testament Literature at The Pontifical Biblical Institute, concurs that “there are many different forms of covenant and these different forms imply different meanings.”\textsuperscript{4} Trying to understand the meaning of “covenant” from the word itself is confused further by the Septuagint’s selection of the term διαθήκη in translating the Hebrew term for “covenant.” In non-biblical language διαθήκη refers almost exclusively to last will and testament.\textsuperscript{5} Paul’s discussion in Galatians 3:15-25 reflects the double meaning behind the term. In that discussion, Paul uses the word διαθήκη to describe both a legal will as well as God’s covenant with Abraham. While English translations note a distinction, in the original Greek the word is the same. McCarthy concludes, “It is not easy to see which meaning should be understood as the New Testament meaning and there have not been wanting advocates of varying points of view.”\textsuperscript{6} In the end, it proves most helpful to arrive at the meaning of the word “covenant” by a careful study of how the term is used in Scripture.

There are at least four prominent words often associated with the word “covenant” in the Old Testament. The first word is the verb כרה which means to “cut.” This verb first appears in association with the word “covenant” in Genesis 15:18 after a ceremony in which Abram is instructed to cut animals in half. Another verb associated with the word “covenant” is קם, which means to “raise up” or “establish.” A third verb


\textsuperscript{5} Morris, \textit{The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross}, loc. 1030.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid.
that is used in the Scripture with the word “covenant” is the verb נתן, “to give.” The fourth prominent word often associated with “covenant” in the Old Testament is ovarian, which means “everlasting.” The phrase “everlasting covenant” first appears in God’s covenant with Noah in Genesis 9:16. Each of these terms reveals different aspects of God’s covenant making, as later analysis will show.

Covenant in the Old Testament

A brief survey of the Old Testament reveals a variety of covenants. Broadly speaking, however, these covenants fall into two categories: covenants among people and covenants between God and human beings. This overview shows how promise making and promise keeping of covenant are integral to human relationships. Clarifying agreements in all kinds of relationships, everything from informal friendships to formal political alliances, is part of what it means to be human. This human inclination comes from being created in the likeness of a God, who is a promise-making and promise-keeping God.

First, covenants between human beings apply to a variety of circumstances in the geo-political realm. For example, in Genesis 21:22-27, Abraham makes a covenant with Abimelech concerning water rights. In the absence of an agreement it was unclear who had rights to the water when Abimelech’s servants seized it (Gn 22:25). The covenant clarifies ownership and usage of the well. Later on Isaac swears a peace treaty oath in covenant with Abimelech in Genesis 26:26-31. The covenant allays fears of Ahuzzath (Abimelech’s advisor) and Phicol (the commander of Abimelech’s army) that Isaac might use his favor with God to bring harm to Abimelech. The covenant ensures peaceful

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7 All Scripture is taken from The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version (Nashville: American Bible Society, 1989) unless otherwise noted.
relations between the parties. However, not all human covenants in the Old Testament are established honestly. In Joshua 9, the Gibeonites deceptively convince Joshua to make a covenant with them (Gn 9:6). Even so, the covenant is a binding contract and Joshua must abide by it. This demonstrates the solemnity of covenant making in the Old Testament. Other politically motivated covenants between human beings in the Old Testament include David’s covenant with Saul’s army commander, Abner, in 2 Samuel 3:12-13. Also, Solomon and Hiram King of Tyre have a covenant in 1 Kings 5:12.

Some covenants in the Old Testament between human beings go beyond the geopolitical realm. These examples illustrate the essence of promise-making and oath-keeping acts, which are at the heart of covenant relationships. While Jonathan and David’s covenant (Gn 18:1-5) has political overtones, the essence of the covenant relationship is friendship. Jonathan makes a covenant with David, “because [Jonathan] loved [David] as his own soul” (1 Sm 18:3). References to covenants between human beings also include marriage (Mal 2:14 and Prv 2:17). The language of covenant is used by Job to describe his commitment not to “look lustfully upon a virgin” (Jb 31:1). Also, in Isaiah 28:15 the rulers of Jerusalem are said to have entered into a “covenant with death.” Covenant is the language of agreement between parties as well as the language of commitment, as in the example of Job.

The second category of covenant in the Old Testament is between God and human beings. While it can be understood that Adam and Eve live under a covenant with God in the Garden of Eden, the first time the word ברית appears in Scripture is in reference to Noah. Following God’s covenant with Noah, the next significant covenant
between God and human beings occurs in Genesis 15. God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 is established further with the covenant of circumcision in Genesis 17. God’s covenant with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai is the most commonly referenced covenant in the Bible. McKenzie aptly refers to this covenant as “the most prominent in the Hebrew Bible . . . [and] the Old Testament covenant.”8 The historical events surrounding the giving of that covenant are recorded in Exodus 24 through 34 and the Book of Deuteronomy. In addition to the covenant with Noah, the covenant with Abraham, and the covenant at Sinai, the next most significant covenant is the one between God and King David. However, the word בְּרֵית is not used in 2 Samuel 7 or First Chronicles 17, when God established David’s lasting dynasty. Only later on is this event described as a covenant in 2 Samuel 23:5, Jeremiah 33:21, and most especially in the Psalms.9

One last reference to covenant in the Old Testament should be noted, because it sets the stage for the use of the term “covenant” in the New Testament. The prophet Jeremiah speaks of the day when the Lord will “make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31). In speaking of this “New Covenant,” the prophecy recalls Israel’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt resulting in the covenant at Sinai (Jer 31:32). Unlike the covenant at Sinai, which was written on tablets of stone (Ex 24:12), the New Covenant will be written on the people’s hearts (Jer 31:33). Jeremiah’s prophecy indicates that the story of God’s covenant making is not final yet. One must look forward to covenants in the New Testament for the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy.

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8 McKenzie, Covenant, 4.

9 Ibid., 5.
Covenant in the New Testament

As noted above, διαθήκη—which is the New Testament’s word for “covenant”—occurs thirty-three times from the Book of Matthew to the Book of Revelation. This overview will demonstrate that the term διαθήκη is used in three different ways. First, διαθήκη is used in reference to God’s covenant with Abraham. Second, it is used to discuss Israel’s relationship with God in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. Third, the term διαθήκη is used in conjunction with the institution of the Lord’s Supper. This is important because the only reason discussion of the first two kinds arise is due to the third. In other words, it is only because Jesus establishes a “new” covenant at the Lord’s Supper that there are references to, and discussions of, an “old” covenant.

McKenzie divides these references into three categories: the gospels and Acts, the letters of Paul, and the letter to the Hebrews. Within the first category, McKenzie further distinguishes references in Luke-Acts from those of Jesus’ institution of the Lord’s Supper. The three mentions of covenant in Luke-Acts that do not pertain to the Lord’s Supper occur in Luke 1:72, Acts 3:25, and Acts 7:8. In all three instances, διαθήκη refers to God’s covenant with Abraham. The synoptic gospels (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20) and 1 Corinthians 11:25 all quote Jesus’ use of the word “covenant” in conjunction with the institution of the Lord’s Supper. References in this first category are divided between being applied to the Last Supper and to being applied to God’s covenant with Abraham. The use of covenant applied to Abraham in these instances is descriptive,

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10 Ibid., 84.

11 Ibid., 85.
while references to the Lord’s Supper reflect the institution of a new kind of relationship God is making with humanity.

The second category of references to covenant in the New Testament is found in how Paul uses the term in his letters. In the ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of Paul’s letter to the Romans he wrestles with God’s election of Israel in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. In this context, Paul mentions “covenant” in Romans 9:4 and Romans 11:27. Borrowing perhaps from Jeremiah’s language, Paul refers to himself as a minister of the “New Covenant” (2 Cor 3:6) as distinguished from the “Old Covenant” (2 Cor 3:14). Again, it is only due to Jesus’ institution of the New Covenant at the Lord’s Supper is there reference to the Old Covenant and the relationship between the two. Paul’s letter against the false teachers in Galatia discusses the role of covenant at length in Galatians 3:15-25 and again in Galatians 4:24. The final reference to covenant in the New Testament letters ascribed to Paul is in Ephesians 2:12, where he refers to covenant in the plural.

The third category of references to covenant in the New Testament applies to the Book of Hebrews alone. More than half of the New Testament’s usage of the term “covenant” is found in Hebrews. The word διαθήκη occurs seventeen times in this book. Here the writer’s discussion pertains to the work of Christ, who has established the New Covenant with humanity.

Covenant Making in the Ancient Near East

Covenant making is not unique to the biblical narrative. Contemporary practices of making treaties in the Ancient Near East may have influenced the understanding of
covenant in the Bible. In particular, the “suzerainty-vassal” covenant form has many parallels to God’s covenant at Sinai.

While opinions vary about extra-biblical sources of treaties that may have informed Israel’s covenant making, their existence further demonstrates how promise making and promise keeping are integral to being human. The possibility that Israel may have borrowed treaty forms from the socio-political sphere in the Ancient Near East demonstrates how much God has interwoven the importance of social contracts within creation.

According to Old Testament scholar Bernhard W. Anderson, Hittite archives reveal two types of covenants in the Ancient Near East. The first type involves a reciprocal agreement between two equal parties. In this parity covenant the parties of equal rank “bind themselves to each other by bilateral obligations.”\(^{12}\) The second type is a “suzerainty covenant” which involves a great king establishing a treaty with a subordinate power. In this arrangement, the suzerain pledges protection for the vassal state, while “the vassal is under obligation to obey the commands issued by the suzerain.”\(^{13}\) Anderson notes that the suzerain’s pledge of protection is no compromise of authority, and yet the treaty is more than a simple “assertion of power over an inferior as

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\(^{13}\) Ibid., 99.
though the vassal were forced into obedience.”\textsuperscript{14} In fact, suzerainty treaties go to lengths underscoring the king’s benevolence, “which evoke a response of grateful obedience.”\textsuperscript{15}

The Hittite suzerainty-vassal treaty has six characteristics. The preamble introduces the sovereign with official titles. Next, the historical prologue recounts the previous relations between the parties with special emphasis on the benevolent acts of the king toward the vassal. Also, stipulations outline the requirements placed on the vassal, including a pledge “not to recognize the sovereignty of other powers.”\textsuperscript{16} The next section prescribes attention to the treaty documents by safely preserving them and regularly reading the treaty publically. The fifth section invokes the gods of both countries as witnesses to the treaty. The last element of the suzerainty-vassal treaty is the sanctions imposed on the vassal-state in the event that it breaks the covenant.

Anderson notes that scholars find striking similarities between this international treaty form and the Mosaic covenant in Exodus 19 through 24. These similarities have led some scholars to conclude that the Sinai covenant is patterned after the suzerain-vassal treaty. The preamble and prologue seem present as God identifies himself in and then recounts his deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt in Exodus 20:1-2. Exodus 20:3-17, which demarcates the Ten Commandments, clearly parallels the stipulation portion of the suzerain-vassal treaty format. Finally, according to the pattern of the suzerainty-vassal treaty, Moses reads the covenant publically in Exodus 24:7. However,

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 100.
Anderson concedes that other scholars note striking dissimilarities between the forms.\textsuperscript{17} McCarthy is among those who conclude that “the resemblance to the treaty form is far from perfect.”\textsuperscript{18} So, while other socio-political treaty forms may have influenced the biblical covenant agreements, it will be most helpful to study the major biblical covenants as they stand in Scripture.

**Major Biblical Covenants in the Old and New Testament**

Covenants permeate the overarching narrative of Scripture. The central storyline of the Bible is God’s promise-making and promise-keeping relationship with humanity and creation. In particular, four scriptural covenants give focused expression to God’s character and purposes for humanity. God’s covenant with Noah (Gn 8:20-9:17) reveals God’s purposes of recreation and restoration for broken creation. God’s covenant with Abraham (Gn 15, 17) reveals God’s self-sacrificing love. God’s covenant at Sinai (Ex 20:1-17) expresses God’s intent for human relationships with one another and with God. God’s New Covenant at the Lord’s Supper (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25) reveals God’s covenantal purposes in Jesus Christ.

The biblical passages that discuss these covenants all share two things in common. First, they each specifically use the term *berith or diatheke*. Second, they each are passages where a covenant is inaugurated. This ensures that the study will address the most basic and fundamental themes of God’s covenants. Broadly excluded are passages where a covenant or covenants are simply referenced, since that would involve

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant*, 17.
examining nearly all of the Old Testament. Specifically, God’s covenant with David in 1 Chronicles 17 (2 Sm 7) is excluded from this study based on the selection criteria. While later writers, most notably the Psalms, refer to God’s promise to David as a covenant, the institution of the promise to the house of David does not use the term “covenant.”

This discussion will consider the biblical texts of these covenants as they stand today and not as the texts might have appeared from different sources. Other scholars, such as McKenzie, base their analysis of biblical covenants on the “documentary hypothesis.” This approach identifies various sources behind the first five books of the Bible and attributes the final outcome to a later editor. McKenzie attributes biblical language of covenant to the “Priestly” and “Deuteronomist” sources and dates their work to the time of the Babylonian exile (ca. 586-539 B.C.E.).

19 Anderson’s Understanding the Old Testament likewise interprets covenant in light of the source critical theory. Evaluating the merits of this approach lies beyond the scope of this study. Instead, this discussion will trace the development of covenant according to a biblical chronology of the scriptural narrative, for the purposes of understanding how God’s intentions for humanity are revealed.

God’s Promise to Noah

The “Noah covenant” is really a covenant with all of humanity and creation. As such, the roots of this covenant stretch back to the earliest pages of Scripture. The storyline of humanity’s relationship with God and with creation begins with God making

19 McKenzie, Covenant, 17.

20 Anderson, Understanding the Old Testament, 90.
human beings in his own image (Gn 1:27) and commanding them, along with all of creation, to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gn 1:22, 28). The formless void (Gn 1:2) and watery mist (Gn 2:6) that once characterized existence now are given shape and purpose by God.

Genesis 1 and 2 paint a picture of creation in which human beings care for the earth and the earth cares for them. Adam stewards the earth (Gn 2:15), names the animals (Gn 2:19), and is sustained physically by the fruit of the land (Gn 2:16). Adam, and his companion, Eve, live in harmony with creation and with one another. Most importantly, they live in harmony with God.

However, the storyline of Genesis quickly turns to rebellion in the third through sixth chapters. Creation resists the purposes by whom and for whom it was created. Tempted by the serpent to disobey the word of God (Gn 3:1-5), Adam and Eve seize the forbidden fruit from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gn 3:6). Their rebellion results in shame and disrupted relationship with God. God strolling toward Adam and Eve in the cool of the day (Gn 3:8) reflects the kind of relationship they had enjoyed with God but that is now forfeited. Furthermore, the earth that once provided for Adam and Eve now is cursed, and tending the ground is toilsome (Gn 3:17). Lamech cries out for relief, saying “from our work and from the toil of [their] hands” (Gn 5:29). God is displeased with what has transpired as well. God sees pervasive corruption and violence on the earth (Gn 6:11-12) and “that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil
continually” (Gn 6:5). Disrupted relationship with God, with creation, and with one another are the results of sin that God addresses in his covenant with Noah.

More than being simply displeased, God is grieved over what has taken place. “And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart” (Gn 6:6). In Genesis 1:31 God had declared all creation “very good.” Now God is resolved to “blot out” all creation; “people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air” (Gn 6:7). Therefore, the precursor to God’s redemptive covenant with Noah is an act of utter destruction.

Genesis 1:1 through 6:8 provides the backdrop for the first mention of the term “covenant” in Scripture. As McKenzie notes, Genesis 1:1-2:3 in particular “prepare[s] the reader for the series of covenants to come.” With Genesis 6:1-7 providing a kind of summary statement of the way things are, the character of Noah takes center stage in God’s interaction with creation; “But Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord” (Gn 6:8). In the midst of God’s declaration to utterly destroy every living thing on earth, God pledges to “establish covenant” (Gn 6:18). Theologian G. J. Wenham translates the phrase with the word “confirm” rather than “establish,” noting that the phrase indicates Noah is already in a covenant relationship with God. “He is not simply a perfectly righteous man; there is a covenant between him and God.” The primary intent of this covenant is expressed here as well: God will deliver not only Noah and his family but also “every living thing, of all flesh” (Gn 6:19).

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21 McKenzie, *Covenant*, 47.

The climax of this drama is in the verses leading up to Genesis 8:1. Having built the ark which God commanded him to build, Noah and his family endure the total and absolute devastation of the earth. The Genesis writer stretches out the phrasing in Genesis 7:21-23 in order to drive home the point, which is the completeness of death that permeates all creation. Wenham points out that the normal word “pair,” used in Genesis to express the process of dying, is spaced out. For example, Genesis 25:8 and 25:17, as well as Genesis 25:29, speak of the characters “breathing their last” and “dying” in quick succession. However, Genesis 6:22 puts the phrases at either end of the sentence, reading more literally something like this: “Everything which has the breath of the spirit of life in its nostrils, namely everything on the dry land, died.”23 The point is that the entire creative order, beginning with the animals and ending with humanity, is completely blotted out now. The story reads in such a way as to emphasize utter destruction and forsakenness.

With the full force of creation’s devastation hanging on the reader, Genesis 8:1 is the central turning point in the Noah covenant narrative: “But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark.” This is significant for two reasons. First, the narrative from this point forward will begin undoing the destruction that has been detailed thus far. Floods have rushed in to cover the earth and destroy all life; and now, beginning with Genesis 8:1, the floods recede to reveal new life. One of the primary intentions of God’s covenant making is to recreate and restore in such a way that sinful creation is punished and destroyed completely.

23 Ibid., 150.
Second, the literary design of the narrative points squarely to Genesis 8:1 because God’s remembering is central to the Noah covenant. When all is destroyed and things are seemingly hopeless for Noah, his family, and the animals on board the ark, God remembers them all. It is significant that the same narrative Scripture first mentions “covenant” and God having remembered someone. As Wenham puts it, “When God remembers, he acts, e.g., saving Lot, giving Rachel children, bringing Israel out of slavery (Exod 2:24; 6:5).”\textsuperscript{24} God’s remembering lies at the very heart of his covenant making, and it plays a primary role in the sign chosen to ratify the covenant with Noah.

Having remembered Noah and the passengers on the ark, God begins recreation. The ensuing verses not only demonstrate the reversal of destruction brought on the earth, they also echo the process of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. God’s first move after the critical point in the narrative when he remembers Noah and the inhabitants of the ark is to send a “wind” (\textit{ruach}) to blow across the earth. This is a clear parallel to the \textit{ruach} that “swept over the face of the waters” in Genesis 1:2. Wenham also notes the similar progressive separation of water from land (Gn 8:1, 5, 11, 14), just as in Genesis 1.\textsuperscript{25} “Earlier Noah had been instructed to take the animals on board to preserve life (Gn 6:19; 7:3); now he must send them out ‘to swarm, be fruitful and multiply.’ The commands given originally just to the fish and the birds (Gn1:20, 22) are here extended to all the land animals, one of many hints in this story that the post-flood era represents the start of

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 184.

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 206-207.
a new creation.”

God twice issues the command to Noah and his family given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.” This “filling” stands in contrast to the violence and corruption which filled the earth in Genesis 6:11 and 6:13.

Noah’s first act upon disembarking the ark is to build an altar to the Lord and offer sacrifice. Genesis 8:21 says that the Lord “smelled the pleasing odor.” The phrase is an intentional play on words with Noah’s name. Lamech named his son “Noah” in the prayer that God would bring “relief” from their suffering. The Hebrew for “Noah,” “relief,” and “pleasing” are all similar such that Wenham paraphrases the verse in this way: “The Lord smelt the Noahic sacrifice.”

This is significant because it points to the change of intention of God toward creation within this covenant. The essence of God’s covenant with Noah is “that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Gn 9:11). In direct response to Noah’s sacrifice, the Lord pledges to never “again destroy every living creature” (Gn 8:21). However, God’s assessment of humanity remains unchanged. Genesis 8:21, “for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth,” follows very closely Genesis 6:5, which reads: “Every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually.” In both passages, before and after the flood, God’s assessment of the human condition remains unchanged. It is remarkable that what once stood as God’s main reason for destroying creation now becomes God’s motivation for its preservation. Whereas in Genesis 6:6-7 God commits to “destroy people together with animals,” due to human sin,

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26 Ibid., 187.
27 Ibid., 189.
God now is committed to preserving creation in light of and despite human sin. In the end, God’s covenant relationship with Noah becomes a means of curing the sinfulness of the human heart rather than simply offering punishment for it.

As a sign of God’s covenant with Noah “and every living creature . . . for all future generations,” God sets a bow in the sky (Gn 9:12-13). The Hebrew for “bow” (qesheth) can refer both to the weapon used in war as well as “rainbow.” This may signify that God is laying aside his weapons of wrath against the earth. While Wenham sees “no reason for taking Gen 9 this way,”28 O. Palmer Robertson observes that in Revelation 4:3 the throne of judgment is surrounded by a rainbow.29 Here also the clouds of judgment serve as the backdrop through which God’s gracious promise shines.

In a context of threatening judgment symbolized by the bloated rain cloud, God designates the overarching beauty of the rainbow to depict his great end judgment. Having once destroyed the world thereby depicting the immutability of his righteous decrees, the Lord God now couples the cloud with the rainbow to manifest his free and unmerited grace.30

God’s remembering figures squarely in the sign of the rainbow. Noah, his family, and all the creatures in the ark were delivered when God remembered them (Gn 8:1). While other covenant signs will serve as reminders to humanity of God’s covenant, the rainbow sign in particular is a reminder for God: “When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh [emphasis mine] (Gn 9:14-15). Ultimately, the remembrance

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28 Ibid., 196.


30 Ibid.
represents not only God’s covenant with Noah in Genesis 9 but really a covenant with all of humanity and creation. Noah, his wife, children, and all the animals on the ark and the entire earth which they will populate are recipients of God’s gracious covenant promise never to destroy the earth again.

God’s Promise to Abraham

While Genesis 1 through 11 traces God’s interaction with humanity in general, in Genesis 12 God begins to deal with a particular person who in turn becomes God’s chosen people. God’s covenant with Abraham is the beginning of God’s covenant with chosen Israel. The making and keeping of promises are at the heart of any covenant relationship. In this story, however, God’s promises are in doubt.

In Genesis 12 God begins dealing with a particular person, who will become a particular people in relationship with God. In the opening verses of Genesis 12, God commands Abram to leave his homeland and people and go to the place God was giving to him as an inheritance. God not only promises Abram land but also progeny that will make his descendants into a “great nation” (Gn 12:1-3). This becomes an important aspect to the storyline of the Abraham covenant, as later on this promise seems to be forgotten.

Genesis 15 marks the second time in the Old Testament that the word “covenant” is used. Furthermore, it is the first time the phrase “to cut a covenant” is used. As the chapter begins, many years have passed since God’s promise to make Abram into a “great nation” (Gn 12:1-3). God echoes the promise of blessing given to Abram, previously reminding him that his “reward shall be very great” (Gn 15:1). While Abram’s resources are significant (he musters 318 “trained men, born of his house” to rescue Lot
in Genesis 14), Abram still has no offspring of his own. Abram wonders if God will keep his promise and give Abram any biological children. The text of Genesis 15:1-2 is obscure and difficult to translate. It is possible that the verses refer to Abram’s concern that a foreign power (“Eliezar of Damascus”) will overtake his estate by force in the absence of offspring to protect it; or, the verses may point to Abram’s intent to adopt a slave of his household to become the heir of his estate. In either case, the central problem stems from the fact that Abram and his wife are well past child-bearing years and as of yet have no male child of their own to continue their lineage. The point here is that if God’s covenant promises are unreliable or temporary, then Abram and his wife must take matters into their own hands to ensure a future lineage. If, however, God’s covenant promises are reliable and enduring, then Abram needs some reassurance and proof.

God responds emphatically to Abram’s query. God promises Abram that his heir will be from his “very own issue” (Gn 15:4). To reassure Abram of the promise, God leads Abram outside into the night sky and invites him to “look heavenward and count the stars” (Gn 15:5). The word “look” infers a long and intense gaze (cf. 1 Kgs 18:43; Ex 3:6). God promises that Abram’s descendants will be as countless as the stars in the sky. The absence of any verbal response from Abram to God’s promise is editorialized in Genesis 15:6. The comment makes clear that Abram accepted the promise. Whereas righteousness is usually spoken of in terms of moral behavior, here Abram’s belief is

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32 Ibid.
reckoned to him as righteousness. Righteousness in the covenant relationship is based on trust in the one making the promise, in spite of contrary circumstantial evidence. To this point, God has done nothing tangible to change Abram’s circumstances with regard to God’s promise of progeny. Instead, God reiterates the promise with an object lesson observing the stars in the sky. However, this reiterated promise is enough for Abram. Abram’s non-verbal response expresses confidence that God’s word will prove reliable and trustworthy.

The second scene in Genesis 15:7 begins like the first, with a promissory statement from the Lord. In response, Abram asks specifically for a sign. His request should not be interpreted as a lack of faith in God’s word of promise but rather as an indication of it. For example, in Isaiah 7:10-14 King Ahaz is chastised because he does not ask for a sign from God when his kingdom is under threat from the Syro-Ephramite alliance. In other words, not asking for a sign is condemned as a lack of faith. As in the covenant with Noah, a tangible and visible sign figures prominently into God’s covenant making with Abram. Signs of the covenant point to the character of the covenant maker and to the intent of the covenant. Whereas the rainbow sign in God’s covenant with Noah pointed to God’s enduring commitment to preserve humanity, the sign of God’s covenant with Abram will point to God’s self-sacrificing commitment to maintain the covenant relationship.

The scene which unfolds in Genesis 15:9-17 has many interpretations. According strictly to the text, God asks Abram to bring “a heifer three years old, a female goat three
years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon” (Gn 15:9). Abram brings them to the Lord and without further instruction cuts in two the heifer, goat, and ram but not the birds. Next, Abram lays the halves of each animal across from one another with a path down the middle. Genesis 15:11 mentions the wild birds that Abram shoos away from the dead animals. At sunset, “a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces” (Gn 15:17). The “smoking pot” is a term referring to a “large earthenware jar,”34 with coals and fire inside which cooked the “bread dough stuck to the sides of the container.”35 Clearly the image is a theophanic manifestation (similar to Exodus 13:21; 19:18; 20:18),36 where smoke and fire also are used to indicate the symbolic presence of God. However, lest there be any doubt, the Genesis writer specifies that it was the Lord cutting a covenant with Abram in this ritual (Gn 15:18). The significance here is the historical roots of this rite and the Lord God’s role in the covenant making.

According to Morris, in the Ancient Near East cutting animals was an “integral part of the making of a covenant.”37 McKenzie notes that participating parties in a covenant ceremony would cut animals as a symbol of what their fate would be if either party broke the covenant treaty. “As they swore their oaths, the partners would invoke the curse upon themselves by saying something like, ‘May I, like this animal, be killed if I


35 Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 332.

36 Ibid.

37 Morris, The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross, loc. 1064.
violate the stipulations of this covenant.”

In this sense, covenant making was a matter of life and death. Jeremiah 34:18 also refers to this ritual: “And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts.” In some cases, the partners would walk between the pieces as an even more graphic representation of the curse they invoked upon themselves should they trespass the covenant. This ritual ensured the absolute and total commitment of the parties in the covenant treaty.

If this is the case, the Lord takes on an uncharacteristic role in Genesis 15. Normally, the deity was assigned the role of witness between covenanting partners as they walked between the dismembered carcasses. However, in Genesis 15 the Lord himself is an active participant as he passes between the animals. Just as notably, Abram does not walk between the severed animals. It is as though the Lord takes both the role of witness and participant. This would have been a startling scene for Abram. Abram had asked for a sign that God would honor his covenant promises, and he receives a vivid illustration of the extent to which God is committed to the covenant.

Wenham, however, dismisses the interpretation that God is the one passing through the animal pieces as a demonstration of his commitment to the covenant. Wenham maintains that while the interpretation may explain neatly the use of the idiom “to cut” a covenant in Genesis 15:18, it leaves too many unanswered questions. A satisfying explanation for Wenham must account for the specific animals and their age required in Genesis 15:9 as well as why the birds were not to be cut in half but the other animals

38 McKenzie Covenant, 17.

were. Furthermore, a satisfying explanation would answer why Abram drives away the scavenging birds from the sacrifice. However, the crux of Wenham’s disagreement with the view that the Lord is acting as witness and participant hinges on “whether a divine self-imprecation is really likely.”\textsuperscript{40} In Wenham’s view, a God who pledges to die if his word is not kept is incompatible with the God of the Old Testament.\textsuperscript{41}

In the end, Wenham succeeds best in raising questions and offers no coherent alternative explanation of the animal rite in Genesis 15. He suggests only that the three-year-old animals may parallel the timeframe given for Israel’s captivity in Egypt. The animal pieces represent Israel, and God walking among them symbolizes nothing more than God’s presence walking among them. God’s promised presence will protect Israel from attacking foreign powers which are symbolized in the birds of prey.\textsuperscript{42} Wenham presses too much allegory into the elements of the story, while missing the central meaning of God’s participatory role in the covenant making. Divine self-imprecation is precisely the point of the passage. God assumes the role as both divine witness and participant for both parties in establishing covenant with Abram and his descendants. God is utterly committed to maintaining the covenant relationship to the point of ultimate self-sacrifice. In fact, God indeed does suffer the fate of the slaughtered animals. God, in Jesus Christ, later dies on the cross due to humanity’s transgression of the covenant.

Genesis 17 continues the story of God’s covenant with Abram. In this chapter God gives Abram and his wife new names and institutes the covenant sign of

\textsuperscript{40} Wenham, \textit{Genesis 1-15}, 332.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 333.
circumcision. The chapter emphasizes the endurance of the covenant relationship. Like the covenant with Noah and all creation (Gn 9:16), God’s covenant with Abram is an everlasting covenant (Gn 17:7, 13, 19). Genesis 17 also underscores the reciprocal responsibility involved in the covenant relationship. In Genesis 15 God guarantees the covenant relationship by pledging his total commitment as deity witness and covenant partner. However, this does not mean that Abram has no part to play in the covenant. The righteousness with which Abram responded to God’s promise in Genesis 15:6 is to be reflected in Abram’s life as he “walks before [the Lord, and is] blameless” (Gn 17:1).

The chapter begins by emphasizing Abram’s age. With Abram pressing the century mark and his wife, Sarai, not more than a decade younger, they are both well beyond child-bearing years. In the thirteen years since Ishmael’s birth (Gn 16:16), Abram has resigned himself to the idea that Sarai will not bear him a son and that Ishmael will be “his sole heir through whom the divine promises will be fulfilled.”  

Abram still is inclined to doubt the fulfillment of God’s promise for a son of his own.

God introduces himself as El Shaddai (God Almighty) and commands Abram to “walk before [God], and be blameless.” God reiterates the making of covenant with Abram. The promise that Abram will be “exceedingly numerous” (Gn 17:2) also is reiterated. God changes Abram’s name to Abraham to underscore the promise that he will “be the ancestor of a multitude of nations” (Gn 17:4), which is a key theme of this chapter. Abraham’s new name is an anagram of the phrase “I shall multiply . . .

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43 Ibid., 28.
exceedingly.” Again, God reiterates that his covenant promises will be kept. Abram falls on his face two times in the seventeenth chapter of Genesis. This first time (Gn 17:3), Abram “fell on his face” in reverence. The next time he will do so in laughter and disbelief (Gn 17:17). It is difficult for Abram that God could perform such a miracle.

Even though God speaks of “making” a covenant (*natan*) with Abraham in Genesis 17:2, the main concern in this chapter is to “establish” the covenant (*qum*) with Abram in the sense of reaffirming it (Gn 17:7, 13, 19). The word *natan* of Genesis 17:2, which means “to give,” is used once, while the verb *qum* is repeated in the passage three times. The main thrust of the passage, indicated by the repetition of the word *qum*, which means “to establish,” is that here God is building upon the covenant inaugurated in Genesis 15. The events of Genesis 17 are meant to reaffirm the covenant. In a similar way, God reaffirmed his covenant with Noah in Genesis 9. It is important to see Genesis 15 and 17 in continuity. The covenant of Genesis 15 is entirely at God’s initiative. God is the active participant in the covenantal ceremony, while Abram is a spectator. The continuation of the covenant with Abram in Genesis 17 shows that while covenant is established entirely at God’s initiative “confirming it involves a human response.”

Abraham will have an active role to play in the covenant partnership.

During the reaffirmation of God’s covenant with Abraham, the covenant also is further defined from Genesis 15. God’s covenant with Abraham is designed to be an “everlasting” one (Gn 17:7). The theme of covenantal perpetuity, which began with God’s covenant with Noah (Gn 9:16) and now continues with Abraham, runs throughout the Old

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44 Ibid., 20.

45 Ibid.
Testament; additionally, the Apostle Paul wrestles with this idea extensively in the Book of Romans (Rom 9-11). As a sign of the eternal character of this covenant, God establishes the rite of circumcision for “every male . . . including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring” (Gn 17:1-12). Just as physical circumcision of the male offspring is lasting and permanent, so are the covenantal promises lasting and permanent.

However, the “everlasting covenant” is to begin with Abraham and his “offspring” (Gn 17:7). God reiterates his promise to grant Abraham offspring of his own by changing Sarai’s name to Sarah and announcing the astonishing news that, after “twenty-five years of childlessness,” she herself will bear Abraham a son. Abraham makes no verbal response when the Lord’s speech is finished. Instead, Abraham’s behavior reflects the Lord’s command at the start of the chapter to “walk before [God], and be blameless.” Abraham’s response is immediate and complete obedience. He begins “that very day” (Gn 17:23) to circumcise himself and every male child in his household, just as God had commanded. Abraham’s obedience exemplifies the kind of reciprocal response God desires in the covenant relationships.

The rite of circumcision is one of three kinds of “signs” that appear throughout the Old Testament. One kind of sign provides proof to convince someone of something. Therefore, Moses provides signs to Pharaoh in Exodus 7 through 12 as proof of God’s power. Another kind of sign is used by the prophets “in that they resemble the situation

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46 Ibid., 30.

47 Ibid., 23.
announced (e.g. Ezek 4:3).” The rite of circumcision in Genesis 17 is of the third kind of sign in the Old Testament. These kinds of signs are “mnemonic in that they are reminders of something.” As the rainbow was a reminder of God’s covenant with Noah, the covenant of circumcision is a reminder of God’s covenant with Abraham and his descendants. The rainbow sign and the circumcision sign are everlasting reminders of the everlasting covenants. The rainbow was a sign that “never again” (Gn 9:15) would God flood the earth. The circumcision rite is a sign throughout all of Abraham’s generations of God’s covenant (Gn 17:12). One important difference between the rainbow sign and the circumcision sign is for whom the reminder is intended. In Genesis 9 the rainbow is for God’s remembering while the circumcision rite is for Abraham and his descendants’ remembering.

God’s Promise at Sinai

The covenant at Sinai further develops the idea that covenant involves obedient response and active participation. The covenant relationship not only includes promises to enjoy, it requires commandments to obey and an identity to embrace. The Ten Commandments stand as a summary of the Sinai covenant. The Ten Commandments express the lasting and objective will of God for the covenant relationship.

As far as the narrative flow of the Old Testament is concerned, the Sinai Covenant occupies the vast material of Scripture, beginning in Exodus 19 and extending through the Book of Deuteronomy. After deliverance from slavery in Egypt, after 430

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48 Ibid.

49 Ibid.
years (Ex 12:40), the Israelites travel the desert toward freedom in the promised land of Canaan. In the third month of their journey the Israelites camp in the desert of Sinai at the base of the mountain (Ex 19:1-2). Israel’s leader, Moses, is summoned by God to the top of Mount Sinai. God’s stated purpose is to distinguish Israel from all the nations of the earth as God’s “treasured possession” and as a “holy nation” (Ex 19:5-6). The Lord gives Moses specific instruction for the people to consecrate themselves for this special moment. The people are instructed to wait at the base of the mountain and “not to break through to the Lord to look” (Ex 19:21) as God’s presence descends on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain “forty days and forty nights” (Ex 24:18) receiving from God the vast number of regulations and commands that are “law” (Ex 24:12) for Israel’s covenant relationship with God. The designation of Israel as God’s “treasured possession” and “holy nation” express the ultimate purposes God has in mind for Israel in this covenant relationship. The commandments themselves lay out specifically how Israel is to embody these covenental purposes.

At the center of these regulations are the Ten Commandments given in two forms.\textsuperscript{50} The ten words recorded in Exodus 20 fall within the narrative of Moses’ first trip to the top of Mount Sinai. After lingering on the mountain for almost six weeks, the Israelites convince Aaron that Moses is not returning and that they should instead build the idol of the golden calf to worship. When Moses returns from the mountain, he smashes the golden calf with the stone tablets God gave him. While Exodus 34 relates Moses’ second trip to the mountain for a second set of stone tablets, these words are not

\textsuperscript{50} Literally, “ten words” (םלועה נֶפֶשְׁל).
recorded. A slightly different version of the Ten Commandments is given in Deuteronomy 5:6-21 as part of Israel’s covenantal renewal. The incident of the golden calf demonstrates how Israel struggles from the beginning to maintain covenantal faithfulness. The same kind of rebellion in the human heart which prompted God’s covenant with Noah is still being worked out in the covenant at Sinai.

The social concerns addressed in the Sinai covenant in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are vast and many. For example, Exodus 22:21-27, Leviticus 25:35-36, and Deuteronomy 24:12-15 address exploitation of the disenfranchised, disabled, and oppressed. Elsewhere property rights (Ex 22), the treatment of animals (Dt 22:4, 6-7, 10), and due process of law (Dt 17:1-13) are addressed.

However, the Ten Commandments stand as the essence of all these regulations and God’s covenant at Sinai is identified particularly with the Ten Commandments. Exodus 34:27-18 states, “The Lord said to Moses: Write these words; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. He was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.” Here it is specifically that the Ten Commandments recorded on the stone tablets are identified as the “words of the covenant.” The Ten Commandments not only express the essence of the entire Sinai covenant, the commandment themselves are identified as God’s covenant.

Likewise, Deuteronomy 4:13 says, “[God] declared to you his covenant, which he charged you to observe, that is, the Ten Commandments.” Again, the essence of the covenant relationship is associated with the Ten Commandments. It is noteworthy that the
Ten Commandments are recorded on tablets of stone. Exodus 34:1 and Deuteronomy 4:13 both mention this detail specifically. Etched in stone, the Ten Commandments express the enduring will of God in an external and objective way.

The “New” Covenant of Jesus

The majority of references to covenant in the New Testament are found in the Book of Hebrews, and they express the “new” covenant of Jesus. However, the writer there is not recording the inauguration of New Covenant. Rather, Hebrews is concerned with the relationship between the New Covenant instituted by Christ and the Old Covenant of Moses (Sinai). The New Covenant of Jesus is inaugurated during the Last Supper with his disciples. In establishing this covenant, Jesus identifies himself with the Lamb of the Passover meal. Jesus places his ministry in this “new” covenant in line with Moses’ ministry in covenant at Sinai.

New Testament references to a “new” covenant are located in the texts concerning Jesus’ institution of the Lord’s Supper. As McKenzie notes, Jesus’ institution of the Lord’s Supper is “the only occasion when Jesus is quoted as using the word ‘covenant.’” \(^{51}\) Furthermore, the events surrounding Jesus’ last days on earth, including accounts of Jesus’ Passover meal with the disciples, take up significant portions of the gospels since these are pivotal in understanding the ministry of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ institution of the Lord’s Supper provides important understanding to the covenantal theme in Scripture.

\(^{51}\) McKenzie, *Covenant*, 87.
All four gospels record events of Jesus’ Passover evening with his disciples. However, only the synoptic gospels record Jesus’ institution of the Lord’s Supper. Paul also records the events of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Most striking among all the passages (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25) is that Jesus mentions his “blood” in conjunction with the covenant. The three synoptic gospels are even more specific, saying that Jesus’ blood is “poured out.” In doing so, “Jesus is drawing an analogy here between sacrifice and the covenant making [sic] ceremony described in Exodus.”

Moses was the mediator between God and the people, as God established the covenant at Sinai. In the consecration ceremony of that covenant, Moses splashes the “blood of the covenant” on the altar (Ex 24:8). By using the phrase “poured out,” Jesus places his ministry in light of Moses. Given the setting in which Jesus makes this statement, he further identifies himself with the Passover lamb, whose blood was splashed on the doorposts of the Israelite’s homes in Exodus 12:22. McKenzie also notes that “the expression ‘for many’ in Mark recalls the statement in Isaiah 53:12 that the servant bore the sins of ‘many.’ Jesus takes on the role of the Suffering Servant who dies vicariously, that is, in place of those who justly deserved punishment.”

Only Luke 22:20 and 1 Corinthians 11:25 have the words “new covenant.” While there are good arguments on either side about whether or not the word “new” was original to Jesus, in John’s account of the Passover meal Jesus gives the disciples a

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52 Ibid., 88.
53 Ibid., 89.
54 Ibid., 88.
“new commandment” (Jn 13:34). The “new” covenant and “new” commandment indicate that Jesus is further refining and deepening the covenant of the Old Testament.

Studying the major covenants of Scripture reveals more about the meaning of covenant than studying the origins of the word itself. The Old Testament contains a variety of covenants. Some covenants are between human beings, and others exist between God and people. References of covenant appear throughout the New Testament as well. However, the only instance of covenant making in the New Testament is during Jesus’ Last Supper. God’s covenant with Noah, Abraham, at Sinai, and Jesus’ New Covenant at the Last Supper are the major biblical covenants analyzed in this chapter. This study is the basis for the theological elements of biblical covenants discussed in Chapter 4.
CHAPTER 4
THEOLOGICAL ELEMENTS OF BIBLICAL COVENANTS

The major biblical covenants of Noah, Abraham, Sinai, and the New Covenant in Jesus Christ will form the basis of covenantal identity for CLPC and its ministry leaders. A leadership process designed around the theological elements of biblical covenants will result in a ministry team covenant. As ministry leaders are influenced by these covenantal themes, they in turn will influence the entire congregation toward a covenantal identity as God’s people. This new identity is the key for CLPC’s rebirth.

This chapter explores the theological elements of biblical covenants. First, biblical covenants are organically related and not distinctly separate dispensations. Second, a trio of major and equally important motifs runs through all the major biblical covenants. Each covenant demonstrates God’s purposes for community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement.

Covenants: Organically Related and Not Separate Dispensations

The biblical covenants of Noah, Abraham, Sinai, and New Covenant in Jesus Christ are not separate and isolated arrangements. While the covenants occur in a
historical sequence, they are not replaced by each subsequent covenant. Rather, the covenants are organically related in such a way that themes are further refined and developed in subsequent covenants. The interrelatedness of the biblical covenants means that all of the covenants are instructive for CLPC ministry leaders in the leadership process and in the development of the leadership covenant.

The dispensationalist view of biblical covenants is that they are not organically related but rather distinct and separate epochs of God’s dealing with humanity. A leading theological institution representing this view explains that God relates to humanity in fundamentally different ways according to the “changed conditions or situations in which man is successively found.”\(^1\) There are three overarching epochs presented in Scripture: “the dispensation of the Mosaic Law, the present dispensation of grace, and the future dispensation of the millennial kingdom.”\(^2\) Each epoch requires a different and distinct way of relating to God. Under the dispensation of Mosaic Law, humans related to God according to laws given by God at Mount Sinai—including all those regulations from Exodus 19:1 through the end of Deuteronomy. Under the dispensation of grace, which exists now through Christ, humans no longer have to earn favor with God by keeping the law. The “dispensation of grace” means relationship with God is a gift that can be freely received. The dispensation of the “millennial kingdom” is when believers in Christ are raised to new life and rule the earth.


\(^2\) Ibid.
More important than the labeling of these covenant epochs, however, is that this view holds to a complete distinction among them. These dispensations “are distinct and are not to be intermingled or confused, as they are chronologically successive.”³ However, a brief survey of the teachings of Reformation theologian John Calvin, the Westminster Confession of Faith, and Robertson as a covenant theologian will show that the major biblical covenants are not distinct and separate epochs but rather are related organically.

Calvin’s Organic View of Covenants

There is essential unity among the covenants, according to Calvin. In Institutes of the Christian Religion, he asserts that the covenants of the Old Testament and the New Covenant in Christ are fundamentally the same. Calvin writes: “The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same.”⁴ The unity of the covenants is revealed in their progressive clarity which culminates in Christ.

The Lord held to this orderly plan in administering the covenant of his mercy: as the day of full revelation approached with the passing of time, the more he increased each day the brightness of its manifestation. Accordingly, at the beginning when the first promise of salvation was given to Adam [Gen. 3:15] it glowed like a feeble spark. Then, as it was added to, the light grew in fullness, breaking forth increasingly and shedding its radiance more widely. At last—when all the clouds were dispersed—Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, fully illumined the whole earth [cf. Mai., ch. 4].⁵

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³ Ibid.


⁵ Ibid., 446.
In other words, each subsequent covenant progressively refines the previous covenant but does not replace it or stand separately from it. To use Calvin’s metaphor, the light that shone as a spark in the covenant with Adam and which eventually “fully illuminated” in Christ is all the same light of God’s covenant relationship with humanity.

Calvin’s insistence on unity of the covenants rests on three points. First, the covenant promises for the patriarchs were never simply about material earthly goods. “The Jews” (to use Calvin’s term) were hoping for immortality and not merely earthly rewards and prosperity of progeny, land, and wealth. Second, just like the New Covenant, the covenants that bound the Jews were not by virtue of their own merit but “solely by the mercy of the God who called them.” Third, the saints of the Old Testament “knew Christ as Mediator, through whom they were joined to God and were to share in his promises.” On this point, Calvin speaks of “the covenant of the gospel” which is based on Christ.

For Calvin, the gospel of God’s mercy in Christ fundamentally undergirds all the covenants in Scripture. He offers scriptural support from John 8:56, where Jesus says “Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad.” The joy that Abraham experienced in covenant relationship with God was one in the same with Jesus Christ. For further evidence Calvin cites Hebrews 13:8, which reads: “Jesus Christ is the

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6 Ibid., 429.
7 Ibid., 430.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 431.
same yesterday and today and forever.”¹⁰ What was true for Abraham then was true for all recipients of the covenantal promises prior to Christ.

The covenants not only share the same gospel mercy of Christ; but based on 1 Corinthians 10:1-6, they also share similar sacramental signs.¹¹ Similar to the New Covenant sacrament of baptism, the Israelites were baptized when they crossed the Red Sea and as they were covered with the pillar of cloud wandering through the desert. The waters of baptism cover believers of the New Covenant, while the waters of the Red Sea and the pillar of cloud covered the Israelites of the Old Covenant. Manna from the sky for Israel was of the same sacramental significance as the Lord’s Supper. Believers in the New Covenant break bread at the Lord’s Supper, while the Israelites ate bread from the heavens. These similar sacramental signs are proof of unity, not discontinuity, among the covenants. In this way, according to Calvin, “the Lord not only communicated to the Jews the same promises of eternal and heavenly life as he now deigns to give us, but also sealed them with truly spiritual sacraments.”¹²

While the covenants of the Old and New Testaments are in substance the same, Calvin does concede there are differences in terms of their presentation. He specifically names five variations, or contrasts, in the “manner of dispensation.”¹³ First, the Old Covenant spoke of “earthly benefits,”¹⁴ while the New Covenant focuses on eternal and

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¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹ Ibid., 432.
¹² Ibid., 433.
¹³ Ibid., 450.
¹⁴ Ibid.
spiritual benefits. Abraham was promised offspring, land, and wealth that were earthly and temporal. The New Covenant promises spiritual blessings for eternity.

Second, “in the absence of the reality, [the Old Covenant] showed but an image and shadow in place of the substance; the New Testament reveals the very substance of truth as present.”[^15] This is the case argued in Hebrews 7 through 10. The priestly sacrifices and offerings of the earthly tabernacle under the Old Covenant’s sacrificial system were just a “shadow” (Heb 8:5) of the true heavenly tabernacle and the eternal ministry of Jesus Christ. In other words, Jesus Christ as the true and spiritual High Priest accomplishes in reality what the Old Covenant’s sacrificial system pointed to symbolically.

Turning specifically to consider the Mosaic Law, the third distinct attribute of the Old Covenant versus the New Covenant is that the old “law” was literal while the new “law” is spiritual. Calvin refers to Jeremiah’s prophecy in Jeremiah 31:31-34 to illustrate this point. The Old Covenant was carved in stone (Ex 24:12), while the New Covenant is written on the human heart (Jer 31:33). The old covenant was externally and indirectly administered, while the new covenant is administered internally and directly. The human heart that was “beyond cure” (Jer 17:9), and which continually led to rebellion against God’s covenant purposes (Jer 31:32), now has God’s covenantal purposes written directly upon it (Jer 31:33).

Fourth, the Old Testament “is one of ‘bondage’ because it produces fear,” while the New Testament is one of “‘freedom’ because it lifts [one] up to trust and

[^15]: Ibid., 453.
assurance.”  

16 According to Calvin, the Old Covenant inspired obedience to the law through fear of consequence, while the New Covenant inspires obedience due to the freedom the believer has from being forgiven by Christ. The spirit of bondage born of slavery to sin is replaced with a spirit of freedom as a result of the believer’s adoption in Christ (Rom 8:15).

Fifth, the Old Testament covenants with Abraham and Moses were specifically with the Jews while the New Covenant is for Jew and Gentile alike.  

17 While the nations were to be blessed through God’s covenant relationship with Israel, the covenant relationship itself was particular to Israel (Gn 12:3; Jon 4:9-11). Under the New Covenant, Gentiles are included in God’s covenant relationship. The mysteries of God’s covenantal purposes once held for Israel are revealed to the Gentiles under Christ’s New Covenant (Col 1:26-7).

The fact that there are differences in the way God administers covenant relationship at different times does not disprove the unity of principle behind them. Calvin provides a helpful analogy on this point. It is reasonable, according to Calvin, that a house owner would prescribe one set of duties for his household in winter and another set of duties for the summer. In the same way, God has prescribed differences to the covenant relationship, like those mentioned above, according to differing seasons of God’s dealings with humanity. Calvin concludes, “Thus, God’s constancy shines forth in the fact that he taught the same doctrine to all ages, and has continued to require the same

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16 Ibid., 458.

17 Ibid., 460-461.
worship of his name that he enjoined from the beginning.”\(^\text{18}\) In other words, even though there are differences in administration, the essential purposes are preserved throughout them.

**The Westminster Confession’s Perspective on the Inextricable Link among Covenants**

Following the theology of Calvin, the seventh chapter of the Westminster Confession likewise speaks of one covenant, albeit “under various dispensations.”\(^\text{19}\) According to Westminster, covenant is the “voluntary condescension on God’s part” toward humanity who otherwise would remain unable to offer obedience to God let alone experience the “blessedness and reward” of relationship with God.\(^\text{20}\) Accordingly, God’s first covenant with humanity was a covenant of works, which required “perfect and personal obedience.”\(^\text{21}\) The Fall, however, made it impossible to fulfill the first covenant, so God established a second covenant, a “covenant of grace.”\(^\text{22}\)

The Westminster Confession recognizes that in the Old Testament, God’s covenant of grace “was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews” and

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\(^{18}\) Ibid., 463.


\(^{20}\) Ibid., sect. 6.037.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., sect. 6.038.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., sect. 6.039.
acknowledges that these look forward to Christ. Furthermore, the Spirit was at work in them to “instruct and build up the elect in faith.” Through the lens of the Westminster Confession, under the gospel, the covenant of grace is administered by the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The covenant of grace in the Old Testament has more “outward glory,” yet the covenant of grace in the New Testament holds “more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy” and encompasses “both Jews and Gentiles.” The “outward glory” is an allusion to Paul’s discussion in 2 Corinthians 3:7-11. The glory of the Old Covenant was so great that the Israelites could not look directly as Moses (2 Cor 3:7). How much more glorious then, Paul argues, is God’s covenant in Christ (2 Cor 3:9). However, while the New Covenant is more “glorious,” it is not a different covenant but rather “one and the same.”

Robertson’s Organic View of Covenants

Based on the established ideas of Calvin and the Westminster Confession, Robertson concludes that the covenants are not so separate and distinct and asserts that one covenant flows naturally from the other. He believes covenants are related one to another “organically to the totality of the Biblical revelation.” In other words, aspects of

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23 Ibid., sect. 6.041.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., sect. 6.042.
26 Ibid.
previous covenants remain present in the successive ones; and, each successive covenant is a fluid outgrowth of the previous.

Robertson demonstrates that there are characteristics of what he calls “the covenant of law” prior to Moses. “Law” is present in the covenant with Noah as God calls for a “reckoning for human life” (Gn 9:5). If a person sheds blood, then the trespasser’s blood must be shed. “Law” is present in the covenant of Abraham. Even though God graciously chooses Abraham and his descendants for covenant relationship and blessing, there is a curse for disobedience which is characteristic of the covenant of law. Circumcision is a sign of blessing for those who obey it, but those not circumcised “shall be cut off from his people; he has broken [God’s] covenant” (Gn 17:14). Even Jesus himself, in establishing the New Covenant, insists that he has come “not to abolish but to fulfill” the law (Mt 5:17). The theme of human responsibility for particular obedience to God does not begin with Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. Instead, this theme begins with God’s earliest covenants with Noah and Abraham. Likewise, the essence of the covenant of law does not end with Christ. Rather, the characteristics of the covenant of law are refined and defined further by Christ’s call to a kind of obedience that goes beyond that of the Scribes and Pharisees (Mt 5:20).

If the covenants are separate and distinct, there is little gained from dwelling on the covenants of the Old Testament. However, if the covenants are related organically then there will be consistent and applicable themes throughout them. The above study has shown that the covenants clearly interrelate.
Three Themes Present in all Major Covenants

Thefirst distinctive of the biblical covenants is that they are not separate dispensations, in which each subsequent covenant replaces the previous. Instead, the covenants relate organically in such a way that the themes of each covenant are carried forward and refined in subsequent covenants. In addition to this organic distinctive, there are three unifying themes common to all the major covenants. These themes are healthy relationships, spiritual formation, and missional engagement.

The survey below illustrates how the major covenants hold together these three themes. First, each covenant reflects the image of the three-personal God. Just as God exists in a unity of relationship as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so each of the covenants emphasize the importance of healthy relationships within the covenant community. Second, each covenant reflects God’s concern that the covenant community grow in relationship with God. The covenants are intended not only to shape the covenant community’s relational ethic but also to shape the covenant community’s holiness and uniqueness in relationship with God. Third, each covenant reflects God’s mission for the world of restoring creation and blessing the inhabitants of the earth.

Community: Covenant in the Image of a Three-Personal God

Each of the covenants reflects the three-personal nature of the covenant-making God. A distinctive of Christian belief is that God exists eternally as three persons in one substance: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity is the Church’s attempt to hold together equally the oneness and “three-ness” of the Godhead.

28 Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), *Book of Confessions*, sect. 3.01.
The term “Trinity” is itself an expression of his threefold nature (“tri”) and oneness (“unity”). Since God does not exist as three entirely separate beings, and does not exist simply as one unified being, God is by very nature relational (cf. Gn 6:9-9:17; 15; 17; Ex 19:16 –20:21). It is the dynamic of God’s three-ness and God’s oneness that makes God relational. God’s very being is in an eternal and unified relationship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and, the covenants reflect this. The covenants are not individualistic but rather are relational and community-oriented. Each of the covenants reflects a concern for how the people of God get along with one another.

God’s concern for community and healthy relationships first appears in the story of the covenant with Noah in Genesis 6. God resolves to completely blot out the earth due to the violence he sees. The word “violence” (חמס) is a relational term “implying a lawlessness, terror, and lack of moral restraint.”29 It is actually God’s displeasure over the corruption of relationship within the human community that leads God to feel regret “that he had made humankind on the earth” (Gn 6:6). Although displeased with humanity’s destructive relationships, God nonetheless is resolved to redeem the relational brokenness. To this end, God does more than preserve the life of a single human individual. God preserves the life of Noah and his familial community (Gn 6:8, 18). Through Noah’s family relationships with wife, sons, and daughters-in-law, God will bring redemption of the human community. Furthermore, the command of Genesis 9:6, “whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind,” reflects God’s concern for a governing ethic of

human relationships. More important than the particular stipulation is the basis for it. The community ethic is directly linked to the image of God. In other words, the way Noah and his community are to treat one another is to be a direct reflection of the image of God in whose likeness they were made.

Like his pact with Noah, God’s covenant with Abraham is not a covenant with an individual person but with Abraham, his family, his offspring, and his household—in essence, a community of people. The community theme of relationships is especially apparent in Genesis 17 when God establishes the covenantal sign of circumcision with Abraham. The covenantal sign does not just apply to Abraham and his kin; it applies to everyone who is part of Abraham’s household, “including the slave born in [his] house and the one bought with [his] money from any foreigner who is not of [his] offspring. Both the slave born in [his] house and the one bought with [his] money” (Gn 17:12-13). God’s covenant with Abraham is a relational vortex enveloping all those with whom Abraham has association. His covenant relationship with God has an immediate impact on the community of those with whom Abraham lives and works.

The quality of relationships within the covenant community and those beyond with whom the community relates are central themes in the Sinai covenant as well. As Chennattu observes, in the Sinai covenant loving one’s neighbor as oneself (Lv 19:18) is intimately related to loving God. “Sharing life with one’s covenant partner is very essential to a covenant relationship. . . . Keeping the commandments, loving and sharing the life with others, are intrinsic to the nature of a covenant relationship.”30 Fidelity in the

Sinai covenant is not privatized or individualistic. A person’s life is not one’s own private property. Rather, in covenant one’s life belongs to God and to others. The Sinai covenant underscores this mutual belonging and frames the ways in which life is shared with one another.

Accordingly, the Ten Commandments, which stand at the heart of the Sinai covenant, are centrally concerned with the ethic of life in communal relationship. The first four commandments concern the supremacy of God in worship, name, and Sabbath rest; but, the remaining six commands speak about how humans are to get along with one another in a variety of relationships (Ex 20:12-17). These commands address one’s relationship with parents, spouses, and neighbor as well as those with whom they have conflict. These are the relationships which encompass every aspect of human community. Communal life involves relationships in the home with parents, children, and spouse as well as with one’s neighbor beyond the home. The last six of the Ten Commandments define and articulate God’s purposes within every sphere of human relationship.

Since the covenants relate organically, themes that exist in previous covenants take fuller shape in subsequent covenants. The theme of relationships and community, which is clear from the earliest covenant with Noah and continues taking shape in God’s covenant with Abraham and the Sinai covenants, fully blooms in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. Each gospel records the events of Jesus’ last Passover with his disciples, at which time Jesus establishes the New Covenant (Jn 13:1-38; Mt 26:17-35; Mk 14:12-31; Lk 22:7-38). In John’s account of these events, Jesus gives the disciples a “new commandment” to

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31 Ibid.
“love one another” (Jn 13:34). While loving others was encompassed in the Sinai covenant (Lv 19:18), the newness of this command is that the disciples are to love one another as Jesus loves them. Jesus’ love for the disciples is supremely self-sacrificial, ultimately unto death on the cross. This “new commandment” invites a similarly self-sacrificing kind of love (Jn 15:13). Jesus further clarifies that this new commandment will stand as the definitive mark of discipleship: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). In other words, the quality of the community’s relationships with one another will be the distinctive mark of discipleship.

In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus reworks the Ten Commandments of the Sinai covenant in his Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). In the same way Moses ascended Mt. Sinai, Jesus ascends a mountain (Mt 5:1). The repeated refrain, “you have heard that it was said” (Mt 5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, 43) refers back to the Sinai covenant. Each phrase is followed by Jesus’ redefinition of the Sinai stipulations. More important than each specific reinterpretation is the subject matter that Jesus covers. He talks about anger (Mt 5:21-26), lust (Mt 5:27-30), divorce (Mt 5:31-32), oaths (Mt 5:33-37), retaliation (Mt 5:38-42), enemies (Mt 5:43-48), judging others (Mt 7:1-6), and making requests (Mt 7:7-11). These issues encompass the broad range of interactions that tend to characterize human relationships. In addressing these, Jesus shows how people can live together in healthy, life-giving community. Jesus concludes his discussion on the relational ethic of community with the Golden Rule: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets” (Mt 7:12).
Spiritual Formation: Covenant for People Development

Right alongside God’s covenantal concern for community is his covenant’s concern for spiritual development of people. It is not only humans’ relationship with one another but relationship with God that is at stake in the covenantal promises. Ongoing renewal is an important aspect of the covenant relationship.

In Deuteronomy 29, Moses leads the people in a service of covenantal renewal. This is a critical transition: Moses hands over leadership of the people to Joshua, and the Israelites prepare to enter the promised land. Following the example of his predecessor, Moses, Joshua gathers the people at Shechem for a renewal of the covenant in Joshua 24. King Josiah also renews the covenant after discovering the Book of the Law in 2 Kings 23. These renewal ceremonies are important, because they underscore the fact that the covenant relationship is not static. Rather, as Chennattu asserts, the covenant relationship is “a process: a call/vocation summons the hearers over and over again to decide in favor of Yahweh.”32

Ultimately, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and the disciples of Jesus are called by God into special relationship. The covenant relationship is one of “treasured possession” and rests only on the condition of God’s gracious choosing. However, God’s benevolent choosing evokes a call to holiness in response (Dt 7:6-7). Loving obedience to the word of God is the essence of covenantal fidelity and the core of ongoing spiritual formation.

This theme of spiritual formation is present from the moment Noah is introduced to biblical readers, who must note God’s concern for righteousness and obedience. In

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32 Ibid., 59.
Genesis 6:9, they meet Noah: one who “walked with God” and who was “a righteous man, blameless in his generation.” Noah demonstrates the essence of covenantal fidelity by obeying God’s word when commanded to build an ark (Gn 6:22). He embodies a life of worship toward God when after the flood he builds an altar and offers pleasing sacrifices to God (Gn 8:20-21). Biblical readers see the spiritual formation themes of righteousness, obedience to God’s word, and personal worship in Noah’s example.

However, God is concerned not just for Noah but for the whole of humanity. God’s covenant with Noah is formed from his concern over the “inclination” of the human heart (Gn 8:21). God’s decision to destroy the earth as well as God’s decision to preserve it has to do with the condition of the human heart in that it is corrupt and fixed on rebellion against God’s purposes. In Genesis 6:5-7 the Lord resolves to blot out the earth, because “every inclination of the thoughts of [human] hearts was only evil continually.” Human beings’ rebellion against God’s purposes causes God to regret having created them. In Genesis 8:21, it is again due to “the inclination of the human heart . . . [to be] evil from youth” that God resolves to “never again curse the ground.” In promising to preserve the earth from future destruction, God commits to the renovation of the heart which will be made possible in future covenants and ultimately in the New Covenant of Jesus Christ. God promises to preserve the earth as a place where humans can go on living while God works to cure their rebellion.

This theme of spiritual formation continues into God’s covenant with Abraham. In the covenantal ceremony of Genesis 15, God takes on the role of covenant witness and participant. In doing so, God offers absolute assurance of the covenantal bond. The
covenant relationship with Abraham is secure, not due to anything Abraham has done to
deserve it but because God swears his own life to guarantee it. However, right alongside
this clear theme of God’s gracious choosing of Abram for covenant relationship is God’s
call to spiritual formation.

The covenantal sign of circumcision is framed in the context of spiritual
formation, as it shows the importance of obeying God’s word. After the command is
given to Abraham to circumcise his household, Abraham responds to God’s word without
hesitation or delay on “that very day” (Gn 17:23). Responding obediently to God’s word
is the basic foundation to spiritual formation.

The words “blameless” and “walk” in the Abraham covenant also connote spiritual
formation. In Genesis 17:1 the Lord exhorts Abram to “walk before [the Lord] and be
blameless.” The words “blameless” and “walk” are the same terms used to describe Noah’s
faithfulness in Genesis 6:9. These words describe the kind of moral character and spiritual
life God desires from his covenantal partners.

The theme of spiritual formation in the Sinai covenant closely relates to the motif
of election, which is developed in the Book of Deuteronomy. Chennattu notes three
facets of the election motif in the key text of Deuteronomy 7:6. First, Israel’s election as a
“holy people” is to imitate God. “The imitatio Dei motif articulated as the keynote of the
Holiness Code (Lv 17-26) provides the rational for the status of Israel’s being holy: ‘You
shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy’ (Lv 19:2).’”33 Just as the Trinitarian image

33 Ibid., 60.
of God grounds the covenental theme of community, so the image of God’s holiness grounds Israel’s call to be spiritually formed in God’s likeness.

Second, part of Israel’s spiritual formation involves being “chosen” and separated from the nations. They were to live distinctly from other nations of the earth: “You shall be holy to me; for I the Lord am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine” (Lv 20:26). God had chosen Israel for special relationship. Being lovingly possessed by God, Israel was supposed to behave differently than the other nations around them. Their values, customs, religious practices, and government were to be shaped by their relationship with the Lord God and not by the other deities and customs of the surrounding peoples. This is what is so devastating about Israel’s later request for a king. In wanting to “be like other nations” (1 Sm 8:20), they rejected the image of God upon themselves individually and as a community.

The third election motif is that God chooses Israel to be his “treasured possession.” Chennattu points out that being God’s “treasured possession” has “indicative and imperative aspects.”34 Indicatively, Israel has been chosen by God for covenant relationship. Imperatively, Israel was called to grow in holiness and distinction as God’s covenant people. Israel is God’s treasured possession not on account of any virtue of its own. God’s free and benevolent choosing of Israel makes Israel “treasured.” On the other hand, Israel is called to live into that treasured relationship. Spiritual formation begins with awareness that one has been freely chosen by God for treasured

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34 Ibid.
relationship and continues by letting God choose to spiritually mold and form the covenant partner. Chennattu concludes:

The concept of a covenant between Yahweh and Israel is based on choices: God’s choice of his people Israel and their choice of God. The choice of Israel underscores their free decision to be obedient and faithful to God. Unlike the treaty, which is typically based on the sovereign’s conquest of the vassal, the covenant is grounded in Yahweh’s deliverance of Israel from an oppressive ruler, the Pharaoh of Egypt (Deut 7:6-8). The election of Israel is not based on the virtue or the strength of the people, but on God’s love and faithfulness to the promises made to their ancestors (Deut 4:37; 7:7-8; 9:4-6; 10:15; 23:5).³⁵

The essence of spiritual formation in the Sinai covenant is based on gracious choosing and thankful response. God chooses to deliver Israel from slavery, and Israel thankfully chooses to live in covenant faithfulness to God and his promises.

This theme of spiritual formation is also present in the New Testament. The organic relationship of the covenants becomes fully evident in Jesus’ New Covenant with the disciples. The idea of how one grows spiritually in relationship with God becomes most clear and most possible in God’s New Covenant in Jesus Christ.

The ministry of Jesus realizes Jeremiah’s prophecy of a New Covenant written on the human heart rather than on tablets of stone (Jer 31:31). God’s intent in spiritual formation has been to reform the rebelliousness of the human heart, which leads away from God’s life-giving purposes. The New Covenant of Jesus makes this renovation of the heart possible. In his ministry, Jesus proclaimed that the kingdom of God is at hand (Mk 1:15). His Sermon on the Mount, which again is Jesus’ re-appropriation of the Sinai covenant, intertwines spiritual reformation of the disciples with the relational ethic of the new community. Jesus calls for a righteousness beyond that of the Scribes and Pharisees

³⁵ Ibid.
in order to participate in the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:19-20). He extends the call to “be perfect” as the heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48). Jesus is calling his followers to be spiritually formed in a kind of righteousness that derives from the heart rather than from external observance of religious code. Jesus talks about spiritual practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving with the heavenly Father—“who sees in secret” (Mt 6:4, 6, 18). The spiritual formation made possible by Jesus results in a life that is truly changed and not one that looks to perform simply when others are watching.

Like the covenants before Jesus, the New Covenant is based on the gracious choosing of God and not on the merit of the recipient. Even so, as was evident in previous covenants, the New Covenant calls for loving obedience to the commands of Jesus. In John’s version of the Upper Room events Jesus reminds the disciples, “they who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them” (Jn 14:21). Finally, participants in the New Covenant are called to fidelity to the word of God. For this reason, Jesus says, “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you” (Jn 15:7).

Missional Engagement: Covenant to Bless the World

The third theme that runs throughout the biblical covenants is mission. Each covenant is not only concerned about relationships within the community and the community’s increasing love for and devotion to God but also about the community’s relationship to the planet and its inhabitants. The covenant relationship reflects the nature of the covenant-making God. As God is an outwardly focused tri-unity of relationships,
so the covenant relationship calls for an outward focus of holy relationships. The covenant relationship is for God’s blessing of the world.

The covenant with Noah makes it clear that God’s agenda for the world is recreation. The entire covenantal narrative is a reworking of the creation narrative. The *ruach* ("spirit," “wind”) of God spreads over the watery chaos in Genesis 8 just as it does in Genesis 1. Just like in Genesis 1, God separates the land from the waters (Gn 8:1, 5, 11, 14). Not just once but three times Noah is commanded to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gn 8:17; 9:1, 7), which is the same command Adam and Eve received from their Creator. The command originally given to only fish and birds to “fill the earth” (Gn 1:21-22) now is extended “to all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth” (Gn 8:17). God’s covenant with Noah is more than just a promise not to destroy the earth again by flood. It is an invitation to partner with God in the ongoing mission of recreation. As Noah, his family, and the inhabitants of the ark begin repopulating and rebuilding the earth they become partners with God in his work of recreation. This partnership takes seriously the tragic effects of sin and extends beyond relationships with people in order to encompass care for the planet.

The covenants reveal a God whose character is outwardly focused and self-sacrificing. In particular, the missional aspect of the Abrahamic covenant takes form through God’s desire to bless the world. This is especially striking in the covenantal ceremony with Abraham in Genesis 15, in which God’s swears the animal’s fate for himself.

Professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary and author of the Genesis commentary for
the *New Interpreter’s Bible*. Terence E. Fretheim notes that this act “reveals the depth of the divine faithfulness to Abram and the divine willingness to become vulnerable for the sake of the promise.”36 From its inception, God’s covenant relationship with Abraham calls for the same “willingness to become vulnerable” for the sake of blessing others. God’s covenant relationship with Abram begins with Abram’s willing vulnerability to leave his familiar homeland and go where God was sending him so that God could bless the nations of the earth through him (Gn 12:1-2). This is the essence of God’s missional call: to go willingly wherever God sends in order to be used in his purposes to bless the world.

The Sinai covenant is rooted in the election of Israel to be God’s “holy people” (Dt 7:6). This election not only calls for a distinctive ethic within the covenant community and distinct devotion in relationship to God, Israel’s election in the Sinai covenant is rooted in God’s desire to bless the nations of the earth. McKenzie summarizes, “In addition to the ‘vertical’ obligation of Israelites to God, the covenant also charges them with a strong ‘horizontal’ obligation.”37 The same covenant that obliges Israel to live in holiness and religious purity also obliges them to bring justice to their neighbors.

The prophecy of Isaiah links the motif of Israel’s election with God’s desire to bring justice on the earth. The prophet says, “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations” (Is 42:1). God “delights” in the covenant partner, but the

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37 McKenzie, *Covenant*, 141.
relationship is not self-serving. The outgrowth of this special relationship is justice for the nations. As Chennattu puts it, “The election and covenant relationship has a special mission for the building up of a just order and bringing the light to other peoples (e.g., Isa 42:1-4; 43:10; 49:6).” God’s chosen people are called to confront oppressive social and economic systems. They are to defend the cause of the weak and powerless (Is 1:17).

Chosen Israel is not only an instrument of God’s blessing in terms of a “just order” on the earth, Israel is God’s witness among the nations (Is 43:10). The manner in which Israel lives its communal life in relationship with God and the way Israel defends the cause of the needy make it God’s “light to the nations” (Is 49:6). God intends others to be drawn to him through Israel’s witness of compassion and justice. God’s presence with Israel will be so apparently obvious that “many peoples and strong nations” (Zec 8:22) will be compelled to seek the Lord. “In those days ten men from nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, grasping his garment and saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’” (Zec 8:23). Israel’s missional engagement involves going out among the nations as well as attracting and enfolding those who are drawn to God’s way of living, as demonstrated in Israel’s corporate life.

The ultimate aim of the New Covenant with Jesus is to point the world toward Jesus’ new way of life in the kingdom of God. Jesus begins the Sermon on the Mount proclaiming that those who embrace the kingdom of God in Christ are “salt of the earth”

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(Mt 5:13). As salt was a sign of the Old Covenant between God and Israel (Lv 2:13), so the follower of Christ is now the sign of the New Covenant for the world.  

Jesus’ “new commandment” in the Upper Room discourse of John 13 is that the disciples “love one another” (Jn 13:34). While the ethic of the New Covenant community is the directive involved in this command, its purpose is to show the world God’s new way of living. As the disciples obey the “new” command to love one another, the world will know that they are Jesus’ disciples (Jn 13:34).

At the end of Matthew, Jesus commands these same disciples to “make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:19); and in the Book of Acts, Jesus says that they will be his “witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Jesus’ mission for the disciples involves taking his message of the kingdom of God to the entire world, beginning with Jerusalem and extending to the far corners of the globe. God's reign is the perfect, just, and life-giving rule of a perfect, just, and life-giving God. The kingdom of God is blessing for the earth. It is in and through God’s kingdom that God’s life-giving purpose for the planet and its inhabitants is restored.

The word that best describes the missional relationship between the Church and the kingdom of God is this: “represent.” The kingdom of God is not the same as or in the hands of the Church. On the other hand, the Church is not entirely separate or distinct from God’s kingdom. Expanding, building, or bringing about God’s kingdom is not within

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the Church’s power, as language in some circles seem to suggest. Rather, the kingdom of God is in the hands of Jesus Christ. Jesus’ central message during his earthly ministry was that the kingdom of God was “at hand” (Mk 1:15) in his person.

At the same time, it is wrong to say that the Church is entirely distinct and separate from the kingdom of God. As George R. Hunsberger aptly states:

We must say with equal force that the reign of God must not be divorced from the church. The church is constituted by those who are entering and receiving the reign of God. It is where the children of the reign corporately manifest the presence and characteristic features of God’s reign. The divine reign expresses itself in a unique, though not exhaustive or exclusive, fashion in the church.

The Church is not separate and distinct from the kingdom of God, because it is the Body of Christ and made up of people who enter into the reign of God. Members of the Body of Christ, who embrace the kingdom and who are embraced by the kingdom, demonstrate the quality and characteristics of God’s reign.

According to Hunsberger, the term “represent” conveys this dual meaning. The term mutually affirms the idea that the Church is not the same as the kingdom of God while neither completely separate from the kingdom. The term “represent” functions this way, because it has both active and passive meaning. Passively, “represent” signifies something that refers to or points to something it is not. A book or a paper represents the word of an author. A movie trailer represents the film coming to the theater. The book, paper, or movie trailer is not the thing itself but rather points to the thing or is a sign of the thing itself.

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41 Ibid., 99.
Actively, the word “represent” refers to a person with the authority to act on behalf of another. Foreign diplomats represent the policies and government of their home country on foreign soil. Attorneys represent their clients in a court of law.\footnote{Ibid., 101.}

Therefore, the Church represents the kingdom of God passively as a sign and foretaste. It points “away from itself to what God is going to complete.”\footnote{Ibid.} In the active sense the Church is an agent and instrument of the reign of God. The keys to the kingdom are given to the Church (Mt 16:19). Members of the church are “fellow workers for the kingdom of God (Col 4:11) and “ambassadors” (2 Cor 5:20) of the reign of God.\footnote{Ibid., 101-102.}

The Church represents the kingdom of God in its three-fold covenantal identity as the people of God. The Church represents the kingdom of God as a community. As Hunsberger puts it, “before the church is called to do or say anything, it is called and sent to be the unique community of those who live under the reign of God.”\footnote{Ibid., 103.} The Church represents the reign of God as servant in the model of Jesus’ earthly ministry “through compassionate response to human need.”\footnote{Ibid., 105.} Finally, the Church represents the reign of God as its messenger announcing “the presence of the reign of God and its implications and call.”\footnote{Ibid., 106.} The Church does this, in part, through the ministry of preaching, teaching, and worship.
Leadership Covenant Making that Shapes CLPC and Engages Culture

The major biblical covenants present three consistent and equally important concerns of God for the covenant relationship. First, the major biblical covenants demonstrate God’s concern for authentic, just, and loving relationships within the covenant community. In essence, the covenants are inherently relational because the God who makes them is relational. Second, God establishes covenant so that God’s people can grow in relationship with God. The covenants call God’s people to continual spiritual formation. Finally, the covenants demonstrate God’s concern for restoring creation and healing brokenness in the world.

The tension CLPC ministry leaders experience in the “outreach” versus “spiritual growth” points of view can be addressed in the theological understanding of covenant, which is outlined above. The biblical idea of covenant emphasizes the importance of community, a concept which both the missional church movement and the spiritual formation movement emphasize. The biblical idea of covenant, however, equally emphasizes missional engagement and spiritual formation. It does not reduce one or the other to a secondary concern.

The answer to CLPC’s organizational and corporate self-identity issues will be a leadership process that results in a leadership team covenant for CLPC ministry leaders. In his book *Leading the Team Based Church*, George Cladis says covenants can be a powerful tool offering leadership groups clear focus and vision for ministry. He observes that team covenants serve as a “powerful tool for creating a setting of love that

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48 George Cladis, *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 11.
the team members hold each other accountable for upholding.” As the newly formed CLPC staff, with elder ministry leader counterparts, faces the challenges of leading the congregation in a new direction, a team covenant can define “loving and honorable ways to be in relationship with one another.”

A leadership process resulting in a ministry leadership team covenant not only will address functional concerns about how elders and paid staff work together, it will begin to shape the identity and values of the entire CLPC organization. According to Edgar H. Schein in his work, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, the primary distinction between managers and leaders is that leaders shape the culture of an organization. Leaders shape culture primarily by what receives their focus and attention. Leaders communicate values, priorities and goals by what they “reward, control, and react to emotionally.” CLPC ministry leaders can be shaped and influenced by the theology and values of biblical covenants as they progress through the leadership process. As staff and elders are shaped by theses biblical priorities, CLPC ministry and congregants in turn will pay more attention to these values within the organization. Covenant values of community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement can shape functional processes like budgeting, leadership recruitment, and promotion. Covenant values can impact facility usage, ministry program development and assessment, and conflict resolution.

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49 Ibid.

The covenantal values of community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement embedded in CLPC leaders through the leadership process and the development of a leadership covenant are the key to re-shaping the culture of the Clear Lake congregation. As Schein notes, “Cultures begin with leaders who impose their own values and assumptions on a group.”51 In the case of an organization with pre-existing norms and values, it is necessary for adaptive leaders to “step outside the culture”52 and examine its limitations. This is the aim of the leadership process outlined in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. As CLPC ministry leaders live out the above covenant values in their relationships, ministry area responsibilities, and everyday lives in their neighborhood communities, they will create a communal, spiritually formational, and missional culture at CLPC.

51 Ibid., 2.

52 Ibid.
PART THREE

STRATEGY FOR DEVELOPING THE LEADERSHIP COVENANT
CHAPTER 5

EXPLORING COVENANTAL LIFE IN COMMUNITY THROUGH SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND MISSIONAL ENGAGEMENT

The strategy portion of this project begins here in this chapter with an overview of the plan and goals for the leadership process. In this plan, church leaders will study and experience community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement as these relate to covenant making. While Chapter 6 outlines the specific sequence, this chapter presents the basic building blocks from which a leadership covenant will be formed, which are based on the theological conclusions that completed Part Two of this discussion.

Overview of Application and Structure

Covenants are God’s way of calling God’s people into community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement. They mend relational brokenness in the human family and call God’s people to live in loving, healthy relationship with one another. God’s covenants heal humanity’s spiritual relationship with God and call human beings into loving obedience to their Creator. God’s covenants invite God’s people into a
mission of blessing the world and restoring creation. These covenantal purposes for God’s people are intermingled and interrelated.

For this reason, healthy relationships are vital to spiritual growth. Spiritual maturity is necessary for healthy relationships. As God’s covenant people live self-sacrificially in God’s mission to bless the world, they grow spiritually. The witness of the covenant community’s corporate life tangibly demonstrates the ways of God to the world.

The application portion of this project leads CLPC elders and staff through a leadership process that will result in a ministry leadership covenant. The objective of this process is to embed a covenantal identity among ministry leaders that reflects equal commitment to God’s covenantal purposes of community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement. As this covenantal identity shapes CLPC ministry leaders, in turn it will permeate the entire congregation.

The leadership process will be practical, timely, reproducible, and integrated.¹

The leadership process is practical, because it uses structures already in place. The bulk of the content and discussion takes place during monthly session meetings when all of the CLPC ministry leaders normally gather. These meetings routinely involve at least one hour of study, prayer, and conversation before the business portion of the meeting. The plan also involves a couple of two-day retreats scheduled during times of the year when most people are available, if given advanced notice.

The leadership process is timely, because it fits within a ten-month window when all three classes of elders are actively serving. At CLPC, five new elders are elected

¹ See the Appendix of this project for an integrated timeline for the leadership process.
annually to serve a three-year term. The months of May and June are transitional time periods for outgoing and incoming elders. Therefore, the leadership process begins in June 2012 and ends April 2013. The process includes fourteen training segments. Ten training segments will take place during monthly session meetings. The eleventh and twelfth segments are the two leadership retreats. The thirteenth and fourteenth segments are two missional engagement exercises.

Additionally, the leadership process as described within this project is reproducible. Its conceptual framework can be reused several years later with a different group of ministry leaders at CLPC. CLPC ministry leaders also can replicate the process in a modified form with their individual ministry teams. This will help to begin spreading the covenental identity throughout the congregation.

Most importantly, the leadership process will be an integrated experience. While the covenental themes of community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement are distinct, they interrelate and are not sequential. One does not have to grow to spiritual maturity before reaching out in mission. Equally, missional engagement is not the first step toward spiritual growth. It is possible to begin growing spiritually and to be used by God to bless the world without having all perfectly healthy relationships. Consequently, the leadership plan treats the covenental themes of community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement distinctly while continually emphasizing their integration for the purpose of maintaining their equal emphasis.
Book Discussion Questions for CLPC Leaders

This section offers a content overview and study questions for three books that will guide the leadership process that results in a ministry leader covenant. Ronald W. Richardson’s *Creating a Healthier Church* will be the primary text addressing the component of community within the leadership process. *The Great Omission* by Willard will guide CLPC ministry leaders in conversation about spiritual formation. Finally, McNeal’s *Missional Renaissance* will lead CLPC ministry leaders to explore the concept and practice of missional engagement.

Overview and Study Questions for *Creating a Healthier Church*

The major scriptural covenants consistently demonstrate God’s concern for healthy relationships within the covenant community. The way the covenant community gets along together in relationship is one of the things setting it apart as uniquely belonging to God. The quality of relationships within the covenant community reflects the inherent relational nature of God. Just as God relates in a balanced and holistic way within the members of the Trinity, so individuals within the covenant community are called to interrelate. Richardson’s work applies Murray Bowen’s family systems theory to the congregational context within a solid Christian theological framework.² It deals with sophisticated sociological, psychological, and theological concepts in a way that is accessible to ministry leaders whether or not they are formally trained. As such, *Creating

*a Healthier Church* provides an excellent platform for addressing the communal component of covenant.

The book begins with the fictitious story of two churches facing similar crises on a Sunday morning. As Richardson imagines how two kinds of churches might respond to a failed boiler and a backed-up sewer, he demonstrates two very different kinds of congregational emotional systems. Specifically, he is concerned with the behavioral responses of the ministry leaders within these situations. Ministry leaders at one church respond anxiously. Tension escalates as ministry leaders spend more time blaming one another than they spend doing any real problem solving. Ministry leaders at the other church seem better equipped to adapt to the crisis. They respond with appropriate good humor and validate one another’s feelings of anger and frustration. Ministry leaders within this latter “system” are able to productively solve problems while preserving healthy relationships.

The opening three chapters of Richardson’s resource present the concept of relational systems within a congregation. According to Richardson, ministry leaders “contribute to the tone or atmosphere of church life, not only as an individual personality but as part of a collective group spirit.” CLPC ministry leaders have the opportunity to shape a positive atmosphere for building healthy relationships throughout the congregation as they learn to relate in a healthy way with one another. The basis for relating well with one another begins with an understanding that human beings are not simply isolated autonomous individuals. A person cannot be fully understood in the

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3 Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church*, 21.
context of relationships without taking into account the connections that exist among individuals. As Richardson puts it, “No one lives or acts in isolation, and we are all affected by each other’s behavior.” Effective ministry leadership at CLPC entails viewing the congregational community as a system of relationships “rather than as a collection of isolated people.”

Richardson examines different kinds of emotional connections that compose a relational system. People can be connected in conflict or in intense closeness. Distant relationships or ones that are entirely cut off also impact a relational system. Anxiety unbalances the relational system and arises from a sense of threat or feeling out of control. Ministry leaders are more effective as they cultivate their ability to remain calm in the face of rising anxiety. A primary way of doing this is to cultivate the ability to objectively observe the relational environment without becoming detached. Wise ministry leaders focus on “functional facts” in a given situation rather than speculating “about things we can’t see or don’t understand (such as motives).” Functional facts are things like body language and voice inflection. As CLPC ministry leaders cultivate their ability to focus on these aspects of their relational environments, they will be better equipped to offer calm leadership that helps others think more clearly and see new possibilities.

While the opening three chapters present the basis for family systems theory applied to the congregational context, the fourth through seventh chapters unfold the

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4 Ibid., 25.
5 Ibid., 26.
6 Ibid., 38.
actual elements at play in a congregational emotional system. These concepts are summarized in the eighth chapter. Richardson’s graph, illustrated in figure 1, is the crux of his argument. Human beings are created for the purpose of “togetherness” and “individuality.” By this, he means a person’s identity is found in belonging with others in a group as well as by expressing one’s individuality apart from the group. From this information, CLPC ministry leaders can better understand the basic drive to human relationships. This understanding will explain why at times people need to join in with others and why at other times they need to do their own thing.

![Functional Style Graph]


Along with these “primary life forces”\(^7\) arise “the relational needs for closeness to and distance from others [emphasis mine].”\(^8\) A less mature process of dealing with

\(^7\) Ibid., 101.

\(^8\) Ibid.
these forces is what the book calls “fusion,” and the more mature process is “differentiation.” The result is that human relationships within a congregational emotional system function in one of four quadrants. Less mature, or unhealthy, relationships will function in either the “enmeshed” quadrant or the “isolated” quadrant. More mature, or healthy, relationships will function either in the “connected” quadrant or the “alone” quadrant. CLPC ministry leaders will grapple with the concepts summarized in this chapter in particular during the leadership process. The missional engagement exercises, book discussion, and Bible studies will provide opportunity for CLPC ministry leaders to be together in relationally intense situations. Equipped with Richardson’s theory and vocabulary, the ministry leaders will be able to discuss more accurately their responses to these situations. This will help them be more genuinely open and self-aware.

Richardson’s remaining chapters (nine and thirteen) are also important content for CLPC leaders, as the ninth chapter deals with the common issue of relational triangles and the thirteenth chapter brings the book’s concept to an applied conclusion. Relational triangles are a constant in any relational system, but they tend to be especially present in congregations. Richardson’s chapter entitled “Triangles in the Congregation” will give CLPC ministry leaders specific strategies for identifying triangulated relationships and skills for managing them. The thirteenth chapter, entitled “Becoming a Better Leader,” will help CLPC leaders appropriate the concepts of the book into a personal development plan for their ongoing growth. It is important that these concepts be intentionally applied personally so the ideas translate to changed behavior.
The concepts in *Creating a Healthier Congregation* will require self-reflection as well as group discussion. The premise of the book is that “you become a leader by becoming more fully yourself, and by managing yourself (not others), within the context of [the] congregation.” Each ministry leader will keep a journal to record answers to “For Your Own Thinking” questions at the end of each chapter. Answers to these particular questions will not be discussed in the group since they invite more personal reflection. The other questions will be discussed in the group setting. Below are the reading schedule and discussion questions for this book.

Eight reading assignments along with eight discussion periods will help CLPC ministry leaders engage and apply the material from the book. Four of the eight reading assignments and discussion periods will include all CLPC ministry leaders. The other four reading assignments and discussion periods are for program staff ministry leaders only. In general, the program staff has been more exposed to literature in spiritual formation and missional engagement than they have to literature focusing exclusively on healthy relationships. Therefore, this format allows all ministry leaders to get a general overview of the content while the program staff is able to study the content more in depth. All CLPC ministry leaders will read select chapters (1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9), while program staff will read the entire book. The result of studying Richardson’s work will be a deeper awareness of how CLPC behaves as a relational system, especially in times of stress which often accompanies change. The study also will help ministry leaders lead in a healthier way within the CLPC system.

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9 Ibid., 172.
The first assignment, which is for all CLPC ministry leaders, offers an introduction to family systems theory as applied to the congregational context. Participants will read “Introduction: When Bad Things Happen in Good Churches” and the second chapter, “The Congregation: More Than Meets the Eye.” In their journals, ministry leaders will write about one or two problematic experiences they have had at work or at home when someone did not behave the way they expected. The goal of this reflection is to identify the ways one tends to target a specific individual as “the problem” rather than understanding difficult situations as a complex web of interpersonal relationships. Ministry leaders will draw in their journals a diagram of their family of origin. This exercise reinforces how various relationships within a family system impact one another. As ministry leaders better understand their own families of origins as an emotional system, they will be better equipped to understand CLPC as an emotional system. In group discussion, ministry leaders will talk about some of the events in the past that have “unbalanced” CLPC. They also will discuss how CLPC has handled conflict in the past. Finally, ministry leaders will practice describing a recent upsetting event at the church using “functional facts.” These discussion exercises will help ministry leaders begin to hone their relational observation skills and to practically apply the theories in Richardson’s book.

The second assignment is also for the entire CLPC ministry leadership team and is designed to help the team understand the role that anxiety plays in unbalancing a

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10 Ibid., 11-40.
relational system. They will read the third chapter, “What Unbalances the System?”11 Ministry leaders will learn how anxiety arises from a sense of threat when people feel under attack and how a sense of threat feels the same whether it is real or imagined. They also will learn about the importance of calm leadership in the face of anxiety. In their journals, ministry leaders will reflect on childhood experiences when they felt distant from a parent, because anxiety can arise from a sense of abandonment. In group discussion ministry leaders will note some instances where calm leadership helped to lower the level of anxiousness in the congregation. They also will discuss when a good or bad “change” in the congregation became a source of threat and how the leadership at the time dealt with it. Assignment two is strategically important because CLPC ministry leaders must understand how to combat anxiety with calm leadership.

Assignments three, four, and five encompass reading the fourth through sixth chapters respectively—“Being One Among Many,” “Closeness, Distance, and the Congregation,” and “Foolishness and Wisdom in Church Leadership”—and are for CLPC program staff only.12 These chapters will be read and discussed on separate weeks and collectively deal with emotionally mature leadership in a congregation filled with differing points of view and personalities. Delving into these chapters will allow program staff to deal in depth with the book’s core ideas after having been introduced to the general content with the rest of the CLPC ministry leaders. These discussions deal specifically with the important concepts that comprise Richardson’s Functional Style

11 Ibid., 41-53.
12 Ibid., 54-90.
Graph. The life forces of togetherness and individuality along with the relational need for closeness and distance inform nearly every human relationship that ministry leaders encounter. The program staff’s working knowledge of the concepts will filter out to the rest of the ministry leaders informally during the course of their everyday interaction.

Assignment three regarding “Being One Among Many” guides CLPC program staff to understand what Richardson calls “the life forces for togetherness and individuality,” ¹³ which was discussed earlier. A theological understanding of the Trinity will help program staff understand why human beings are created with a sense of togetherness and individuality. These forces are reflected in the doctrine of the Trinity, since God is both one in substance (togetherness) and three in persons (individuality). Healthy leadership balances these life forces with differentiation.

Assignment four regarding “Closeness, Distance, and the Congregation” leads CLPC program staff in understanding the proper balance between closeness and distance in a church system. As the program staff interacts with this content, they will understand how church members try to use the mechanisms of “emotional pursuit and distance” ¹⁴ as one way to feel more comfortable in an emotional system they feel is out of balance. Study in this chapter will help ministry leaders know why in times of stress some congregation members try to get especially close to a ministry leader and why others try to distance themselves. Through group discussion and personal reflection ministry, leaders will understand how to respond to these kinds of approaches in a healthy way.

¹³ Ibid., 56.

¹⁴ Ibid., 69.
Assignment five regarding “Foolishness and Wisdom in Church Leadership” introduces program staff to Richardson’s concepts of fusion and differentiation. Fusion is the unhealthy emotional process of coping with a healthy need for closeness or distance. Differentiation is the healthier process of dealing with the same need. In their journals and group discussion, CLPC program staff ministry leaders will reflect on their ability to distinguish between opinions and fact, an important skill in avoiding fusion and maintaining differentiation.

Assignment six collectively covers “Reactivity is More Than Reacting” and The Four Functional Styles of Congregational Life,”15 the seventh and eighth chapters from the book and once again involves the entire CLPC ministry leadership team. The focus of this assignment is to begin integrating the concepts from the book and applying them concretely to the CLPC congregation. The concept of reactivity is critical for CLPC ministry leaders to understand, because it explains the way people respond to a sense of real or perceived threat. CLPC ministry leaders will be in a better position to effect change and lead the congregation as they understand the patterns of reactivity that Richardson outlines. Discussion on the four functional styles of congregational life will help ministry leaders understand the dynamics of Richardson’s Functional Style Graph. The purpose of these discussions is to help CLPC ministry leaders to begin seeing the everyday life of the congregation through the lens of these functional styles. CLPC ministry leaders will choose a recent session meeting as a case study for applying these concepts. Ministry leaders will divide into groups of five or six to do their analysis and

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15 Ibid., 91-113.
then present their findings to the entire group. Members of each group then will reflect on their own group process in light of the Functional Style Graph. This will give ministry leaders practice seeing themselves and others through the grid Richardson describes.

Assignment seven is the last assignment for this book that involves the entire CLPC ministry leadership team. The focus of this assignment is on relational triangles and draws from the content of Richardson’s ninth chapter, “Triangles in the Congregation.” Discussion and reflection on these relational dynamics helps ministry leaders see how anxiety in the congregation makes it more difficult for people to relate directly to one another. As anxiety increases in the system, people tend to form alliances with one another against a third person or issue rather than dealing with the person or issue directly. This content offers lots of examples of triangles, how to identify them, and how to reposition oneself in order to de-triangulate. CLPC ministry leaders will discuss triangles they have seen in the church and some ways they have been part of them or how they have successfully repositioned themselves to avoid being triangulated.

Assignment eight is for CLPC program staff ministry leaders only. In this assignment they will skim the tenth through twelfth chapters, which collectively deal with assessment tools for congregational emotional health, but will read the thirteenth chapter entitled “Becoming a Better Leader.” The program staff leaders will discuss the four attributes Richardson says are important for leaders of a congregation and determine in what attributes they see one another excelling. More importantly, they will identify one or two ways they can help one another grow in the attributes where they lack.

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16 Ibid., 114-130.

17 Ibid., 172-183.
Richardson’s *Creating a Healthier Church* is an important building block for establishing a covenant of healthy relationship for the CLPC ministry leadership team, because redemptive relationships begin with an accurate understanding of how people interrelate. Reflection, study, and group discussion on this book will help ministry leaders foster patterns of relationship that will make their work together more effective. These concepts also will benefit their relationships with the congregation as a whole.

**Content Overview and Study Approach for *The Great Omission***

The major covenants in Scripture persistently demonstrate God’s concern for the holiness of the covenant community. The covenant people are God’s treasured possession. This treasured relationship leads the covenant community into ever increasing love and trust of God by which they reflect God’s character. As a community under the New Covenant of Christ, CLPC is called to grow in ever increasing love and trust of Jesus (cf. 2 Cor 3:16-18). The process of growth in holiness and loving obedience to Jesus Christ is the way of spiritual formation. According to Willard, “Spiritual formation is the process through which those who love and trust Jesus Christ effectively take on his character.”

Willard has written extensively on the topic of spiritual formation, perhaps more than any other contemporary author. *The Divine Conspiracy* is his most comprehensive work on the topic. However, the size and intricacy of *The Divine Conspiracy* can make it inaccessible as a starting point for understanding Willard’s approach to spiritual formation. For this reason, CLPC ministry leaders will read select chapters only. This

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work is a collection of elsewhere published articles and addresses given by Willard. The book’s title refers to the omission of disciple-making from the Great Commission (Mt 28:19-20). Willard challenges the prevailing belief that “we can be ‘Christians’ forever and never become disciples.”

The chapters are divided into three main sections. The first section, “Apprenticed to Jesus,” debunks the myth that spiritual formation is an additional option for a select group of super Christians. Instead, salvation means learning to live life in the kingdom of God under the instruction of Jesus Christ as the master teacher. The section entitled “Spiritual Formation and the Development of Character” discusses Jesus’ agenda for spiritual formation. The twelfth through fifteenth chapters compose the section entitled “Discipleship of the Soul and the Mind,” which introduces Willard’s concept of the soul as it relates to the mind and will in the process of spiritual formation. During the leadership process, CLPC ministry leaders will read and discuss the Introduction and the third, fifth, eighth, and twelfth chapters of The Great Omission, which are described in detail below.

After reading the introduction, CLPC ministry leaders will discuss how they might explain the good news of Jesus Christ differently to someone who is not a Christian. Instead of the gospel just being about going to heaven when people die, Willard exposes what he calls the “Great Omission” from the Great Commission, which is discipleship. Since according to Willard, the “good news” of Christ is about making a real difference on earth today, ministry leaders will discuss how they want their faith in

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19 Ibid., xi.
20 Ibid., ix-xv.
21 Ibid. xii.
Christ to make a practical difference. Articulating specific arenas for desired change will lead the discussion and reflection from abstract concepts of theology into practical arenas of everyday living and ministry.

Reading the third chapter, entitled “Who is Your Teacher,” will help ministry leaders understand the ministry of Jesus Christ more as teacher than simply Savior alone.\(^{22}\) Ministry leaders will talk about influential teachers in their lives. They also will discuss what and how they learned from these teachers and what methods of instructions these influential teachers used. This chapter also probes the idea that Jesus’ authority and knowledge is somehow exclusive of math, science, and business. Ministry leaders will discuss why it is difficult to believe that Jesus could be “master of fields such as algebra, economics, business administration, or French literature”\(^ {23}\) and how the confession that Jesus is Lord goes hand in hand with the belief that Jesus is “the smartest person who ever lived.”\(^ {24}\) In contrast to the way modern Christians tend to think of Jesus, first-century Christ followers “learned to do everything they said or did in cooperative action with Jesus, their ever present teacher.”\(^ {25}\) CLPC ministry leaders will discuss how according to the chapter this kind of interactive relationship with Jesus is possible. They will confer about how life might be different if Jesus interacted with them in everyday matters like balancing a checkbook, repairing the car, or engineering design consultations at work.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 18-22.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 19.

\(^{24}\) Ibid.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 20.
Ultimately, this will be for the purpose of seeing that relationship with Christ is instructive for every arena of human living.

The content in Willard’s fifth chapter, entitled “The Key to the Keys to the Kingdom,” was originally published as a journal article for full-time ministry leaders and pastors. However, its message addresses all ministry leaders regardless of their professional vocation. Ministry leaders will discuss times when they have noticed the busy pace of their lives negatively impacting their relationship with God. They also will contemplate the ways demands of ministry at CLPC contribute to their feelings of busyness. In this chapter, Willard introduces the important concept with regard to spiritual formation that “grace is opposed to earning, not to effort.” Through collective dialogue, CLPC ministry leaders will grapple with the truth that grace does more than save a person from sin. Rather, grace is a powerful and enabling resource for an interactive relationship with Christ. Finally, in this chapter, Willard discusses the importance of the Sabbath, which according to the Old Testament is a sign of the covenant (Ex 31:13). In contemplating this topic, CLPC ministry leaders will talk about the practices of solitude, silence, and fasting as integral to Sabbath rest. Each ministry leader will choose one of these disciplines (solitude, silence, or fasting) to practice on their own for one month. Ministry leaders will cluster with others who have chosen the same discipline to practice and brainstorm specific ways they will implement the practice.

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26 Ibid., 32-39.
27 Ibid., 34.
28 Ibid., 35.
for that month. Ministry leaders will debrief their experiences with one another the following month. Putting the spiritual disciplines into practice is important, because it reinforces theoretical learning. Furthermore, practices that involve the physical body are integral to spiritual formation.

The eighth chapter of *The Great Omission*, entitled “The Spirit is Willing, But… The Body as a Tool for Spiritual Growth,” is important because it clarifies the important role of the body in the process of spiritual formation. The body of animals was an important element in the Abraham covenant in Genesis 15, and the human body is also a key element in God’s covenant sign of circumcision in Genesis 17. Willard explains that from a Christian perspective the “flesh” (in terms of the human body) is not necessarily opposed to the things of God; rather, it is a “tool for spiritual growth.” This is why nearly all activities of spiritual discipline involve the body: fasting, solitude, silence, celebration, sleep). Since physical bodies are involved in the choices one makes, retraining them through spiritual disciplines is an important facet of spiritual formation.

While his eighth chapter deals with the role of the body in spiritual formation, Willard’s twelfth chapter—entitled “Spiritual Disciplines, Spiritual Formation, and the Restoration of the Soul”—unpacks the concept of the human soul as it relates to the human person in the process of spiritual formation. The article originally appeared in a scholarly journal, so it will require more careful reading. In this chapter, Willard explains that the

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29 Ibid., 80-90.
30 Ibid. 80.
31 Ibid., 137-158.
human soul is like a computer at the heart of an automobile manufacturing plant.\textsuperscript{32} In the same way a manufacturing plant requires integration of multiple operations, so the human person requires integration of the will, mind, body, and spirit. The human soul serves this integrative function within the human person. CLPC leaders will return to discussion about the active role of grace in the process of spiritual formation when they reflect on Willard’s conviction that “under grace, passivity does not exclude activity and activity does not exclude passivity”\textsuperscript{33} By understanding more clearly how the concepts of body, will, and desire work together, CLPC ministry leaders can grasp the necessity of sustained practice of spiritual disciplines in the process of spiritual formation.

Content Overview and Study Approach for \textit{The Missional Renaissance}

The major scriptural covenants reflect God’s desire to bless the world through the covenant community. God’s covenant relationship with Abraham is rooted in God’s desire not only to bless Abraham but to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham’s descendants. Frequently the Israelites drifted from this call, presuming their chosenness by God was for them alone to enjoy (cf. Is 1:1-4; Ez 34:1-6; Am 6:1). Like the prophet Jonah, Israel confused the blessing of God as a commodity to hoard for themselves rather than a gift to share with others (Jon 4:1-4).

God has a mission to restore, redeem, and bless all of creation; and the Church is at the heart of God’s purposes to this end (cf. Acts 1:8). In addition to calling members of the Church into a new kind of radical self-giving relationship with one another, and to a

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item Ibid., 144.
\item Ibid., 150.
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radical sense of loving obedience to God, the covenant relationship with God calls the Church to give its life away in the same way God gave his life for the Church in Jesus Christ (Phil 2:5). Just as the Three-in-One nature of God establishes the pattern for relationships within the covenant community, the self-sacrificing and outwardly focused nature of God establishes the pattern for missional engagement for the covenant community. The covenant community imitates the life of God who gave himself in Jesus Christ (Mt 20:28) by giving itself to bless the world.

McNeal’s work, The Missional Renaissance, invites churches to fundamentally restructure its corporate life for the sake of God’s mission to bless the world. This restructuring is not merely adopting another program or taking on the latest model for doing church. The missional call of God requires churches “to redefine their position in the community . . . through service and sacrifice.” According to McNeal this involves three essential shifts. First, a congregation must move from “an internal to an external ministry focus.” In the same way an airport focuses on moving people through the airport and to their destination, the missional church sees its ultimate mission to move people beyond the church building and into the world. In part, this new perspective will help CLPC ministry leaders who are engaged in secular professions see their vocations as missional callings. They no longer will see their church work as spiritual and their day job as un-spiritual. Furthermore, as CLPC ministry leaders design and implement new

34 McNeal, Missional Renaissance, 6.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 45.
church programs, they will focus less on how many people attend a particular event and more on how the program equips and motivates people to be missionaries in their neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools.

The second shift is moving from “program development to people development.”37 For CLPC, this missional shift does not require abandoning Sunday School, youth group meetings, Bible study gatherings, and other church programs. Rather, this shift means that CLPC ministry leaders will evaluate church programs based on how well they build up and equip people for God’s service in the world. Instead of sustaining programs year after year simply from habit, more energy will be focused on customizing training and mentoring relationships with individuals. Without this second shift, being “missional” simply becomes another program tacked on to everything else a local church is doing. CLPC ministry leaders will learn that missional mindset is focused on people growing in relationship with God and one another along with a growing understanding of their call to bless the world.

The third missional shift is “from church-based to kingdom-based leadership.” Church-based leadership is concerned with institutional preservation. Kingdom-based leadership, on the other hand, is concerned with the big picture of God’s kingdom work in the world, regardless of what church or denominational structure is used to accomplish it. In this missional shift, CLPC leaders will be led to let go of traditional denominational and theological barriers for the larger purposes of God’s kingdom on earth.

37 Ibid., 10.
Ultimately, *The Missional Renaissance* gives CLPC ministry leaders a shared vocabulary for discussing the missional engagement dimension of being the covenant community of God. Most of the present-day CLPC ministry leaders were not part of the session meetings when the book was discussed two years ago. While McNeal’s resource may be lacking in that it suggests mission is sequentially the first step in renewal, it nonetheless offers valuable insight to the practicalities of the missional engagement component of covenantal identity. CLPC ministry leaders will read *The Missional Renaissance* in its entirety and reflect on each chapter in the following ways.

In the introduction and first chapter CLPC ministry leaders will receive an overview of McNeal’s approach and will review McNeal’s three “missional shifts,” which he says comprise the missional renaissance.\(^{38}\) To bring a missional renaissance to CLPC, ministry leaders also will discuss what McNeal means by the “altruism economy.” Today’s consumers expect companies to care for the environment and for the social welfare of the communities where they reside. CLPC ministry leaders will discuss ways they see their own workplaces serving the neighborhood and being environmentally friendly. In this discussion, CLPC ministry leaders will talk about what motivates the altruism of today’s industries and how that motivation can be similar or different from what motivates the CLPC congregation to be outwardly focused.

McNeal’s second chapter, “Missional Manifesto,” will help CLPC ministry leaders grapple with the important distinction between “a church” (a particular

\(^{38}\) Ibid., xiii-18.
congregation) and “the Church” (the people of God).\textsuperscript{39} Wrestling with this concept is an important key for shaping CLPC ministry leaders’ identity as God’s covenant people in relationship with one another, with God, and for the world. In order to avoid a pattern of chasing fads, CLPC ministry leaders primarily must be concerned with being the people of God rather than being a particular kind of church. Congregations that try to be a particular kind of church simply look at what other churches are doing and try to imitate it. CLPC’s future lies in knowing who they are in relationship with God and not in pursuing some prescribed pattern for success. “Missional Manifesto” also focuses on the connection between God’s incarnation and self-sacrificing nature with God’s mission for the world. God’s mission in Jesus Christ is incarnational and therefore highly contextual (Jn 1:14). This means that CLPC will discover relevant ways to live out its covenant relationship with God, unique to the Clear Lake community. God’s mission in Jesus Christ is also supremely self-sacrificial (Phil 2:5-11; Mt 20:26-28). This means that CLPC is called to live out its covenantal identity in service to the community. Equipped with these concepts through the leadership process, CLPC ministry leaders will assess their ministry activity in light of these themes.

CLPC ministry leaders will read and discuss in one session “Missional Shift 1: From an Internal to an External Focus” and “Changing the Scorecard from Internal to External Focus,” the third and fourth chapters of Missional Renaissance.\textsuperscript{40} These deal with the first missional shift of moving from being internally focused to being externally

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 19-40.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 41-88.
focused. McNeal’s airport analogy is particularly instructive on this point. CLPC ministry leaders will talk about how CLPC ministries would be different if CLPC started building a culture of missionaries rather than a culture of church members.

The fifth and sixth chapters of *Missional Renaissance* respectively are called “Missional Shift 2: From Program Development to People Development” and “Changing the Scorecard from Measuring Programs to Helping People Grow.” CLPC ministry leaders will discuss why the second missional shift is indispensable from the first and what some of the unintended consequences of a program orientation are to spiritual growth. Discussion also will include the legitimate role of programs in a people-development church. Additionally, CLPC ministry leaders will talk about which of the nine sub-shifts they find most compelling.

After reading “Missional Shift 3: From Church-Based to Kingdom-Based Leadership” and “Changing the Scorecard from Church-Based to Kingdom-Based Leadership,” the seventh and eighth chapters of *Missional Renaissance*, CLPC ministry leaders will talk about the similarities McNeal sees between the leadership challenges facing the first-century Church and “the leadership challenges of today.” McNeal says that “the default position for church leaders in North America is that of institutional

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41 Ibid., 45.
42 Ibid., 54-56.
43 Ibid., 89-128.
44 Ibid., 95-109.
46 Ibid., 132.
CLPC ministry leaders will talk about the ways in which they expect
CLPC program staff and clergy to represent the congregation in the community. The
ministry leadership team will discuss the difference between representing the church and
being a “viral agent,” who more subtly looks for ways to embed the gospel in the culture
through everyday interactions in the marketplace, school, and neighborhood. Most
importantly, the leaders will grapple with the role a “traditional” church like CLPC can
play in the missional movement. Essentially, CLPC ministry leaders will wrestle with
which of McNeal’s challenges they personally respond to from these chapters as they
consider their leadership role at CLPC.

**Outlines for Seven Bible Studies on Covenants of Healthy
Relationships, Spiritual Formation, and Missional Engagement**

The second building block for the leadership process involves focused Bible studies
on the major scriptural covenants. The Bible studies will be integrated with the above book
studies. The questions are designed for small group discussion with a facilitator. The
purpose of these biblical studies is to engage the CLPC ministry leaders with the primary
texts which expose the threefold covenantal themes of community, spiritual formation, and
missional engagement. Below is an overview of each of the biblical passages as they will
be presented to CLPC ministry leaders in the leadership process. The Appendix of this
project contains the actual text for the study questions.

\[47\] Ibid., 137.
Noah: Covenant of Recreation, Genesis 6:1 through 9:17

God’s covenant with Noah embodies God’s purpose to recreate the earth in light of the tragic effects of the fall. The covenant with Noah reveals God’s intent to deal with the sinfulness of the human heart and to heal the resulting brokenness of human relationships. God’s covenental purposes with Noah extend beyond the human family to include all of creation. The narrative of the Noah covenant spans nearly all of three chapters. The particular objective in having CLPC ministry leaders study the Noah covenant as a group is to see how God’s plan for recreation integrates the threefold covenental themes: community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement.

The Bible study on the Noah covenant will happen in three sections. Study #1 covers Genesis 6:1-8 and explores the condition of humanity which prompts God to issue the flood. Study #2 covers Genesis 6:9 through 7:24, which includes the events surrounding the actual flood. Study #3 covers Genesis 7:25 through 9:17 and deals specifically with God’s covenant with Noah.

**Study #1: Genesis 6:1-8**

The purpose of the first study in Genesis 6:1-7 is to help CLPC ministry leaders understand the brokenness of creation and God’s displeasure with it, which sets the context for the flood story proper in Genesis 6:9 to 7:24. The story of Genesis begins with the perfection of God’s creation. Adam and Eve are in perfect relationship with one another, with God, and with creation. The temptation and resulting sin of Genesis 3 devastates God’s perfect creation. The result is enmity in the human family and evil in the human heart. God is so displeased that he regrets making humankind.
Four sets of questions will help CLPC ministry leaders grapple with the corrupting effects of sin on God’s creation and God’s response to this corruption. The first set of questions helps to invite ministry leaders to skim through Genesis 1 and 2 and to make general observations about the quality of creation and God’s pleasure with all that has been made. Ministry leaders will observe how the word “good” is used repeatedly to describe God’s creation. It also will be revealed how the goodness of what God made applies to God’s relationship with humanity as well as to humanity’s relationship with the created order (Gn 2:15-16).

The second set of questions observes how these perfect relationships are upended by the fall in Genesis 3. Questions in this set also will help ministry leaders see how Genesis 6:1-7 is God’s response to the predicament of the fall. God is sorry that he made creation and vows to blot out humanity (Gn 6:6-7).

A third set of questions invites ministry leaders to reflect on current news reports that reflect the brokenness of the created order described in Genesis 6:1-7. The ministry leaders will consider not only relational brokenness reflected in the latest celebrity gossip but evidence of brokenness in the created order, such as natural disasters.

The last set of questions invites the participants to notice the contrast introduced in Genesis 6:8. The sentence begins with the word “but.” Ministry leaders will talk about how this sentence creates a sense of hope for the reader about what is to come.

**Study #2: Genesis 6:9 through 7:24**

The purpose of the second study, delving into the flood story as described in Genesis 6:9 through 7:24, is to show the effect of God’s judgment against sin and to
introduce the covenantal themes of God’s gracious choosing and human response. The passage begins with God choosing Noah to build an ark. Noah’s obedience to God’s choosing reflects the essence of covenantal fidelity. Genesis 7:17-23 graphically portrays the utter destruction of all creation. Three sets of questions will help the ministry leadership team engage these concepts.

The first set of questions helps participants notice the words used to describe Noah’s character. The words, “righteous,” “blameless,” and the phrase “walked with God” are expressions the Scripture uses to describe human aspects of covenantal faithfulness (Gn 15:6; 48:15; Dt 18:13). Since Noah stands as an example of covenantal faithfulness, it is important for ministry leaders to observe how these words contrast to the general statement of humanity in Genesis 6:11-12.

The second set of questions in this study zeroes in on Noah’s obedient response to God’s command to build an ark (Gn 6:22). Obedience to God’s commands is central to the covenantal theme of spiritual formation. CLPC ministry leaders will see that Noah’s obedience in Genesis 6:22 is in stark contrast to Adam and Eve’s disobedience in Genesis 3:6.

The third set of questions leads CLPC ministry leaders to observe the way the narrator describes the utter destruction of the earth in Genesis 7:17-23. The ministry leaders need to understand how complete and utter the devastation of the earth is in order to fully appreciate God’s remarkable plan of redemption that begins in the following section. Genesis 7:17-23 is a vivid illustration of God’s punishment for sin. God’s covenant with Noah is all about redeeming the earth and humanity out of sin’s destruction.
Study #3: Genesis 7:25 through 9:17

The purpose of the third study on the story of the Noah covenant, delving into God’s rescue of Noah and the ark’s inhabitants as described in Genesis 8:1 through 9:17, is twofold. First, the study will demonstrate that the mission of God’s covenant is to recreate and restore humanity and the earth. CLPC ministry leaders will see how the Noah covenant invites them to be partners in God’s plan to redeem creation from the effects of sin. Second, this study will draw together the threefold covenantal themes found throughout the Noah covenant narrative. Drawing concepts discovered from the previous two studies, CLPC ministry leaders will begin to apply the covenantal themes to their ministry context. Six sets of questions will help accomplish these objectives.

The first set of questions helps CLPC ministry leaders see the sharp contrast between God’s remembering in Genesis 8:1 and the god-forsakenness of Genesis 7:17-24. These questions lead the participants into noticing that God remembers all the inhabitants of the ark and not just Noah. After all, God is concerned with restoring community and not just Noah as an individual.

In order to grasp God’s purposes in restoring creation, CLPC leaders must notice the way Genesis 8 retraces the creation story of Genesis 1 and 2. This is the aim of the second set of questions. Participants will observe in the text that God does not just remake creation but rather he is making the new creation even better.

A third set of questions focuses on Noah’s response to being rescued from the flood. CLPC ministry leaders will see that worship is a primary response to God’s
covenant initiative. When Noah emerges from the ark, the first thing he does is build an altar and offer worship. Participants will observe how God is pleased with Noah in this.

As CLPC ministry leaders focus in on Genesis 9:9-11 for the fourth set of questions, they will see again that God’s covenant plans involve not just human beings but animals as well. In this study CLPC ministry leaders will better understand God’s redemptive mission for the whole planet and not just human beings.

The sixth set of questions concerns the sign of the rainbow. Participants will learn that the word for rainbow is the word used to describe a bow as a weapon. The sign of the rainbow is God’s commitment to withhold judgment on the earth. Tangible signs figure a prominent role in God’s covenants as a way of reminding both God and humans of their mutual commitment.

The last set of questions is designed to help CLPC ministry leaders take an overview of the entire Noah covenant narrative studied in these three sections. They will discuss ways in which they would like to see the threefold covenantal themes reflected in the Noah covenant become part of the CLPC ministry leadership covenant.

**Abraham: A Covenant of Promise, Genesis 15**

Studying God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 will help CLPC ministry leaders understand the self-sacrificing nature of God. In the study of Genesis 15, ministry leaders will see how covenants are rooted essentially in promise. As such, promises that are forgotten or forsaken threaten to strain or even break the covenant bond. Broken covenants require punishment, because the sacred trust has been violated. In this study CLPC ministry leaders will see how God takes on himself the threat of broken promise as
he “cuts” a covenant with Abraham. In doing so, God acts in a supremely self-sacrificial way. God’s example encourages CLPC ministry leaders to respond in kind as they live out God’s threefold covenantal purposes. Three sets of questions will help CLPC ministry leaders grapple with these themes.

The first set of questions takes the ministry leaders back to God’s original promises to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3. As participants are reminded that God promised Abram to be a great nation of many descendants, they can better understand Abram’s frustration in the opening verses of Genesis 15. Ministry leaders will share with their group about a time when they experienced a broken or forgotten promise. This discussion lays the groundwork for understanding covenants as sacred promise as well as the painful consequences involved when promises are broken.

In the second set of questions CLPC ministry leaders will notice how Abram is inclined to take matters into his own hands when he thinks that God has forgotten his promise. Ultimately, God reassures Abram of his promise and Abram believes God. CLPC ministry leaders will see that covenantal faithfulness involves trusting God’s promises in the face of contradictory circumstantial appearances. Abram believed God’s promise in spite of the fact he had no evidence to prove it. The narrator describes this response as “righteousness” (Gn 15:6).

The final set of questions deals with the vision in which Abram sees God walking between the animal pieces (Gn 15:9-21). CLPC ministry leaders will learn about the Ancient Near East custom of cutting animals in two as a way of symbolizing the fate of the covenant partners if the agreement is broken. Ministry leaders will note that only
God, and not Abram, walks between the pieces. They will see how this is a demonstration of self-sacrifice. The questions in this section will help CLPC ministry leaders draw the connection between God’s promise here and Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross.

Abraham: A Covenant Sign, Genesis 17

This study will help CLPC ministry leaders understand the significance of human response in covenant to God’s gracious initiative. Four sets of questions on this chapter will help CLPC ministry leaders see God’s concern for Abram’s spiritual formation as God commands him to “walk before [God] and be blameless” (Gn 17:1). Through this study, CLPC ministry leaders will grapple with their trust of God’s promises for their own lives and for their ministries.

The first set of questions helps CLPC ministry leaders imagine themselves in Abram’s situation. They will discuss the irony of God changing Abram’s name to one that means “many offspring” (Gn 17:5). This is ironic, since as of yet Abraham still has no children of his own.

The next set of questions focuses on God’s call at the beginning of the chapter for Abram to “walk before [God] and be blameless” (Gn 17:1). CLPC ministry leaders will talk about how the metaphor of walking is descriptive of the spiritual formation process. They will discuss what it means to be blameless. In this set of questions, ministry leaders will note that God introduces himself to Abram as “God Almighty,” which connotes God’s ability to accomplish anything—including making the barren fertile (Gn 28:3;
This is important because the God who makes these bold promises to Abraham has the power to keep them.

The third set of questions zeroes in on the covenantal sign of circumcision. CLPC ministry leaders will grapple with the significance that slaves and foreigners within Abraham’s household are to be included in the circumcision rite. This is important because God’s covenantal purposes are outwardly focused and communally oriented. In this set of questions, ministry leaders will note that Abraham’s response to God’s command of circumcision was immediate and complete. It is this sort of obedience to God’s commands that characterizes a growing and faithful covenant partnership with God. It is at the core of God’s process of spiritual formation.

The fourth set of questions considers the phrase “everlasting covenant.” Using a concordance, ministry leaders will look up the many instances this phrase is used. This will help draw out the idea that God’s covenants are not separate and distinct but rather ongoing, integrated expressions of God’s desire for covenant relationship.

Sinai: A Covenant of Words, Exodus 20:1-17

In the Bible studies so far, CLPC ministry leaders will have discovered that covenant relationship with God begins with God’s initiative. They also will have seen how the covenants embody God’s mission to recreate and redeem creation. In answer to God’s gracious choosing, Noah and Abraham respond in obedience to God’s word. God’s covenant at Sinai is an expression of God’s will in words, or commandments. They express the essence of what God desires in covenant relationship with his people. The

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purpose of this study is to help CLPC ministry leaders see the Ten Commandments as rooted in God’s call to holiness (Dt 7:6) and obedience to his word. Four sets of questions will help these ministry leaders grapple with these themes.

The first set of questions helps CLPC ministry leaders see the giving of the Ten Commandments in historical context. They will recall that Israel has just been freed from many years of slavery in Egypt and that under Moses’ leadership they are headed toward freedom in the promised land. Understanding this will help CLPC ministry leaders see God’s commandments associated with the kind of freedom God desires for his people.

The second set of questions introduces Deuteronomy 7:6, where God characterizes Israel as “holy” and God’s relationship to Israel as “treasured.” These concepts frame the call to relationship in the Sinai covenant. In this part of the discussion CLPC ministry leaders will note the association of the Ten Commandments in particular with the whole of the Sinai covenant. This is expressed in passages such as Exodus 34:27-28, Deuteronomy 4:13, and Deuteronomy 9:9-11.

The heart of this Bible study comes in the third set of questions. Here CLPC ministry leaders consider how the Ten Commandments reflect the three covenantal themes of community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement. The first through fourth commandments express God’s concern for his people’s relationship with him. This is spiritual formation. The fifth through tenth commandments express God’s concern for healthy relationships. This is the covenantal theme of community. Scattered throughout different parts of the commandments CLPC ministry leaders will see God’s concern for missional engagement. The Sabbath command, for instance, applies to the “alien
resident” (Ex 20:8). The tenth commandment concerns justice in the relationship between people and possessions (Ex 20:17). In their study, CLPC ministry leaders will notice other such themes.

The fourth set of questions helps to draw out the significance that the Ten Commandments are literally ten “words.” This translation issue is important because a repeated theme in the previous Bible studies has been how God’s covenant partners obey the words, or commands, that God gives to them. Noah obeys God’s command, or word, to build an ark. Abraham obeys God’s command, or word, to circumcise. Repeatedly CLPC ministry leaders have seen that covenantal fidelity involves faithful obedience to God’s word. This concept becomes theologically important in order for CLPC ministry leaders to understand how Jesus Christ becomes the word which God’s covenant partners are to obey (Jn 1:14).

The New Covenant in Jesus Christ (Selected Passages)

As CLPC ministry leaders study the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, they will see how themes of the previous covenants continue and develop. The idea of a New Covenant that is no longer “externalized” is first presented by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 31:31-34). Jesus formally announces the New Covenant during his Passover meal with his disciples the night before he was crucified. The important thing for CLPC ministry leaders to grasp is how the three covenantal themes of community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement come to full fruition in the New Covenant relationship with Christ. To do this, CLPC ministry leaders will study Jeremiah 31:31-34 and New Testament passages recounting the events of the Last Supper.
The study questions for these selected passages could be used for one longer session or for two shorter sessions. For the purposes of explanation, they will be presented in two shorter sessions. Session A, dealing with Jeremiah 31:31-34 has two sets of questions. Session B, passages recounting Jesus’ Last Supper, has three sets of questions.

The first set of questions for Session A helps CLPC ministry leaders compare and contrast the Old Covenant with the New Covenant, promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The Old Covenant was broken by Israel (Jer 31:32) and required continual reinforcement (Jer 31:34). The most important contrast for CLPC ministry leaders to note is that the Old Covenant was written on stone while the New Covenant promises to be written on the heart.

The second set of questions for Session A delves into the translation of the word “law,” or torah (Jer 31:33). This study will show CLPC ministry leaders that the Hebrew meaning of this word means “way” or “direction” in addition to law. In this sense, Jeremiah promises that the New Covenant will put God’s direction into the human heart. In other words, the New Covenant will allow for a new kind of internally enabled obedience to the ways of God.

For Session B, dealing with passages on Jesus’ Last Supper, CLPC ministry leaders will be given handouts of the following passages for easier reference: Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; and John 13:31-35. The first set of questions here recalls the historical setting for these events. CLPC ministry leaders will make the connection between the way the original Passover meal preceded the Sinai covenant and the way Jesus’ celebration of the Passover meal precedes his
establishing a “new” covenant. Jesus connects the cup to the New Covenant and in two of the passages refers to his blood in conjunction with the covenant (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). In light of Exodus 12:22 and Exodus 24:8 this is significant, because Jesus clearly associates himself with Moses as a new kind of law giver from God. The second set of questions in Session B addresses these themes so that CLPC ministry leaders can appreciate the continuity of God’s covenant making in Jesus Christ.

The last set of questions for Session B helps ministry leaders see the sense in which Jesus replaces or fulfills (Mt 5:17) the Ten Commandments of the Old Covenant with one new commandment of the New Covenant in John 13:31-35. Jesus’ new commandment to love one another becomes the overarching theme of the New Covenant. CLPC ministry leaders will see how God’s covenantal purposes come to fruition in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Covenantal fidelity no longer depends on obedience to external commands but rather on loving relationship with Christ.
CHAPTER 6
DEVELOPING THE LEADERSHIP COVENANT

This chapter presents the specific strategy for developing a CLPC leadership covenant that promotes healthy relationships, spiritual formation, and missional engagement. It also considers ways to promote the leadership covenant to the congregation as well as an ongoing plan for renewing the leadership covenant annually. The chapter concludes with a measuring tool to determine the continuing effectiveness of the covenant.

Church Leadership Discovers Its Covenant

The purpose of this ministry project is to develop a leadership process that results in a CLPC ministry leader covenant. Arriving at the covenant is a progression of guided discovery for the CLPC ministry leaders. This progression involves the “covenant tablet,” two leadership retreats, ten studies during monthly session meetings, and two missional engagement exercises.
The Covenant Tablet

The covenant tablet is a tool to help CLPC ministry leaders actually craft the leadership covenant. The idea comes from the stone tablets that Moses received on Mount Sinai for the Ten Commandments. As the Ten Commandments are central to the covenant of the Old Testament, so the CLPC covenant tablet will be central to this covenant-making process.

The covenant tablet will be formed physically by a trio of panels, each four feet by five feet. The material used will be construction-grade, foam-board insulation. Each panel will be dedicated to one of the three covenant themes: community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement. As CLPC ministry leaders brainstorm covenant commitments for each area, they can use sticky notes or push pins to attach their notes to the covenant tablet. As we collectively agree on the commitments in each area, we will remove the sticky notes and write the covenant promises on the tablet in magic marker. The foam board is light enough to be easily moved from meeting locations to retreat locations. It is also big enough to be eye-catching. The covenant tablet will be displayed at each session meeting and during the leadership retreats as a reminder of our covenant leadership process.

Two Covenant Leadership Retreats

Gathering the leadership team for two off-site retreats during the discovery process will help integrate and apply the team’s discoveries to the leadership covenant. The first leadership retreat is scheduled toward the beginning of the leadership process in order to give the process momentum. The second leadership retreat is scheduled toward the end of the process in order to draw closure.
First Leadership Retreat

The first covenant leadership retreat takes place in the seventeenth week of the leadership process. By that time, CLPC ministry leaders will have been introduced to the overarching question of the leadership process: “What does it mean to be the covenant people of God as CLPC ministry leaders?” The first leadership retreat brings to a close the study and reflection of what it means for CLPC ministry leaders to be in a covenant relationship with one another. During the monthly session meetings all CLPC ministry leaders will have studied God’s covenant with Noah and read the first through third and seventh chapters from Richardson’s Creating a Healthier Church, which deal with the basic concepts of family systems theory as applied to the local congregation. The program staff team will have read and discussed other selected chapters from the book during its weekly team meetings. The ninth chapter, “Triangles in the Congregation,” from Creating a Healthier Church is the assigned reading prior to the leadership retreat.

There are three goals for this covenant leadership retreat. The first involves teambuilding. As CLPC ministry leaders spend time eating, discussing, studying, grappling with their collective task, and resting together, they will grow closer to one another. The second goal is spiritual formation. Through worship, prayer, Scripture study, and times of solitude and silence, CLPC ministry leaders will create an environment which fosters growth in their relationship with God. The third goal is for CLPC ministry leaders to articulate specific components of the leadership covenant pertaining to their relationships

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1 Richardson, Creating a Healthier Church, 11-100.

2 Ibid., 114-130.
with one another. Through a facilitated discussion in two sessions, ministry leaders will identify specific behaviors or habits they want included in the final leadership covenant.

The schedule for the retreat begins with CLPC ministry leaders arriving at the retreat location Friday evening after dinner. After a brief welcome and overview of the weekend, ministry leaders will take thirty minutes to sit alone in silence. The idea of silent meditation is familiar to the ministry leaders, since session meetings customarily open each gathering with five minutes of silence. After the time of solitude and silence, and a brief period of musical worship, the first session begins by discussing “Triangles in the Congregation” from *Creating a Healthier Church*, because it is considered “one of the most important contributions of systems theory.”\(^3\) It is critical for CLPC ministry leaders to understand the dynamics and potential dangers of triangulated relationships in order for them to be effective in ministry.

Saturday’s schedule begins after breakfast with a guided personal Bible study on John 8:1-11. This passage about Jesus’ encounter with the woman caught in adultery illustrates some dynamics of triangulated relationship. The Pharisees attempt to use the woman in order to deal with Jesus. Jesus de-triangulates by relating directly with the woman and directly with the Pharisees. The second session begins with group reflection on the lessons learned from John 8:1-11. CLPC ministry leaders will learn what constitutes a triangulated relationship and the importance of relating directly, rather than indirectly, with others.

\(^3\) Ibid., 115.
In the remainder of the second session, CLPC ministry leaders will brainstorm behaviors, habits, or attitudes they would like to characterize their covenant relationship. They will do this by writing down three to five items on separate sticky notes and placing them randomly on the foam board “covenant tablet.” Next, in groups of five, participants will approach the board silently and rearrange the sticky notes into common themes or categories. This approach offers the opportunity for consensus building without the need for verbal discussion. After each group of five has had an opportunity to rearrange the sticky notes, the collective group will verbally debrief the process and the results. The team will observe and comment on the arrangement of the sticky notes. From this they will offer tentative observations about what seems most important to the group. Finally, by consensus, the team will create a summary statement about what they have learned about themselves as a leadership team in this process.

After lunch, the third session guides the group toward a handful of specific behaviors and attitudes that will become part of the community component of the CLPC ministry leadership covenant. The group will label each category of sticky notes and define exactly what is meant by each one. The resulting commitments need to be specific but not too numerous. It is important for CLPC ministry leaders to have a clear and common understanding about what each item means for their relationships with one another. The first leadership retreat closes with this session.

**Second Leadership Retreat**

The second leadership covenant retreat takes place during the forty-third week of the leadership process. The purpose of this retreat is to tentatively finalize all the tenets of
the CLPC leadership covenant. Following this retreat, ministry leaders will have one more session meeting to refine the covenant before it is formalized in the fifty-second week. Unlike the first retreat, this one will be two nights long, beginning Friday evening and ending Sunday morning with worship. CLPC program staff and any elders who are available will travel to the retreat location early Friday morning for a day of prayer and fasting for the retreat. The group will break the fast with a light meal together before the rest of the group arrives.

On Friday evening, the first meeting will review all of the key discoveries so far in the leadership process. By this point in the process CLPC ministry leaders will have studied seven biblical passages relating to covenants, read portions of three books, participated in two missional engagement activities, and conducted the sticky-note exercise on the community and spiritual formation components of the leadership covenant. This first meeting gives CLPC ministry leaders the opportunity to reflect on the process and address any lingering questions they may have.

Saturday’s schedule will be similar to the first leadership retreat. After personal Bible study, the second session will repeat the sticky-note process, addressing the missional component of the leadership covenant in light of the missional shifts discussed in *Missional Renaissance*. After lunch, ministry leaders will do a team-building exercise (ropes course) and have free time. The evening meeting will conclude the sticky-note exercise for the missional engagement component of the covenant, and the group will begin crafting the final wording for the entire covenant document. This part of the
process is discussed in the section below. Sunday morning will allow more time for finalizing the covenant followed by worship and departure.

Covenant Building during Monthly Session Meetings

The experiential and educational building blocks of the covenant leadership process hinge on the two leadership retreats described above. During these extended times away CLPC ministry leaders will focus on assimilating the Bible studies and book discussions that take place during the regularly scheduled monthly session meetings. This section explains the study plan for these monthly meetings using the Bible studies and book discussion questions outlined in Chapter 5 of this paper.

The introduction to the CLPC ministry covenant leadership process takes place in May during the annual orientation of new church officers. Traditionally, incoming elders and deacons attend a morning-long training for new officers during the second weekend in May. Current elders join the group at the end of the training to examine the new officers in accordance with CLPC’s church polity. This year, the program staff team also will join the new deacons, incoming elders, and current elders, for the second half of the morning. I will introduce the theme of the yearlong covenant leadership process to the entire group. Even though the deacons will not be participating formally in the covenant leadership process, this is an opportunity for a significant subsection of the CLPC congregation to be exposed to what the ministry leadership team will be doing. I will lead a Scripture reflection on God’s covenant with Abraham from Genesis 12 and 15 demonstrating the three covenantal themes of community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement.
The core focus of the covenant leadership process for CLPC ministry leaders centers on what it means for CLPC ministry leaders to be the covenant people of God. This issue has three essential parts that correspond to the three covenant themes. The first part is what it means for CLPC ministry leaders to be in a covenant of healthy relationship with one another. The second part is what it means for CLPC ministry leaders to be individually and corporately in a covenant relationship of spiritual formation. The third part is what it means for CLPC ministry leaders to be missionally engaged with God’s purposes in the world. Each CLPC ministry leader will receive a copy of Richardson’s *Creating a Healthier Church* and an assignment to read the first two chapters, which focus on the idea that the church is made up of many dynamic and interrelated relationships, prior to the next session meeting.

Aside from the two leadership retreats in September and March, the bulk of discovery and discussion of the leadership process takes place during the monthly session meetings from June to February. The session meetings of June, July, and August focus on the covenantal theme of community and healthy relationships. During these months, CLPC leaders will discover God’s plan to redeem relational brokenness as they study God’s covenant with Noah. The leadership team will gain a valuable theoretical framework for understanding the complexity of how broken relationships manifest themselves in the congregational context by reading and discussing the first three chapters from *Creating a Healthier Church*.

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4 See the Appendix for a detailed time line of the covenant leadership process.
After the first CLPC ministry leader retreat in September, the leadership team will begin addressing the covenantal theme of spiritual formation during the October and November session meetings. Excerpts from Willard’s *Great Omission* and further study of God’s covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17 will help the leadership team see how God’s desire is to shape people spiritually in relationship to him.

December and January will mark a shift in focus to the missional engagement theme of the leadership covenant. A review of McNeal’s *Missional Renaissance* will help the CLPC ministry team see God’s heart to bless the world. The book also exposes ministry leaders to the three missional shifts necessary for CLPC ministry leaders to understand God’s missional call. Studying John 1:1-18 and Jeremiah 31:31-34 will help CLPC ministry leaders to see how God’s mission for the world is incarnational.

February is the last month for session discussion before the second leadership retreat in March. For this meeting, CLPC ministry leaders will read and discuss the fourth chapter from Guder’s *Missional Church*, entitled “Missional Vocation.”5 This will offer an important theological understanding of the distinction between the Church and the kingdom of God. CLPC ministry leaders will think about ways the Clear Lake congregation is called to “represent” the kingdom of God to the Clear Lake community and the world.

**Two Missional Engagement Exercises**

Twice during the ten months of the covenant process, CLPC ministry leaders will engage in hands-on, missional engagement exercises. The purpose of these activities is

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threefold. First, the exercises will help CLPC ministry leaders better understand the immediate community which they are called to bless. Second, the activities will help CLPC ministry leaders experience the blessing of being a blessing to others. Third, these activities will demonstrate the interrelatedness of the covenant themes of community and spiritual formation along with missional engagement. Participants will reflect on ways they encountered God through their service and conversation. In addition, they will discuss their interpersonal interactions with one another during the missional engagement activities.

**Serving the Homeless in Galveston, Texas**

Every third Saturday CLPC offers church members the opportunity to feed breakfast to the hungry in Galveston, Texas. CLPC serves under the direction of the Galveston Street Ministry (GSM),\(^6\) which is affiliated with a local non-denominational church on Galveston Island. Less than half of the currently serving CLPC ministry leaders have participated in this feeding program. This missional engagement exercise begins with a preparatory devotional and concludes with a brief time for group reflection and discussion.

The preparatory devotion before departure, which lasts about fifteen minutes, will focus on Mark 6:30-56. The devotional will note the similarity of circumstance between Jesus, with the disciples feeding hungry people, and CLPC ministry leaders heading to Galveston to feed the hungry. The theological significance in terms of the CLPC covenant leadership process is in the events of the passage which follow. Specifically, the devotional will note that after the feeding, when the disciples are rowing against the wind in the story,

the gospel writer Mark says that Jesus was about to “pass by them” (Mk 6:48). The phrase “pass by” is an allusion to Exodus 33:22-23, where the glory of the Lord “passes by” Moses when God gives the Ten Commandments of the covenant. The devotional also will note that Jesus, like Moses, gives a new commandment to his disciples to “love one another” (Jn 13:34). Feeding the hungry in Galveston gives CLPC ministry leaders opportunity to love others and, in doing so, to watch for God’s “passing by.” During the debriefing at the end of the morning, CLPC ministry leaders will share ways they saw God revealed in the day.

Travel time to Galveston from Clear Lake is approximately forty-five minutes. The group departs from the CLPC parking lot at 7:00 a.m. Setup, serving time, and clean-up usually finish by 9:00 a.m. Afterwards CLPC ministry leaders will gather at a local restaurant in Galveston with a group meeting area. During the debriefing, I will again refer to Mark 6:30-56. As a way of connecting the missional engagement exercise with the covenantal theme of community, we will consider some of the interpersonal dynamics at play in the passage. We will dialogue regarding the interplay among the disciples during the miraculous feeding (Mark 6:30-44) and during the disciples’ boat trip on the lake. I will ask CLPC ministry leaders what they noticed about their relational dynamics as they served the hungry. We also will discuss where CLPC ministry leaders saw God while serving the hungry, and we will explore the impact of their experiences.

**CLPC Neighborhood Interviews**

The covenantal theme of missional engagement calls God’s people to bless their neighbor. God’s covenant with Abraham has its roots in Genesis 12 when God calls
Abraham to leave his country and his people for the place God would show him. God’s intent in this sending is to bless all the nations of the earth (Gn 12:1-3). In this missional engagement exercise CLPC ministry leaders will not be called to leave their country and homeland, but they will be invited to leave the familiarity of the church campus and venture across the street to the surrounding neighborhood. In pairs, CLPC ministry leaders will go to every home bordering the church property. Each household will receive a letter in advance of the visit. The letter will explain that CLPC wants to be a good neighbor to those around the church. The purpose of the visit is to have a brief front-porch chat about how CLPC can better serve them and the community. The ministry leaders also will have a small gift for each neighbor. The letter will offer an opportunity for them to contact the church office by email or phone, if residents do not wish to be visited. The specific date and time of the visit will be included in the letter. The neighborhood visits will take place on a Saturday morning during a season when it is comfortable to stand outdoors. The purpose of this missional activity is to get to know firsthand the kinds of people who live in the immediate community around the church. Potentially, this exercise can lead to new kinds of ministries and relationships that will meet the needs of CLPC’s neighbors and expose them to God’s love in action through the church.

I will lead a brief orientation before the visits and a debriefing session afterwards, for the purpose of preparing the group for the exercise and for processing their learning afterwards. The orientation will include a few role plays for the visits in order to make the participants more comfortable which in turn will make for better conversation with the neighbors. The group will read from Genesis 12 and discuss how God’s covenant
relationship is rooted in God’s sending of Abraham. This will give a theological rationale for doing the neighbor visits. Potentially, this will encourage CLPC ministry leaders to think of other ways God may be sending them to “neighbors” at work and in the marketplace. CLPC ministry leaders will divide into pairs and will be assigned which homes they are to visit. When all the logistics are covered, the group will pray together and agree on what time to return to the church for debriefing.

During the debriefing, group members will share what they learned during the visits. As a discussion starter, participants will talk about what surprised them during the exercise, either something about a visit itself or something about their own internal emotional reaction to the exercise. They also will discuss what they learned about the demographic makeup of the immediate neighborhood. The group will assess the experience theologically and spiritually by talking about where they saw God in their conversations.

**Church Leadership: Writing the Covenant**

Covenants can be verbal or written, long or short. The most important thing is for every effective ministry team to have one, according to Cladis. He insists, “It is absolutely essential that ministry teams and church leadership forge clear commitments and covenants in order to lead effectively.” The CLPC covenant leadership process will include book discussions, Bible studies, missional engagement activities, and two extended leadership retreats. Along the way, the group will have grappled with what it means to the covenant people of God as CLPC ministry leaders. They will have been asking what it means to be in a covenant of healthy relationship. The group will have

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been examining what it means to be in a covenant of spiritual formation; and, they will have been exploring what it means to be in covenant relationship and spiritual formation for the sake of partnering with God to bless the world. The result of these discussions will be a covenantal document that is specific, written, brief, biblical, and gracious.

The CLPC leadership covenant will be specific in order to serve as a guide for future leadership behaviors and interactions. The covenant specifically could mention issues like gossip, triangulation, and projection that often affect church leadership. In particular, the covenant might consider how commitments to daily spiritual formation impact the way CLPC ministry leaders work together and conduct their ministries. This could include whether or not to have Sunday ministry team meetings, how often ministry teams pray and study the Bible, as well as the role of prayer and silence during business deliberations. Finally, the CLPC ministry leadership covenant most likely will address a commitment to partnering with God to bless our global and local communities. This could include how much and in what ways CLPC ministry leaders want the church facility used by outside organizations. The covenant also may include specific commitments regarding the allocation of financial resources as well as the amount of time staff is expected to be in the community serving and building relationships. The details of the covenant ultimately will spring from the spirits, minds, and hearts of ministry leaders as they partner with the Holy Spirit in the covenant-making process.

The CLPC leadership covenant will be a written document, as opposed to being verbally communicated. Cladis notes that some church leadership teams maintain an
effective covenant verbally; however, a written covenant will be more effective for
CLPC ministry leaders. Schein cautions that “formal statements cannot be viewed as a
way of defining the organization’s culture. At best they cover a small, publicly relevant
segment of the culture—those aspects that leaders find useful to publish as an ideology or
focus for the organization.” However, written value statements such as a leadership
covenant serve an important role in reinforcing culture as the organization matures. In
other words, in the beginning it will be more important how CLPC ministry leaders are
being shaped by the biblical values of covenant. Over time, the written articulation of
those values in a leadership covenant will serve as an anchoring reference point as the
new culture matures and develops. Having a clearly written covenant eliminates
confusion about the agreement. The covenant in writing gives a foundational document to
change, edit, discuss, and intentionally reassess on an ongoing basis. A written covenant
also allows it to be shared in other print and electronic mediums which will help
communicate it to the CLPC congregation. A written covenant gives ministry leaders
something to sign. The act of signing the covenantal document signifies personal
commitment to the agreement.

The CLPC leadership covenant also will be brief. Just as covenants can be effective
if they are verbal or written, they also can be lengthy or brief. At the end of his book,
Cladis gives an example of covenants in long and short forms. A short-form covenant, no
longer than one page, will work best for CLPC. The engineering culture of the church tends

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8 Ibid., 39.
9 Schein, Organizational Culture, 257.
10 Ibid., 250.
to prefer things to be concise. A one-page document can be easily displayed and reproduced. A brief written covenant will be easier to describe and to pass on to others. Simplicity makes for easier integration and internalization into one’s life and ministry. CLPC ministry leaders can refer to one of several bullet points on a single page rather than thumbing through a multi-page document with many headings and subheadings. The challenge of a shorter form covenant will be not to lose the necessary specificity outlined above. A shorter document will require more precision in the choice of words.

The CLPC leadership covenant will be biblical, since this is the leadership guide for spiritual and missional foundations in a PC(USA) congregation. CLPC ministry leaders will choose Scripture verses to undergird the leadership covenant and reference those passages in the document. This is important so that the covenant document stays rooted in the covenantal themes discovered in the leadership process and does not become just a list of human rules divorced from Scripture. Embracing a biblical nature will lead the CLPC leadership to form a covenant that is gracious. The covenant will articulate positive behaviors and commitments rather than a list of prohibitions. This is vital because a healthy community is one of encouragement and affirmation rather than shame and blame. Accountability to the covenant will be created by establishing a leadership culture that embodies the covenant commitments. The covenant leadership culture created by the leadership discovery process by influence, as opposed to punishment, will root out behavior that is contrary to the covenant. As Cladis points out, this process takes time, patience, and conversation as some will find it difficult to “live
by healthy, spiritual standards.”¹¹ This is a way healthy organisms and organizations function.

**Church Leadership: Reproducing Covenant-Making Communities**

The sense of covenantal identity that CLPC ministry leaders gain from this process needs to be reproduced in the congregation. The end goal of the covenant leadership process is more than just arriving at a shared agreement among ministry leaders. The ultimate goal is to embed a shared covenantal identity throughout the CLPC congregation. As CLPC ministry leaders live out their covenant with one another for healthy relationships, spiritual formation, and missional engagement, it is hoped that these same commitments will impact ministry leadership teams, small groups, and new ministry leaders.

Reproducing Covenant Making with a CLPC Leader’s Ministry Teams

As described in Part One of this discussion, CLPC elders and paid staff are yoked with ministry leaders for a specific ministry area. In most ministry areas, two elders are yoked with one paid staff member. Together, the staff member and two elders form the core of a ministry team that includes lay members of the congregation. Most ministry teams meet on a monthly basis to plan activities and programs for their ministry area. In a modified form, CLPC ministry leaders will be able to reproduce the covenant-making process outlined in this project with their specific ministry team.

They will begin by sharing with their ministry teams the covenant they agreed on as ministry leaders. Next they will ask members of their ministry team to pray for them as

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¹¹ Cladis, *Leading*, 47.
they seek to honor their covenant commitments. It will be natural for CLPC ministry leaders to ask what it means for their particular ministry team to be the covenant people of God. They will discuss what commitments from the CLPC ministry leader covenant the team would like to adopt as their own. Then the ministry team can develop a similar covenant that applies specifically to their particular ministry area. Individual ministry teams will choose whether their teams’ covenant will be written or verbal, long or short. This allows for unique application of the covenant depending on the makeup of each ministry team. The most important thing is that their discussions are informed by the biblical and theological themes of the leadership process that CLPC ministry leaders have experienced.

The specific way CLPC ministry leaders approach their team will differ. The Bible studies and books used with the elders and staff in the CLPC ministry leadership process will be accessible for use with the individual ministry teams. The ministry leaders will have had the process modeled for them, which will make it easier for them to customize and reproduce it with their own teams.

Reproducing Covenant Making in Leaders’ Small Groups

CLPC ministry leaders are also members of small groups that meet for Bible study and fellowship, which include lay members of the congregation. In the same way ministry leaders share their covenant with ministry teams, they also can share the covenant in their small groups. Many current CLPC small groups lack any sort of formal group covenant. The CLPC covenant leadership process gives opportunity for ministry leaders to raise the question of covenantal identity in their small groups. Again, small
groups may choose some of the very same commitments from the leadership covenant for their own small group. CLPC ministry leaders can inform their small group’s discussion on covenant with materials used in the covenant leadership process.

Reproducing Covenant Making Annually with New Leaders

The most critical reproducing of the covenant will occur annually, when the term of five new elders begins. If incoming ministry leaders are not committed to the covenant, in three short years it will become obsolete. Outgoing elders will play a critical role in explaining the leadership covenant to the incoming elders. All CLPC ministry leaders must be prepared to embrace the new elders into the ministry leadership covenant. Embracing new leadership into the covenant may mean the leadership covenant has to be modified to reflect the unique circumstances, gifts, perspectives, and personality of the incoming elders. Passing on the CLPC ministry leadership covenant to future generations of leaders will involve explanation, negotiation, and rededication.

First, CLPC ministry leaders must explain the existing covenant to incoming ministry leaders. CLPC ministry leaders will tell the story of how they arrived at the current covenant and what it means to them personally. The group can share how they have seen the covenant influence the way they do ministry and live their lives with one another. The ministry leaders will talk about which parts of the covenant they find most difficult to embrace personally as well as those parts of the covenant of which they are especially fond. Second, CLPC ministry leaders will negotiate the covenant with incoming ministry leaders. They will discuss which covenant promises seem unclear and with which ones they disagree. Together the newly formed leadership team will discuss
any changes they would like to make. Finally, each member of the new CLPC ministry leadership team, along with ongoing leadership members, will rededicate themselves to the new covenant by signing it. The explanation, negotiation, and rededication of the new covenant will take place annually during the first two months of the new elders’ term.

**Keeping the Covenant Outwardly Focused**

The peril of this covenant leadership process is that any of the three covenantal themes could be overemphasized at the expense of the other two. Over time the leadership covenant could become only about interpersonal relationships and lack equal emphasis on spiritual formation and missional engagement; or, the covenant could overemphasize spiritual formation, with the insistence that it does not really matter how CLPC leaders and members relate to one another or that they reach out to the world as long as they are drawing closer to God. However, the greatest peril of the CLPC leadership covenant is that it could become an entirely inward-focused document by reducing the importance of missional engagement. The Book of Jonah is an example of the way Israel throughout the Old Testament struggles to remember that the covenant relationship is ultimately for God’s blessing of the world. Jonah’s confidence in his covenantal relationship with God leads him to disdain God’s desire to bless the pagans of Nineveh (Jon 4:1). In a similar way, CLPC ministry leaders could become so focused on internal relationships and spiritual growth that they forget God’s desire to use them to bless the world. More importantly, this would mean shedding the importance that blessing local and global communities with acts of justice and compassion are means by which CLPC grows in deeper relationship with one another and with God.
A leadership covenant with an outward focus will reflect a commitment to bless the Clear Lake community and the world. One way to discover whether or not the leadership covenant has an outward focus is to ask people in the community. This approach adds a public element to the covenant-making process. If ministry leaders know they will be sharing the content of the covenant with people outside the CLPC congregation, they will be more likely to frame the document in a way that has the community in mind.

In order to accomplish this, each ministry team leader will choose two friends or co-workers from the community to talk with about the covenant. Ministry leaders will ask them how they perceive the outgrowth of the leadership covenant having a positive impact on the Clear Lake community and the world. Toward the end of the second retreat (in March), ministry leaders will begin praying about who they will choose. These conversations will take place after the retreat but before the April session meeting when the covenant is finalized so that any additions or changes based on these conversations can be integrated in the covenantal document.

**Measuring Tool for the Ongoing Effectiveness of the Covenant**

A ministry leader covenant must be effective in order to be of value. With so many urgent issues facing ministry leaders on a daily basis, CLPC leaders need to know that the ministry leader covenant is working and that it actually is making a measurable difference in the exercise of leadership. Below are descriptions of two surveys to be administered annually to CLPC ministry leaders and to selected at-large members of the
congregation. The results from these surveys will help gauge the ongoing effectiveness of the covenant.

Annual Surveys for Analysis

An annual survey for ministry leaders and at-large congregation members will aid in the covenantal renewal process. Ministry leaders will receive their survey as part of the regular April session meeting. Surveys for the congregation will be distributed the same week. This is two months before outgoing elders’ terms expire. The responses will be tabulated and the results reported to the session at the May meeting. Results of the survey will help shape the explanation, negotiation, and rededication process outlined above.

The survey questions to ministry leaders will ask how often and under what circumstances they have referred to the covenant in the past year. This, in part, tells how relevant the covenant has been for the ministry leader personally. The survey will ask the ministry leaders to name three specific ways the CLPC ministry leader covenant impacted their ministry in the past year. This question measures the relevance of the covenant in terms of team ministry. Finally, the survey asks what changes or additions the ministry leader would like to see made in the CLPC ministry leader covenant.

The second survey is targeted at members of the congregation who are somewhat regularly involved in the life of the congregation. The survey will be distributed to a random list of thirty CLPC members who have attended worship 40 percent or more in the previous six months. The survey will be sent with a cover letter from me and will include a copy of the CLPC ministry leadership covenant. The leadership covenant needs to be a working document that becomes a regular part of CLPC’s corporate conversation.
For that reason, the survey will ask when and under what circumstance in the last year, they have heard a pastor, elder, or staff member refer to the CLPC ministry leadership covenant. The survey will ask the respondent to name two or three ways they have noticed a change at CLPC as a result of the ministry leadership covenant. This will help to identify specific ways the leadership covenant impacts the congregation as a whole.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

CLPC is at a tipping point between decline and renewal. Given CLPC’s massive staff upheaval of the last five years along with a steep slide in worship attendance and membership of the last decade, it might seem the key to rebirth lies in renewing past methods of success. With a newly hired and complete staff team, CLPC seems poised to begin another four decades of managing an ever increasing array of programs to attract new members and bolster worship attendance. However, the Clear Lake community is no longer the rapidly growing area it was in the decades following the founding of the Johnson Space Center. Furthermore, broader cultural trends indicate that old ways of approaching ministry are no longer effective. What CLPC does not need is another new program or mission statement. Rather, CLPC needs to recapture a vibrant sense of what it means to be the people of God in covenant relationship with one another (communal), with God (spiritually formational), and for the world (missional).

As the primary influencers of the organizational culture, ministry leaders are strategically important in establishing this identity. Their influence on the congregation will come to bear as they participate in the in-depth leadership process. The ministry leaders will be shaped in their own covenantal identity as they read ground-breaking books together, as they study the major covenants of Scripture, and as they share adventure together in hands-on ministry to the community. The result of this leadership process will be the sacred bond of covenant among the leaders to build healthy relationship with one another and the world, to grow daily in love and devotion to Jesus Christ, and to be actively engaged in God’s mission to bless the world.
In recent years as CLPC ministry leaders looked for clues about how to seize the current opportunity for renewal, they turned to literature from the missional church movement and the spiritual formation movement. What CLPC ministry leaders discovered was that the literature they encountered from both movements talked about the importance of community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement. While both camps seemed to equally emphasize the importance of community, they differed when it came to whether spiritual formation or missional engagement was of first importance.

Literature from the missional church movement seemed to suggest that the way forward for a congregation like CLPC is to focus on serving the community. According to this literature, blessing the local community and world is the first step toward revitalization. It promised that spiritual growth would follow outreach naturally. On the other hand, the literature CLPC leaders read from the spiritual formation movement clearly proposed the opposite. The spiritual formation literature indicated that CLPC’s focus should be on growing spiritually mature disciples. It promised that an inclination toward outreach naturally would follow a focus on discipleship.

The covenants of Scripture are foundational for CLPC ministry leaders and establish a new identity because each equally embraces the priorities of community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement. A firmly embedded organizational identity rooted in scriptural covenants will ensure CLPC does not fall prey to the kind of “either-or” thinking encountered in the previously mentioned literature. CLPC does not have to choose between being a disciple-making church or a missional church. CLPC can become a “covenant people of God” church that gives equal priority to building healthy
relationships, growing in Christ-likeness through spiritual disciplines, and participating in God’s mission to bless the world.

As CLPC ministry leaders study the major covenants in Scripture they will discover these three covenantal themes. First, they will discover how God’s covenants express God’s concern for authentic, just, and loving relationships. This theme is pronounced in the covenant of Noah, where the impetus for the flood’s destruction as well as God’s covenant rainbow sign point to God’s agenda to heal the relational brokenness of humanity (Gn 6:7; 8:21). God’s covenant with Noah was also a covenant with the whole community within the ark. Likewise, God’s covenant sign of circumcision with Abraham extends to the community of relationships which surrounds Abraham (Gn 17:26-27). The Ten Commandments of the Sinai covenant deal with the ethic of human community (Ex 20:1-17). The crowning display of God’s concern for healthy relationships is found in the institution of the New Covenant, when Jesus issues the command “to love one another” (Jn 13:34).

Second, CLPC ministry leaders will discover that God establishes covenant so that God’s people can grow in relationship with God through spiritual formation. This theme is especially pronounced when God establishes covenant relationship with Israel to be God’s “holy people” (Dt 7:6). Abraham was called to “walk before [God] and be blameless” (Gn 17:1). Obedience to God’s word is implicit in God’s call to spiritual formation. In the New Covenant of Jesus Christ, he himself becomes the living word to which God’s covenant people are to respond and obey (Jn 1:14).
Running throughout the major scriptural covenants CLPC ministry leaders will see God’s relentless concern to restore the brokenness of creation and God’s choice to use his people as agents of blessing in the world. This theme of missional engagement is the beginning of God’s covenant relationship with Abraham. God chooses Abraham and his descendants to bless the nations of the earth (Gn 12:1-3). The quality of relationships within the covenant community and evidence of spiritually reformed lives heal brokenness and restores justice in the world. Jesus calls his followers “salt of the earth” (Mt. 5:13), and as such they are God’s covenantal sign for the world’s blessing (Lv 2:13).

These covenantal values will be embedded in CLPC ministry leaders as they participate in the leadership process. In turn, the leadership process equips the ministry leaders to form a theologically informed ministry team covenant based on covenantal values. Since the leadership of any organization is the key to influencing its values, as CLPC ministry leaders are shaped by this covenant they in turn will begin to influence the entire congregation.

In addition to Bible study on the major scriptural covenants already discussed, CLPC ministry leaders will read three books together. Each book is designed to help the ministry leaders think about practical application of each of the covenant themes as they progress toward establishing a leadership covenant. Richardson’s *Creating a Healthier Church* makes practical the covenant theme of community and healthy relationships. Willard’s work, *The Great Omission*, helps ministry leaders grapple with the covenant theme of spiritual formation. Finally, McNeal’s *Missional Renaissance* guides ministry leaders in thinking practically about missional engagement.
Two missional engagement exercises round out the basic building blocks that will help shape CLPC ministry leaders in their covenental identity. Serving in the Galveston Street Ministry feeding program and meeting CLPC community neighbors will help the ministry leaders see better the community through God’s eyes. These experiences will help guide the ministry leaders in articulating specific aspects of missional engagement into the leadership covenant.

A little more than a year from now, CLPC ministry leaders will have a copy of the leadership covenant they developed as a result of the leadership process. The document will be more than just a signed sheet of paper. It will be a living reminder as well as a promise to live as the covenant people of God—a solemn agreement to live in healthy relationships toward one another, to grow daily in relationship and obedience to Jesus Christ, and to partner with God in his plan to bless the world. These commitments will not stop just with CLPC ministry leaders. As they embody these commitments and embrace their covenental identity, there is solid hope that it will spread to the entire congregation and thus will begin a truly new chapter in the life of Clear Lake Presbyterian Church.
APPENDIX

LEADERSHIP PROCESS AND BIBLE STUDIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>May</th>
<th>New Officer training:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Bible study:</strong> Covenant with Abraham Genesis 15 (What does it mean to be covenant people of God?). Present three questions that we’ll be seeking to answer over the next 10 months:</td>
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<td>a. ...in a covenant of healthy relationship with one another?</td>
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<td>b. ...in a covenant of spiritual formation?</td>
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<td>c. ...in a covenant for the sake of blessing the world?</td>
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<td><strong>Homework:</strong> Distribute journals and copies of <em>Creating a Healthier Church</em>. Read chapters one and two, pages 11-40. Be prepared to discuss questions three, four, and five under the section; “For Group Discussion” on page forty.</td>
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<th>June</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
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<tr>
<th>June</th>
<th>Week 4 / Session meeting</th>
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<td><strong>Bible meditation:</strong> Noah Covenant Study One Genesis 6:1-7 (Relational discord. Rebellion in the Human heart. Brokenness of Creation. These are the things God is undoing in the covenants of Scripture.)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Discussion:</strong> Assigned questions from chapters one and two of <em>Creating a Healthier Church</em>.</td>
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<td><strong>Homework:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Read chapter three (pages 41-53) and chapter seven (pages 91-100).</td>
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<td>2. For chapter three: Answer questions 2 and 4 under the section “For Your Own Thinking” on pages 51-2. Be prepared to discuss questions 2, 4, and 7 under the section, “For Group Discussion” on pages 52-3.</td>
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<td>3. For chapter seven: Be prepared to discuss with the group the four patterns of reactivity and ways you have seen them at play in our congregation.</td>
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<tr>
<th>July</th>
<th>Week 5 Program staff reads/discusses chapter 4 “Being One Among Many” in <em>Creating</em></th>
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<td>Week 6 Program staff reads/discusses chapter 5 “Closeness, Distance and the Congregation” in <em>Creating</em></td>
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<td>Week 7 Program staff reads/discusses chapter 6 “Foolishness and Wisdom in Church Leadership” in <em>Creating</em></td>
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<th>July</th>
<th>Week 8 / Session meeting</th>
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<td><strong>Bible meditation:</strong> Noah Covenant Study Two Genesis 6:8-7:24 (The Flood Story)</td>
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<td><strong>Book Discussion:</strong> Discuss assigned questions from chapters three and seven in <em>Creating a Healthier Church</em>.</td>
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<td><strong>Homework:</strong> Read chapter nine of <em>Creating a Healthier Church</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1. Read chapter nine of <em>Creating a Healthier Church</em> (pages 114-130)</td>
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<td>2. In your journal, answer questions 1, 4, and 5 under the section “For Your Own Thinking” on pages 129-30.</td>
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<td>3. Be prepared to discuss questions 1, 3, 4, and 5 under the section “For Group Discussion” on page 130.</td>
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<td>Aug (5)</td>
<td>Week 9</td>
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|         | Week 13 / Session meeting | **Bible Study**: Noah Covenant Study Three Genesis 8:1-9:17 (God’s Covenant with Noah)  
**Book discussion**: Questions from chapter nine of Creating a Healthier Church  
**Homework**: 1. Get ready for first leadership retreat |
| Sept    | Week 14| Program staff reads/discusses chapter 12 “Assessing Your Congregation’s Emotional System” in Creating |
|         | Week 15|                                                                                                 |
|         | Week 16| Program staff reads/discusses chapter 13 “Becoming a Better Leader” in Creating                 |
|         | Week 17 / Twenty-Four-Hour Leadership Retreat at Camp Cho-Ye | **Bible passages for study/reflection??** (Sermon on the Mount - Jesus’ exposition of the new covenant)  
**Give a sneak preview of Great Omission – “Who is Your Teacher?”** (They could read this on the spot during the weekend.) Use article printed by permission from Dallas Willard website (http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=67)  
**Discuss content chapter nine Creating a Healthier Church.**  
**Preliminary CLCP leadership covenant discussion: What are two or three concepts from this book you would like to see characterize our relationships as ministry leaders?**  
**30-minute business meeting for any necessary agenda items.**  
**Incorporate elements of spiritual formation/spiritual disciplines of solitude and silence.**  
**Homework**: Read chapter two from The Great Omission |
| Oct (5) | Week 18|                                                                                                 |
|         | Week 19|                                                                                                 |
|         | Week 20 | Saturday morning: Galveston Street Ministry (Missional Engagement #1) |
|         | Week 21|                                                                                                 |
|         | Week 22 / Session meeting | **Scripture meditation**: God’s covenant with Abraham Study One, Genesis 15:1-21  
**Discussion**: Discuss chapter two from The Great Omission  
**Homework**: Reach chapter eight from The Great Omission. Think about what commitments to spiritual formation you would like to be reflected in the CLPC ministry leader covenant? Consider especially commitments to scripture study, solitude/silence, prayer. How might these commitments impact when and how we hold ministry team meetings? Is it okay to have meetings on Sunday? How often will our ministry teams study the Bible together and pray together? What percentage of our Session meetings will be devoted practicing the spiritual disciplines? How can we integrate spiritual formation into the “business” portions of our meetings? What will the role of prayer, silence, and Scripture be during our business deliberations? |
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<th>Nov</th>
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<td>Week 24</td>
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<td>Week 25 / Session meeting</td>
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<td><strong>Scripture meditation:</strong> God’s covenant with Abraham, Study Two, Genesis 17:1-14</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion:</strong> (Sticky Note process) Discuss content from chapter eight in <em>The Great Omission</em>. Discuss what commitments to spiritual formation we would like to characterize our covenant community as CLPC ministry leaders? At the end of the discussion, review what we have looked at thus far (relationships/spiritual formation) and briefly introduce the missional theme present in the scriptural covenants.</td>
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<td><strong>Homework:</strong> Distribute copies of <em>Missional Renaissance</em>. Read chapter one.</td>
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<td>Week 29 / Session meeting</td>
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<td><strong>Scripture meditation:</strong> John 1:1-14, The incarnation, mission, and covenant.</td>
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<td><strong>Discussion:</strong> Chapter one, <em>Missional Renaissance</em>.</td>
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<td>1. What does Reggie mean by the Altruism economy? Where do you see evidence of this trend in your companies and workplaces?</td>
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<td>2. Summarize the three missional shifts Reggie talks about which embody the missional renaissance. Which shift makes the most sense to you? Which one is most conceptually difficult to grasp? Which shift seems most practically difficult for a church like CLPC to attain?</td>
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<td><strong>Homework:</strong> Read chapter two in <em>Missional Renaissance</em></td>
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<td>Week 30</td>
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<td>Jan</td>
<td>Week 31</td>
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<td>Week 32</td>
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<td>Week 33 Missional exercise: Saturday morning church neighborhood interviews.</td>
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<td>Week 34</td>
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<td>Week 35 / Session meeting</td>
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<td><strong>Scripture meditation:</strong> Jeremiah 31. New Covenant, Part 1.</td>
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<td><strong>Book discussion:</strong> Chapter two of <em>Missional Renaissance</em></td>
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<td>1. “Why is it important to understand the distinction between ‘a’ church and ‘the’ church?”</td>
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<td>2. “What is the connection between the nature of God and God’s mission for the world?” “What is the connection between God’s incarnation and God’s mission for the world?”</td>
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<td>3. “What does it mean to be a church ‘where certain things happen’ or a church that is a ‘vendor of religious goods and services’?” “How are these views of church different than being ‘a body of people sent on a mission’?”</td>
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<td>4. “Having read chapters one and two, what is your personal definition of a missional church?” “Which of the biblical passages that McNeal uses are most convincing for you? Explain.”</td>
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<td><strong>Homework:</strong> Reach chapter four “Missional Vocation: Called to Represent the Reign of God” from <em>Missional Church</em> by Darrell L. Guder.</td>
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<th>Feb</th>
<th>Week 36</th>
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<td>Week 37</td>
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<td>Week 38</td>
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<td>Week 39 / Session meeting</td>
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<td>- <strong>Scripture meditation</strong>: (NT Passages from chapter 4) New Covenant of Jesus, Part 2.</td>
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|         | - **Reading discussion**: Discuss chapter four “Missional Vocation” from *Missional Church*  
|         |   1. How are the church and the reign of God (aka the Kingdom of God) related to God’s mission for the world.  
|         |   2. What does it mean that the church *represents* the reign of God to the world? |
|         | - **Homework:** |
| Mar     | Week 40 |
|         | Week 41 |
|         | Week 42 |
|         | Week 43 / Second Leadership Covenant Retreat (two days) |
| April   | Week 44* |
|         | Week 45 |
|         | Week 46 |
|         | Week 47 |
|         | Week 48 / Session meeting |
|         | - **Refining the covenant** |
| May     | Week 49 |
|         | Week 50 |
|         | Week 51 |
|         | Week 52 / Session meeting |
|         | - **Cutting the covenant** |
Covenant Bible Studies

The Noah Covenant, Section 1
Genesis 6:1-9 (Genesis 1-2)
Purpose: To help CLPC ministry leaders understand the brokenness of creation and God’s displeasure with it and how this sets the context for the flood story proper in Genesis 6:9-7:24.

1. Skim Gen 1-2. What words characterize God’s creation? How would you describe Adam and Eve’s relationship in Gen 2? How would you describe their relationship with God? How would you describe their relationship with the rest of creation?

2. What happens to all of these relationships (with humanity, with God, with creation) in Gen 3? How does Gen 6:1-7 describe this condition of humanity and creation? Which verse from this passage is a kind of summary statement for the condition of humanity at that point? What is God’s response to this predicament? How does God feel about creation? What does God resolve to do about it?

3. Think about what you have seen in the news or read in the newspaper lately. In what way does our world continue to reflect the brokenness described in this passage?

4. At the end of an otherwise despairing passage, the narrator offers a glimpse of hope. Imagine you know nothing of the story that is to come. What kind of expectation in the reader does Gen 6:8 encourage?

The Noah Covenant, Section 2
Genesis 6:9-7:24
Purpose: To help CLPC ministry leaders see the effect of God’s judgment against sin and to introduce the covenantal themes of God’s gracious choosing and human response.

1. What words does the narrator use in Gen 6:9 to describe Noah’s character? The words, “righteous,” “blameless,” and the phrase “walked with God” are expressions the Scripture uses to describe human aspects of covenantal faithfulness. How do these expressions contrast the general condition of humanity in Gen 6:11-12?

2. What is Noah’s response to God’s command to build an ark? How else could Noah have responded? Compare and contrast Noah’s trusting obedience to God’s word to the way Adam and Eve respond to God’s command about the tree of knowledge (Gn 3).

3. What images does the narrator use to describe the absolute destruction of creation in Gen 7:17-23?
The Noah Covenant, Section 3
Genesis 8:1-9:17
Purpose: To help CLPC ministry leaders understand God’s mission to recreate and restore humanity and the earth and how God invites them to partner in this plan to redeem creation from the effects of sin.

1. How does Gen 8:1 stand in sharp contrast to what has just taken place in Gen 7:17-24? Who or what is the object of God’s remembering? Why does the narrator note that God remembers all the animals aboard the ark in addition to Noah and his family?

2. What similarities do you observe between the events of Gen 1-2 and the events of Gen 8? In what ways is the scope of God’s recreation even greater than the creation of Gen 1 and Gen 2?

3. What is the first thing Noah does after emerging from the ark (Gen 8:20)? What is God’s response to Noah’s act of worship?

4. With whom does God establish covenant in Gen 9:9-11? What does this tell you about God’s covenant purposes beyond human beings? How does God’s redemptive plan encompass all of creation?

5. What is the sign God provides as a reminder of this covenant? For whom is the covenant sign a reminder? What does this indicate about the nature of God’s covenant making with humanity?

6. Consider all that we have studied concerning God’s covenant with Noah. Where can you see God’s concern for healthy relationships? What elements of spiritual formation are encompassed in this covenant? How would you describe God’s mission for the earth embodied in this covenant? In what specific ways would you like to see these covenantal themes reflected in our CLPC ministry leadership team?
The Abraham Covenant: A Covenant of Promise
Genesis 15
Purpose: To help ministry leaders understand the self-sacrificing nature of God as it relates to God’s covenant purposes.

1. What big promises has God made to Abraham earlier in Gen 12? What is Abraham’s frustration in light of these promises now that many years have passed? When have you doubted a promise that someone made to you? Talk about a time when you had a promise broken or forgotten. How did that make you feel?

2. What is Abraham’s alternative plan? What is God’s continued plan? What is Abraham’s response to God’s reassurance?

3. Describe the scene that takes place in Gen 15:9-21? In the Ancient Near East both parties of a covenant symbolically walk between the pieces. In this ceremony why does only God walk between them? What does this suggest about God’s character and the nature of God’s covenant with Abraham?

The Abraham Covenant: A Covenant of Sign
Genesis 17
Purpose: To help CLPC ministry leaders understand the significance of human response in covenant to God’s gracious initiative.

1. Abraham’s name is changed from Abram and his new name carries with it the idea of “many offspring.” How would you feel if you were in Abraham’s shoes and God gave you this new name?

2. What does God mean when he tells Abraham to “walk before me and be blameless” (Gn 17:1)? Why do you think God begins by introducing himself as “God Almighty”?

3. How long does it take for Abraham to implement God’s covenant sign of circumcision? Why does God include slaves and foreigners within Abraham’s household in the covenant sign of circumcision? How does this reflect God’s desire to bless others through his covenant relationship with Abraham?

4. Using a study bible concordance, see how many times the expression “everlasting covenant” is used? What does that suggest about the endurance of God’s promises?
**Sinai: A Covenant of Words**

Exodus 20:1-17

Purpose: To help CLPC ministry leaders see the Ten Commandments as rooted in God’s call to holiness (Duet 7:6) and obedience to his word.

1. What big historical events have led up to Exod 20? Where are Moses and the people of Israel? How did they get there?


3. How would you group the Ten Commandments into two or three common themes? Which commandments demonstrate God’s concern for spiritual formation (1-4)? Which commands demonstrate God’s concern for interpersonal relationships (5-10)? Which commands demonstrate God’s concern for blessing others (4, 10, 9, 8, 7)?

4. As a theologian, Robertson calls the Sinai covenant the “external administration of the will of God.” How does that definition help you understand why God chose to write the Ten Commandments on stone tablets? In Hebrew, the term translated “commandment” simply means “word.” How could one see the “Ten Commandments” differently by understanding them as the “Ten Words?” How does this idea help you understand John 1:14 (“The word became flesh and dwelt among us”) in a different light?

**The New Covenant in Jesus Christ**

Selected Passages

Purpose: To help CLPC ministry leaders grasp how the three covenant themes of community, spiritual formation, and missional engagement come to full fruition in the New Covenant relationship with Christ.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

1. God, through the prophet Jeremiah, promises to establish a New Covenant with God’s people. In what ways will this covenant be different than the previous covenants? In what ways will the New Covenant be the same? What was the Sinai covenant written on? Where will the New Covenant be written?

2. The word for “law” in Jer 31:33 is the Hebrew word torah. For the Hebrews, Torah refers to the first five books of the Bible. The Hebrew term also means “direction” or “way” in addition to meaning “law.” In what sense does this New Covenant promise to put God’s direction within human beings?
Discussion Questions for Passages on Jesus’ Last Supper
(For this study, CLPC ministry leaders will be given a handout with the following passages printed on them for easier reference: Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23; and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:31-35.)

1. What is the context for these passages? What historical event did the Passover Meal commemorate for the Jews of Jesus’ day?

2. Jesus connects the cup to the New Covenant and in two of the passages refers to his blood in conjunction with the covenant. In light of Exod 12:22 and Exod 24:8, why is this significant?

3. In what sense is Jesus replacing the Ten Commandments of the Old Covenant with one new commandment of the New Covenant in John 13:31-35? In what ways does Jesus’ new command make more complete the Ten Commandments?


