A Strategy for Turning Seekers into Disciples at CrossWinds Church in Dublin, California

Jodie W. Tey

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P.O. Box 30183
Portland, Oregon 97294
USA
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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A STRATEGY FOR TURNING SEEKERS INTO DISCIPLES AT CROSSWINDS CHURCH IN DUBLIN, CALIFORNIA

Written by

JODIE WALLING TEY

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

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A STRATEGY FOR TURNING SEEKERS INTO DISCIPLES AT CROSSWINDS CHURCH IN DUBLIN, CALIFORNIA

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SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
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OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
JODIE WALLING TEY
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ABSTRACT

A Strategy for Turning Seekers into Disciples at CrossWinds Church in Dublin, California
Jodie Walling Tey
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2012

The goal of this paper is to develop a strategy for discipleship at CrossWinds Church in Dublin, California. The main thrust of this strategy focuses on the concept of customizable learning modules that will facilitate spiritual growth, provide ongoing spiritual direction, and disciple individuals towards Christ-like character. CrossWinds Church is a seeker-sensitive church that has been in existence for twenty years.

At its inception, CrossWinds filled a niche by providing a seeker-sensitive venue for the growing Tri-Valley suburban community. Over the last several years, however, the seeker-sensitive model has proven to be ineffective at retaining individuals; and, attendance has dropped steadily, causing concern among senior leaders. Crosswinds’ leadership participated in Willow Creek’s REVEAL survey and discovered that busy lifestyle choices were keeping people away from church. Congregants were overwhelmingly dissatisfied with how they were growing spiritually. In order to reverse this current downward spiral, various learning options will be explored in an effort to develop an integrated spiritual growth strategy that gives people personalized options for discipleship and growth.

This paper contains three major sections. The first looks at CrossWinds’ ministry context: location, demographics, target audiences, and how postmodernism has affected this community. The second section of this paper reflects on various theological viewpoints for spiritual development, dominant ecclesiological themes found in CrossWinds’ mission statement, and theological frameworks that inform spiritual growth. The final section of this paper provides a strategy for launching an integrated spiritual growth plan through customizable learning modules that seek to meet people at various levels of spiritual development, so that all will feel they are experiencing transformation and growth in a way that fits their learning style, spiritual pathway, and current life stage. The end result should yield greater retention and commitment among attendees, life change, and renewed commitment to Christ.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION

1

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## PART ONE: MINISTRY CONTEXT

Chapter 1. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PEOPLE OF CROSSWINDS CHURCH 9

Chapter 2. CHURCH CONTEXT: THE CHALLENGES OF BEING “SEEKER SENSITIVE” 27

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## PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Chapter 3. LITERATURE REVIEW 54

Chapter 4. THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH 77

Chapter 5. A THEOLOGY OF DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH PERSONAL LEARNING MODULES 99

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## PART THREE: STRATEGY

Chapter 6. GOALS AND PLANS FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION MODULES AT CROSSWINDS CHURCH 133

Chapter 7. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS 169

---

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

189

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

193
INTRODUCTION

This final project is about discipleship. It is no secret that mainline churches have been struggling with effective strategies at forming fully devoted followers of Christ. With the many social, economic, and cultural influences invading North American culture, discipleship efforts—while well intentioned—remain somewhat ineffective at producing Christian character and aligning Godly priorities. In fact, Alan Hirsch, founding director of Forge Mission Network and a leading voice in the missional movement as it pertains to Western church development, writes: “The dilemma we face today in regard to the issue is that while we have a historical language of discipleship, our actual practice of discipleship is far from consistent. . . . I think it is fair to say that in the Western church, we have by and large lost the art of disciple making.”\(^1\) While this thought is disheartening and discouraging, it does not have to remain a reality for the churches in North America. Specifically, it does not have to remain a reality for the congregational family at CrossWinds Church in Dublin, California.

The main goal of this project is to help reverse and correct this trend for the congregation at CrossWinds Church, which is located in the East Bay of the San Francisco Bay Area. CrossWinds is a seeker-sensitive church that has been in existence for twenty years. At its inception, it filled a niche in the Tri-Valley area by providing a seeker-sensitive venue for the growing suburban community. The congregation quickly grew in size to approximately two thousand and maintained this peak for fifteen years.

\(^1\) Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 103-104.
Over the last six years, attendance steadily began to drop. In 2007, senior leaders sought to gain awareness of this decline by applying to be part of Willow Creek’s REVEAL survey. The survey revealed that busy lifestyle choices were keeping people away from church. In addition, people were overwhelmingly dissatisfied with how they were growing spiritually. To be more specific, it was discovered that the main disappointment of the congregation was that the church did not challenge individuals to grow in their walk of faith. Moreover, 23 percent felt as if they were spiritually stalled; and, this caused them to be highly dissatisfied with the church. Of those who were dissatisfied, 52 percent were considering leaving the church.

This was a wakeup call for CrossWinds. One gaping hole that was uncovered was this: CrossWinds was not offering enough by way of discipleship and spiritual formation. It simply was not paying enough attention to the spiritual growth of people. The ministry need for this congregation centers around a reversal of its current downward spiral by embracing a spiritual growth strategy that allows people to have flexible options in their spiritual journey. Moreover, the need is for a strategy that integrates individual learning

---

2 Shannon McNeill, *People Query Database Report* (Dublin, CA: CrossWinds Church, 2009-2011). This “people query” involved the search of individual information by pulling date of birth after January 18, 1946 and before January 18, 1965 to get all persons between forty-seven and sixty-five years of age, which is the Baby Boomer population. I did the same type of query for the Busters, by pulling date of birth for those born after 1966 but before 1990 to get their population numbers.

3 Willow Creek’s REVEAL helps leaders to answer key questions—“Are my people really growing spiritually?” and “What actions should I help them take to grow?”—and to “make measurable, positive changes in the process of growing disciples.” This guidance has come “after five years of studying 280,000 in-depth responses from congregants in 1,200 churches across a wide variety of denominations,” according to Willow Creek Association, “REVEAL,” http://reveal.com (accessed February 7, 2011).

4 CrossWinds Church, *REVEAL Survey Results: CrossWinds Church* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Association, 2007), 31 and 39.
styles, spiritual pathways, life stage, and development along the spiritual growth continuum.

The issue of discipleship is vital and should be a non-negotiable in the life of the believer. If the above quote by Hirsch is correct, then the church is failing to live up to one of the greatest commandments given by Christ. The Great Commission found in Matthew 28:19 states: “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” This passage is pivotal in that it mandates one of the central tasks in the life of any Christ follower. Careful adherence to Jesus’ words requires that disciples are intentional about disciple making in their spheres of influence. Hirsch further says, “Missional reading of this text requires that we see that Jesus’ strategy is to get a whole lot of little versions of him infiltrating every nook and cranny of society by reproducing himself in and through his people in every place throughout the world.” If the goal of discipleship is to reproduce the image of Christ in the individual, then this central task of discipleship makes sense. Multiple likenesses of Christ throughout the world would be proof positive that God exists and that He is working among His creation to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

In addition to this aspect of the impact of discipleship on the world, it is also non-negotiable due to what it produces in the life of the believer. The responsibility of every disciple is to become a spiritually formed follower of Christ. The heart of spiritual formation can be defined as “an increasing love for God and for other people . . . based on

5 All Scripture quoted is from the Holy Bible: New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), unless otherwise noted.

Jesus’ description of the two greatest commandments: ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39).  

As disciples grow in their relationship with God and allow themselves to be transformed into the image of Christ, love becomes more and more of a hallmark of the disciple’s life. The byproduct of love then becomes a telling characteristic in the life of a disciple, because it reflects the nature of Christ within the individual. Love then turns into an outward statement of an inner devotion, reflecting the nature of Christ to the world. “And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them” (1 John 4:16).

If the Church in the West is going to recapture its vitality in living out its mission, discipleship and disciple making must remain the priority and serve as the foundation and impetus for its existence. It cannot be an afterthought nor can it be something that is attempted periodically in the midst of other programs and offerings. If this trend continues, churches in North America cannot expect to recapture their vibrancy and vitality. They will continue in a downward spiral, breeding future generations of nominal Christians. Eddie Gibbs states:

In contemporary Western Christianity, we have little understanding of the concept of discipleship. Those who are evangelized are brought to the point of decision, go through membership and then continue as a part of the worshipping congregation. Western churches suffer from a chronic problem of undisciplined church members, an environment that serves as the perfect breeding ground for “nominal Christianity.”

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My personal interest in this topic stems from some of my first experiences in seminary. I was one year into my Master of Divinity program before I heard the word “discipleship.” Once I heard it, I heard it everywhere. Professors and students alike freely used the word in conversation and touted the responsibility of every believer to engage in it, yet I never heard an explanation of what discipleship was or what it intended to produce in the life of the believer. Scholar and historian Ray Vander Laan echoes this sentiment in his comments on contemporary Christianity. He asserts, “Contemporary Christianity does not always make discipleship central to the faith. Many who call themselves Christians don’t even know what a disciple is.”9 I was one of those Christians.

Since that time of realization, my prayer has been this: “Lord, teach me what it means to be a disciple and how to disciple in turn.” As I have journeyed with God in this area, He has convinced me that there is nothing greater I can do with my life than engage in the art of disciple making. It has become the single most important aspect of my ministry calling and the one thing to which God calls me back time and time again. Hirsch articulates the sentiments that I carry with me into ministry each day: “When dealing with discipleship, and the related capacity to generate authentic followers of Jesus, we are dealing with that single most crucial factor that will in the end determine the quality of the whole—if we fail at this point then we must fail in all others.”10

The ministry challenge presented at CrossWinds Church, the critical importance of discipleship, and my personal conviction to be a disciple maker all lead to the thesis of

9 Ray Vander Laan, In the Dust of the Rabbi (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 11.

this final project: to develop and initiate a comprehensive strategy for discipleship in the context of customizable learning modules so that people can experience ongoing spiritual direction and be discipled toward growth in Christ-like character despite the state of their current walk of faith. To address CrossWinds’ ministry challenge, this paper will contain three major sections. The first part will focus on the ministry context. Chapter 1 will begin by examining CrossWinds’ location, demographics, and target audience. Special attention will be given to how postmodernism, consumerism, and pluralism have affected this community and how they apply to the spiritual growth challenge in this context. Chapter 2 will explore CrossWinds’ history, including its past and present mission statements and how they have played into the role of spiritual formation and discipleship. It also will include a section on the current status of the discipleship ministry using the recent REVEAL survey to measure the strengths and weaknesses of its current strategy.

The second part of this paper will be grounded in theological reflection. Chapter 3 will offer a literature review with special attention given to why leading Christian authors and leaders believe people are not growing spiritually overall and what might be done to curb the problem. Chapter 4 sets forth ecclesiology and addresses the strengths and weaknesses of it, as it pertains to the proposed discipleship model. Chapter 5 will examine four other theological frameworks that inform spiritual growth and the proposed discipleship model: the Baptist tradition, Jesus’ model of discipleship, Jewish catechism, and early Christian catechism.

The third part of this paper provides a strategy for launching an integrated spiritual growth plan. Chapter 6 will begin with an outline of the strategic goals for the
discipleship learning modules and will touch on three areas of learning: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. It then will address the content of the strategy, which includes four main modules: a discipleship series called the “Knowing Series”; a seminary-type learning experience called the “Going Deeper School”; a customizable, online spiritual growth dashboard called “Monvee”; and, a one-on-one “Mentoring” module. The chapter also will describe the target population as it pertains to the roll-out strategy. The final chapter will summarize the pilot project and will follow with a timeline, leadership development strategy, and an explanation of resources needed to carry out the initiative. The paper will conclude with an evaluation process that will shed light on the effectiveness of the overall strategic plan.
CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PEOPLE OF CROSSWINDS CHURCH

This chapter will describe the people who make up CrossWinds Church in Dublin, California. The first section will give an overview of the San Francisco Tri-Valley, an area of high-tech business that yields a mix of nationalities and brings in many young families. It also will explain the current challenge of shifting its focal target audience from Boomers to now Boomers and Busters. The last section will focus on the main effects of postmodernism on these two target groups, namely consumerism and pluralism as they speak to the spiritual growth challenge in this context.

An Introduction to San Francisco’s Tri-Valley

CrossWinds Church is strategically located in the Tri-Valley of the San Francisco Bay Area in the city of Dublin, California. The Tri-Valley region is unique in that three adjacent valleys come together to form this bedroom community. The Amador, Livermore, and San Ramon valleys all converge on the eastern side of the San Francisco Bay to create the Tri-Valley—which is home to the five cities of Pleasanton, Livermore,
Dublin, San Ramon, and Danville. The valley is located about halfway between San Francisco (thirty-six miles away) and Silicon Valley (twenty-two miles away).

While each city has its own unique history and culture, the region itself has a common story that makes for a colorful past and vibrant present. The first settlers in the valley were the Ohlone people who moved between the bay and the inland valleys to follow their food sources. They remained the primary ethnic group until Spanish soldiers took it over as a colony. Under the Spanish, the valley was used primarily for agricultural and grazing land. Hence, the valley is home to Native American villages, Spanish mission culture, and Spanish land-grant ranchos. Many of these remain today as points of historic interest.

Since it was a main travel route from San Francisco to the Sierra Foothills, the region was also very active during the Gold Rush. The Gold Rush days brought an influx of more diverse populations which included people from Latin America, Europe, Australia, and China, all of whom were looking for gold. The completion of the transcontinental railroad through the valley turned many of the diverse Gold Rush settlements into real “towns.” The first towns of the valley were made up of truly diverse populations.

The completion of the transcontinental railroad through the valley also caused the agricultural industry to thrive. This opened up markets across the country for locally

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3 Ibid.
produced grains, hops, and wines. With the establishment of the continental railroad, the valley became one of California’s oldest wine regions. The wine industry of the valley has flourished ever since. Today it is home to forty-five boutique and historical wineries.  

World War II and the nuclear age also have played their parts in shaping the region. During World War II, the city of Dublin became home to Camp Parks, the largest inland naval base in North America. The camp currently serves as a training facility for over eleven thousand reservists in the San Francisco Bay Area. In addition, a former World War II Naval Air Station in Livermore became home to the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. It was established at the height of the Cold War to meet national security needs by advancing nuclear weapons science and technology. The lab is still in existence today with the goal of ensuring the nation’s security through scientific research and engineering development.

With regard to modern business and technology, the Tri-Valley is right in the middle of one of the most robust economic regions in the United States. The Bay Area is the world center for computer technology and biotechnology and serves as the headquarters to more Fortune 500 companies than any metropolitan area in the Western United States. The city of Dublin is home to Hacienda Business Park, which is the

4 Ibid.


largest master-planned business park in Northern California and accommodates a high number of corporations.

With such varied influences coming together from both the past and present, the valley is truly a unique community. Due to its colorful and historic past, the valley is a place that preserves and appreciates history. Moreover, its colorful history makes it no stranger to ethnic diversity. The development of its various wine regions make it a place of elegant sophistication, while its business and technological center makes it an area that teams with innovation and technically savvy people. It is an area that attracts transients, transplants, and travelers. While some people come to the valley for a destination vacation, most seek it as a modern mecca in which to work and raise their families. Some come to play. Some come to stay. There are many reasons that people seek the valley as a refuge; but, whatever the reason, one observation can be made when it comes to the life and culture of this area. It is a region that continues to evolve due to the diverse nature of the valley and its offerings; it is a unique blend of old and new.\(^8\)

Due to the distinctiveness of this area, it hosts a fascinating demography in terms of the “characteristics of the people in the community . . . numbers, age, and sex distribution; ethnic and racial profile; and changes in these data over time.”\(^9\) The following sections will look at some of these key demographic aspects as they pertain to creating a new spiritual growth strategy for CrossWinds. The fact that this area is a hub

\(^8\) Tri-Valley California, “Tri-Valley History.” The Tri-Valley community is so clear about its unique identity that the website even offers media story ideas about its unique blend of old and new: Tri-Valley, California, “Media,” http://www.trivalleycvb.com/media/ (accessed February 7, 2011).

for technology and business plays a large part in who lives in the valley. Big business has brought more ethnic diversity to the area as well as young couples seeking a place to raise their children. As a result of this surge, the dominant population (and target population for the church) has shifted. CrossWinds Church originally started with a focus on reaching the Baby Boomers but now finds itself shifting to reach both Boomers and Busters. This shift in population also has brought with it a postmodern mindset that is pervasive in the valley. In light of this, the intangible forces of postmodernism, namely consumerism and pluralism, will be examined as they speak to the challenge of creating a spiritual growth strategy in this context.

An Area of High-Tech Big Business

One of the key factors that affect demographics in the Tri-Valley area is the existence of the Hacienda Business Park in the city of Pleasanton. The business park is the largest development of its kind in Northern California. It covers an area of 874 acres and contains over ten million square feet of space that is occupied by 475 companies locally employing approximately eighteen thousand people.\(^\text{10}\) It is located along the Interstate Corridor of 580 (runs east to west) and 680 (runs north to south) which connects the East Bay with San Francisco to the west and Silicon Valley to the south. Consequently, its location gives people additional access to two of the largest metropolitan cities in Northern California. It also provides residents around the Bay Area with quick access to luxuries in the Tri-Valley.

\(^{10}\) Hacienda, “Introduction.”
Hacienda Business Park houses some of the biggest names in biomedical development, software development, business solutions, computer technology, and telecommunications. Some of the leading companies in these categories who call Hacienda their home are Roche Molecular, Oracle, Xerox, Cisco, AT&T, PacBell, and Verizon Wireless. Of the 450 tenants that reside in the park, these five categories account for 21 percent of the park’s population.\(^\text{11}\) Since this park is located strategically along an all-access corridor and houses some of the most advanced technological and business companies in the country, this corridor has been expected to have the most rapid growth in labor force of any employment center in the Bay Area.\(^\text{12}\)

Given the projection for growth, Hacienda has sought to accommodate people moving to the area by providing an infrastructure in which people can live as well as work. The park has six housing communities with over 1,500 units of housing available within the development.\(^\text{13}\) It is also replete with the necessities of any basic neighborhood. Five retail shopping centers, six hotels, a sports park, two hospitals, two elementary schools, and one middle school all are at the disposal of those who call Hacienda their home.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{11}\) Hacienda, *Hacienda Tenant Directory*, http://www.hacienda.org/tenants/data/tenant_sort5.html (accessed January 18, 2011). This calculation was taken by adding the tenants in these categories and dividing by the total number of tenants in the business park.

\(^{12}\) Hacienda, “Introduction.”


With a plethora of modern amenities and built-in comforts within the business park, more and more technologically savvy individuals and families are calling the Tri-Valley their home. This influx of people not only brings with it a tech-savvy population, it also brings an influx of ethnic diversity. Since this area has so much to offer young families and individuals, it has seen a tide of people from other countries who seek employment in the fields of technology and business. The result is that the area continues to grow in ethnic diversity and to develop into an area that has a broad cultural base. This fact also must be addressed, as it pertains to the population of CrossWinds Church.

Growing in Diversity: Demographic Data for the Tri-Valley

The rise of high-tech, big business has brought an influx of opportunity for many nationalities. In 2003, the cities of Pleasanton and Livermore hired a consulting firm to help determine what the greatest human service needs were in the Tri-Valley. Using the United States Census Bureau as a resource base, the study presents compiled information regarding the changing demographics of the region and reports the following:

The Tri-Valley region has experienced sustained economic and residential growth over the past two decades. During this period, the area has evolved from a primarily suburban residential community to a regional employment center with a diverse mix of retail, office and housing opportunities. This increasingly diversified economy has also resulted in a more diverse residential population.\(^{15}\)

With the increase of economic growth, the Tri-Valley has transformed from a quiet bedroom community to a bustling business mecca that has made it a popular home for

international businesses. The result of the Tri-Valley’s popularity is increased growth in ethnic diversity. This growth can be shown statistically.

Using census information from 1990 and 2000, ICF Consulting’s demographic data uncovered that the Tri-Valley is the fastest growing region in Alameda County. This is shown in Table 1. From 1990 to 2000, the Tri-Valley’s population increased by 28 percent which surpassed Alameda County’s 13 percent rate of growth as a whole.\(^\text{16}\) What this means is that most of the growth that took place in Alameda County over this ten-year span can be attributed to growth that took place in the Tri-Valley.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6,744</td>
<td>1,630</td>
<td>2,033</td>
<td>Total 30.1%</td>
<td>Total 5.8%</td>
<td>Total -5</td>
<td>Total 879</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>16,604</td>
<td>4,954</td>
<td>7,111</td>
<td>Total 29.8%</td>
<td>Total 42.8%</td>
<td>Total -30</td>
<td>Total 1,907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Livermore</td>
<td>13,101</td>
<td>1,628</td>
<td>4,741</td>
<td>Total 12.4%</td>
<td>Total 36.2%</td>
<td>Total -17</td>
<td>Total 4,706</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant.</td>
<td>36,449</td>
<td>8,212</td>
<td>13,885</td>
<td>Total 22.5%</td>
<td>Total 38.1%</td>
<td>Total -73</td>
<td>Total 8,431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tri-Valley Region</td>
<td>164,559</td>
<td>92,105</td>
<td>-88,922</td>
<td>Total 56.0%</td>
<td>Total -54.0%</td>
<td>Total -11,749</td>
<td>Total 116,318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alameda County</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
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The report also indicated that within this population boom, the Tri-Valley is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. The Latino/Hispanic population grew by 72 percent, accounting for 23 percent of the population growth between 1990 and 2000. The Asian and Pacific Islander population grew by 129 percent, accounting for another

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 7.
23 percent of the region’s population growth since 1990.\textsuperscript{17} Table 1 reveals that Whites still account for the greatest amount of population growth, making up roughly 38 percent of the population in the Tri-Valley. However, the Latino/Hispanic and the Asian and Pacific Islander populations have driven a sizeable amount of the region’s overall population increase during this time. Although the White population in the Tri-Valley has grown by 12.9 percent, the non-White population increased by 98.5 percent during the 1990s. There are nearly twice as many non-White Tri-Valley residents in 2000 as compared with those living in the area in 1990.\textsuperscript{18}

Although the report concluded that the White population is still the sizeable majority, this does not diminish the fact that the region has been increasing in terms of its racial diversity. This trend shows no signs of slowing down. A projection of the demographic data for 2015 reveals that among the population in all five Tri-Valley cities, 64 percent of the average population will be White while 36 percent of the population will be of another race.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{A New Bedroom Community: The Shift from Boomers to Busters}

Not only did the technological boom in the valley bring with it an increase in ethnic diversity, it also has brought an influx of a younger generation. At its inception, 

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} ICF Consulting, \textit{Human Services Needs Assessment of the Tri-Valley}, 31.

\textsuperscript{19} Church Marketing Solutions, \textit{Demographic Detail Comparison Report} (Fairfax, VA: Church Marketing Solutions, January 18, 2011), 5. I ordered this report from Church Marketing Solutions, http://www.church-marketing.com (accessed January 18, 2011). This figure was calculated using the 2015 projected figures from the U.S. Census Bureau. The projected percentages for the White population of the five cities were added and averaged. The "another race" percentage refers to the non-White population: American Indian, Asian, Black, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, other, and multi-race.
CrossWinds Church originally was geared to woo Baby Boomers back to church. Senior pastor John Merritt says, “The motivation which drove me into church planting was the burning desire I had to effectively reach people who had dropped out of church without any serious intention of returning. My burden was for a generation of Baby Boomers who grew up in the church but who had long since written the church off as irrelevant and unnecessary.” Baby Boomers often are defined as people born between 1946 and 1964, because there was a noticeable bulge in the annual birth rate during these years after World War II. On the age continuum, they are anywhere from forty-five to sixty-five years old.

However, this original target population is shifting from being the dominant population to becoming a secondary population to Baby Busters, the generation that follows. The Baby Buster generation, which has been called by several names (Generation X or the Lost Generation), is the post-Boomer generation ranging in age between twenty-one and forty-five. This generation of young adults currently numbers in excess of 100 million and makes up more than a third of the United States population.

With regard to the population makeup in the Tri-Valley, the data follows the national trend. As of the spring of 2010, the Busters make up 33.2 percent of the valley’s


22 Ibid., xvi.
population. The median age of a person living in the Tri-Valley is 39.3 years. This median age falls right in the middle of the Buster generation. With regard to the CrossWinds population, a search of the church database shows that of 7,614 people on record 1,715 are between the ages of twenty-one and forty-five. This roughly equals 23 percent of the total attendance. While this is not quite the national average, the data shows that Busters make up a significant part of the congregation.

The Baby Boomers fall slightly behind the Busters in the valley. They currently make up 30.5 percent of the population in the valley. At CrossWinds Church, their percentage is even smaller. Of 7,614 people in the database, 1,472 are between the ages of forty-six and sixty-five. This is 19 percent of the total attendance. Given this small percentage, it is clear that a generational shift has taken place. Boomers are not in the place of dominance that they once were. This fact has direct impact on the shaping of a spiritual growth strategy. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow states, “The boomers who once

23 Church Marketing Solutions, Demographic Detail Comparison Report, 2. This portion of the report offers demographic data by age. It gave age breakdowns as follows: twenty to twenty-four, twenty-five to thirty-four, and thirty-five to forty-four. Given this breakdown, I only could tabulate ages twenty to forty-four years old, which slightly varies from the Buster age bracket: twenty-one to forty-five years old. For each city in the valley, the percentage of the population that each age bracket made up was reported. I added them up for the five cities and then took an average to arrive at the figure of 33.2 percent.

24 Jodie Tey, Fellowship One Database Report (Dublin, CA: CrossWinds Church, January 18, 2011). First, a search was done to gather total active participants. A second search was done to see how many were between the ages of twenty-one and forty-five. Then the percentage was calculated.

25 Church Marketing Solutions, Demographic Detail Comparison Report, 2. This portion of the report offers demographic data by age. It gave age breakdowns as follows: forty-five to fifty-four and fifty-five to sixty-four. Given this breakdown, I only could tabulate ages forty-five to sixty-four years old, which slightly varies from the Boomer age bracket: forty-seven to sixty-five years old. For each city in the valley, the percentage of the population that each age bracket made up was reported. I added them up and then took an average to arrive at the figure of 30.5 percent.

26 Tey, Fellowship One Database Report. First, a search was done to gather total active participants. A second search was done to see how many were between the ages of forty-six and sixty-five. Then the percentage was calculated.
shaped American religion are rapidly growing into the elderly population—Busters are becoming dominant in community and culture. Baby boomers are no longer the future of American religion. As they grow older, they are rapidly becoming its past. The future now lies with the younger adults.”

The influences of business and technology have spawned growing diversity and generational shifts within the Tri-Valley region. All three influences come together to add to the spiritual growth challenge in this context. While the region is grounded securely in its history, it has been infiltrated by technology, innovation, and a new technologically savvy generation. Even though its original population was a mix of ethnically diverse people, the diversity continues to grow given the expanding business and technological opportunities in the valley. This all has brought an influx of a younger generation which is supplanting the Baby Boomers who once dominated the Tri-Valley. In these ways, the valley truly is a mix of old and new, which creates unique challenges for creating a spiritual growth strategy in this context.

The challenges can be seen as more in-depth characteristics about this population come to light. The primary ministry challenge has to do with moving away from a “one-size fits all” mentality of ministry to a more organic and personalized approach to discipleship. The postmodern, technologically adroit generation depends on the ability of the internet to provide information and choices. With the immense volume of information at their fingertips, they seek choices and opportunities that fit their lifestyles, personalities, and current goals. The idea of anything “cookie cutter” is cast quickly aside in favor of something that is customizable and unique to the individual. With regard to the

importance of choices among this population, Lyle E. Schaller observes that young people today can choose from among thousands of different occupations and vocations. This is very different from the times when their parents grew up. With so many choices, the culture has shifted from a culture focused on survival goals to a consumer-driven culture that overflows with choices.\(^{28}\)

Ethnic diversity also calls for a celebration of choices and options, especially in terms of how the gospel is presented and how individuals are encouraged to grow in their faith. “In the postmodern world, diversity is celebrated. Denominations that are monochrome in ethos and cookie-cutter in their approach . . . emaciate the gospel. Diversity must be celebrated.”\(^{29}\) Ethnic diversity brings with it a need for choice and options if churches—CrossWinds, in particular—are going to meet the evangelistic goals and spiritual growth needs of their congregations.

For the Baby Busters, their entire mode of operating centers on choice. Wuthnow suggests that there are large questions for religious and community leaders that pertain to the spiritual growth of this generation. One of these is that “young adults are increasingly a generation of *bricoleurs* who piece together their lives in highly diverse ways and from a multitude of sources.”\(^{30}\) Bricoleurs are “tinkerers” who believe that it is impossible to solve problems through predefined solutions.\(^{31}\) In his articulation of the spiritual growth challenge

\(^{28}\) Lyle E. Schaller, *Discontinuity and Hope: Radical Change and the Path to the Future* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 136 and 138.


\(^{30}\) Wuthnow, *After the Baby Boomers*, 232.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 14.
for this generation, he writes: “The temptation for some religious leaders will be to provide ready-made answers for the tinkerers who come their way.”32 The challenge for leaders is for them to resist the “one size fits all” mentality of ministry and opt for solutions that give individuals choices while still pointing them in the direction of growth and responsibility.

The demographic data is not the only information that informs the growth challenge for CrossWinds Church. The era of postmodernity also brings influences that create a challenge for developing a discipleship strategy in this context. The specific effects of postmodernism that influence this demographic are consumerism and pluralism.

The Effects of Postmodernism on the Tri-Valley: Consumerism and Pluralism

“Postmodernism” is a term that is used to describe the current culture and climate within American society. The term “postmodern” was adopted to describe a new movement in art and architecture. The term then was extended to explain what was happening in the world at large. In postmodern art, there is no real world. It is held that nothing exists beyond the piece of art; hence, there is nothing to represent. The piece represents itself. In postmodernism, reality disappears and all that is left is the counterfeit, the image, the piece of art that relates to nothing.33

Reality, according to postmodern thought, is something that cultures construct or manufacture.34 Within this type of framework, people work to create their own realities,

32 Ibid., 232.

33 Chuck Smith, Jr., The End of the World . . . As We Know It (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 29.

34 Ibid., 30.
picking and choosing from the past and the present in order to give the individual meaning and significance. Due to this, truth becomes subjective. In fact, postmoderns have rejected the illusive search for truth; or, more accurately, they have redefined truth in terms of consensus or “whatever works for you.” Consequently, postmoderns can be classified as a generation of individuals who piece together their own meaning and significance and reject anything that leans toward absolute truth. This propensity toward selective picking and choosing has brought with it several influences that bear on the culture in the Tri-Valley. Two of the influences are consumerism and pluralism.

Since reality in postmodernism is something that cultures construct or manufacture, there is no absolute for the postmodern individual. Religion is no exception to this “rule.” Chuck Smith, Jr. states, “If religion, like culture, is a human invention, then people who want to be religious must become consumers of reality—shoppers who weigh and compare the various claims of religions and determine what each one has to offer.” This consumer mentality has led to mass-marketing efforts by churches nationwide in an effort to sell their spiritual goods. This has created a “malling” of religion. “Churches have become the counterparts to megamalls, super-super markets and multiplex cinemas and resemble a cross between shopping malls and theme parks—modernity’s ultimate in people-moving selling-machines.” The result of these mass-marketing efforts is that people are

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36 Ibid., 73.

encouraged to shop for and become consumers of religion in an effort to find what suits their needs and fits them personally.

This consumer mentality regarding religion also invites a pluralism of belief. Pluralism is “marked by a multiplicity of style and a mix of many different things.”\(^{38}\) It gives people freedom and permission to mix and match aspects from any given religion to create their relative truth in an effort to find what is right for them. This trend is also popular among Christians who shop for churches that meet their individual spiritual desires and needs. Smith agrees and writes: “Postmodern religion is eclectic. Believers pick and choose their favorite authors and teachers from a variety of denominations and theological persuasions.”\(^{39}\)

The impact of this religious picking and choosing is that while Christians select from many different churches and traditions in an effort to find what is right for them, they do not commit to or form an allegiance with any one church or denomination. This type of loose association between a church and its constituents can be detrimental to the church as well as to the spiritual individual. For the church, it offers no expectation that the congregant will commit to that body of believers by way of time, talent, or finances. For the congregant, there is no guidance over the myriad of spiritual choices being explored—some of which may or may not be biblically sound or produce fruitful, substantive spiritual growth.

While it is difficult to quantify these kinds of invisible forces upon a society, it is possible to make observations based on what CrossWinds has experienced in the last several years. CrossWinds began to strongly experience the impact of consumerism and

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 46.

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 67.
pluralism about seven years ago with the influx of “church hoppers” into its congregation. People no longer were making CrossWinds their church home but were committing their allegiance to several congregations, depending on which one met their specific needs at the time. Walter Brueggemann calls this cultural trend “military consumerism.” Military consumerism refers to the world in which individuals hold the conviction that well-being, security, and happiness are the result of getting, having, and using—activities that may be done without restraint or limit.\(^\text{40}\)

For many in the CrossWinds congregation, they were seeking a Sunday experience that made them feel better about themselves and about their lives. They wanted a church that could cater to their most immediate physical, spiritual, and emotional needs. If they got what they needed on a Sunday morning, they stayed. If they did not, they went shopping for a church that could meet their most current needs. The result was that the Sunday-attending body became a large group of rotating, passive participants who utilized various ministry resources but were not involved in contributing their time, talent, or finances to the ministries of the church. In other words, they did not become fruit-bearing disciples.

This finicky consumerism has been widely noted by the pastors on staff. Since attendance has gone from approximately two thousand adults down to eight hundred adults on an average Sunday morning, the church leadership team, comprised of staff

pastors, was tasked with polling families as to their reasons for leaving. At each weekly leadership team meeting, pastors would report back on their “exit interviews” with individuals and families. While the responses were not quantified, this familiar refrain kept surfacing in a variety of ways: “I was not getting my needs met, so I think I am going to shop around for a while.”

Since consumerism and pluralism have infiltrated church culture, they are challenges that will have to be taken into consideration with regard to discipleship in this context. The cultural propensity to collect and consume, along with the cultural need for choices and options, heavily weigh on creating an effective discipleship strategy for those at CrossWinds Church. Wuthnow sums up this challenge accurately. He says, “The temptation for some religious leaders will be to provide ready-made answers for the tinkerers who come their way. The challenge is to encourage people to draw responsibly from the full range of resources at their disposal and to work at putting together their lives in ways that are collectively as well as personally beneficial.”

One size does not and cannot fit all. People must be given options to experience transformation and growth in a way that fits who they are depending on their learning style, spiritual pathway, current life stage, and cultural disposition. They must be guided yet have the freedom to move in and out of the developmental process at their own pace and with regard to the flow of their lives and individual, personal experiences.

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41 CrossWinds Church, *CrossWinds Weekly* (Dublin, CA: CrossWinds Church, 2004-2010). Figures were pulled from the weekly church bulletins and averaged.

CHAPTER 2

CHURCH CONTEXT: THE CHALLENGES OF BEING
“SEEKER SENSITIVE”

This chapter will look at the history of CrossWinds as it pertains to the challenge of being a seeker-sensitive church. It will start by giving a brief explanation of why the church was started as well as expound on its past and present mission statements and platforms for impact regarding spiritual growth and discipleship. The next section will present the strengths and weaknesses of CrossWinds’ discipleship efforts within the framework of the new mission statement. Then the discussion will evaluate the current status of the discipleship ministry using Willow Creek’s REVEAL survey. The final section will look at some new opportunities for a spiritual formation strategy within the body life of this seeker-sensitive model.

A Brief History of CrossWinds Church

CrossWinds Church was started in 1989 by Merritt, its current senior pastor. Before he began CrossWinds, he was the pastor of a traditional Baptist church in the Midwest. As a young pastor, he often was frustrated with the way churches unknowingly
created “built-in barriers” making it difficult for outsiders to get inside.\(^1\) This frustration led to a discontentment that sparked a deep desire within him to plant a church that intentionally removed the barriers for people to attend church and participate in body life. Pastor Merritt experienced a defining moment when he visited Willow Creek Community Church in 1987. He was overwhelmed at how Willow Creek was able to attract thousands of diverse people at different places in their spiritual journeys. The Willow Creek style seemed relaxed and non-threatening in that it utilized current, mainstream music in worship services and delivered relevant sermons that people could apply to everyday life. Once he experienced the atmosphere at Willow Creek, there was “no doubt in John’s mind and heart that God was calling him to start a new church that was welcoming, authentic, not confusing and very much ‘come as you are.’”\(^2\) His goal then became to plant a church where irreligious people and unchurched people could seek God and connect with Him in a meaningful and relevant way.\(^3\)

With the help of his parent denomination, the Baptist General Conference, Merritt decided to plant a church in the San Francisco Bay Area because it had one of the highest non-churchgoing populations in the United States.\(^4\) That vision came to fruition on November 6, 1989 when CrossWinds opened its doors to the people of the Tri-Valley. Three hundred people were in attendance at the first church service. Since that day, the


\(^2\) Ibid.

\(^3\) Irreligious people are those who do not practice a particular religion or who are hostile to or have no desire to be involved in church.

\(^4\) Ibid.
church has grown exponentially. By 2004, the church blossomed to eighteen hundred people and made its mark in the Tri-Valley as the congregation for the unchurched.\(^5\)

**Initial Mission Statement and Platforms for Impact**

The element that has been the driving force behind CrossWinds Church is the mission statement around which Merritt founded the church back in 1989. Since he was so impressed with what he saw at Willow Creek, he adopted Willow’s mission statement: to turn irreligious people and seekers into fully devoted followers of Christ.\(^6\) In Merritt’s mind, this mission statement can be boiled down to one word: discipleship. When developing the CrossWinds church-planting strategy, he explicitly states that “the primary purpose of the church is to make disciples. As the pastor of a new church I am choosing to place emphasis on making disciples as a matter of urgency since we will not exist as a church if discipleship fails to happen.”\(^7\) Within this sentiment, Merritt expresses the single more important component in planting CrossWinds: making disciples so that the church can flourish both in the present and into the future.

For Merritt, however, discipleship also is linked intricately to evangelism. Pastor Merritt goes on to state:

> Some have preferred to make a clear distinction between evangelism and discipleship. Evangelism is commonly seen as the act of bringing one to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ; discipleship is commonly seen as what follows evangelism which involves the nurture of the new believer. I prefer not to draw

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\(^7\) Merritt, *A Strategy for Planting a Regional Church in San Francisco’s East Bay Area*, 6.
such a distinct line between the act of evangelism and the process of discipleship. I am convicted that evangelism is not complete until the one who has been converted is discipled.  

This sentiment embodies the goal for CrossWinds that the ideas of discipleship and evangelism be joined inextricably. There is no division between the two that would make one a higher priority over the other, as one cannot exist without the other.

While Merritt does not draw a definitive line between discipleship and evangelism, the philosophy of ministry for CrossWinds Church centers on evangelism. Primarily, this has happened due to Merritt’s gifting as an evangelistic preacher and his driving passion for evangelizing the lost. Since he led the church plant, the philosophy of ministry for CrossWinds is built around this goal. Merritt says, “We are determined to do whatever it takes to reach the unchurched and the unsaved with the good news of life in Christ. We are intentionally making evangelism the central focus of the church, not one of several peripheral programs.”

This emphasis on evangelism comes from Merritt’s Baptist roots. CrossWinds’ parent denomination is the Northern California Baptist Conference (NCBC), which is a division of the Baptist General Conference. The NCBC now is called Converge Pac West. Within this denomination, one of the primary tasks is evangelism through teaching God’s Word. The goal of teaching is to bring about conversion to Christianity. The original founders of the denomination emphasized a conversion-centered experiential

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8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 88.

faith based on God’s Word, missionary outreach, and evangelistic passion that results in soul winning.\(^{11}\) This puts primary significance on the senior pastor to deliver biblically based, evangelistic messages that result in conversions and baptisms.

In order to accomplish the primary task of evangelism, CrossWinds adopted a model of ministry that was relevant to its culture. One of the ways a church can be relevant is by being intentional about presenting the gospel in a way that is easily understandable to someone living in modern culture. The biblical rationale that frees a church to do so is found in 1 Corinthians 9:22. In this passage, Paul explains his desire to remove any and all barriers which might render the testimony of his life as well as the testimony of Christ as ineffective. He says, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means, I might save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22b). This passage gave CrossWinds the freedom to explore alternate ways of doing ministry as well as a mandate to “replace irrelevant and confusing church patterns with meaningful and helpful approaches to the Christian life.”\(^{12}\) This way of doing relevant ministry allowed CrossWinds to experiment with several fresh platforms for spiritual impact. Three of the most significant platforms that were used in the launching of CrossWinds were the introduction of a new type of Sunday morning service, a Wednesday night worship venue, and community growth groups.

The most radical aspect of the ministry strategy was the Sunday morning service. Traditionally, morning worship experiences were primarily targeted at the believer. The

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\(^{12}\) Merritt, A Strategy for Planting a Regional Church in San Francisco’s East Bay Area, 23.
ministry philosophy of CrossWinds dictated that Sunday now would be aimed at the seeker and become the main evangelistic arm of the church. The entire format of the service was meant to provide a nontoxic atmosphere in which the truths of the Christian faith could be creatively presented on a basic, introductory level.\(^\text{13}\) The goal was to translate the gospel by keeping the message intact while merely using different modes to communicate it in ways that connect with the people CrossWinds was trying to reach.\(^\text{14}\) These modes included easy-to-understand and relevant preaching, excellent mainstream and identifiable music, drama sketches, and multi-media presentations. Throughout the service, audience participation intentionally was kept to a minimum so that unchurched people did not have to embarrass themselves by revealing their ignorance.\(^\text{15}\) By using modern means to communicate with modern people and by being sensitive to the needs and spiritual condition of seekers, CrossWinds quickly became known as the “pop culture church.” Eileen Mitchell, a reporter for the Tri-Valley’s Diablo Magazine commented, “Few churches have embraced pop culture like Dublin’s CrossWinds Church has.”\(^\text{16}\) The result was that the church grew from three hundred people to five hundred within a two-year period.\(^\text{17}\)

In order to supplement the Sunday morning evangelistic efforts, a Wednesday night service called “Winds of Change” was designed for believers who were seeking to

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 90.  
\(^{14}\) Lee Strobel, Inside the Mind of Unchurched Harry and Mary: How to Reach Friends and Family Who Avoid God and the Church (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 162.  
\(^{15}\) Merritt, A Strategy for Planting a Regional Church in San Francisco’s East Bay Area, 91.  
\(^{16}\) Mitchell, “Going Pop For the Flock,” 51.  
\(^{17}\) Merritt, A Strategy for Planting a Regional Church in San Francisco’s East Bay Area, 141.
worship God and grow in their faith. This venue gave believers the opportunity to experience extended times of worship, participate in life-sharing and prayer, and hear expositional Bible preaching. In addition, growth groups were established to give believers an opportunity to meet together for times of sharing, accountability, encouragement, and spiritual growth. At the time, the leadership team felt it was essential that all believers participate in a growth group so that they could develop a more intimate connection with the Body of Christ and be encouraged in the continual challenge of living the Christian life.\textsuperscript{18}

Adult ministry revolved around the Sunday morning venue, Winds of Change service, and growth groups. The senior leaders believed that the combination of these three mediums would help individuals become fully devoted followers of Christ. Consequently, the makeup of CrossWinds staff reflected the priorities of its mission statement. As senior pastor, Merritt was tasked primarily with delivering relevant, evangelistic preaching on Sunday mornings. He was joined by a full-time ministry team including a music director, worship pastor, drama director, and Sunday morning program director—all of whom were responsible for creating seeker-sensitive Sunday morning services. In order to fulfill its mission of discipleship, a separate full-time teaching pastor was designated to provide deep Bible teaching at the Winds of Change service as well as encourage mature believers toward ongoing spiritual growth. In addition, the church employed a full-time small groups pastor to develop leaders and ensure that CrossWinds participants were assimilating into small groups where they could experience spiritual growth in community.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 92.
Additional ministries also were added to support the congregation. CrossWinds developed both a Children’s Ministry Department and Student Ministries Department, each run by its own pastor. Both departments utilized the same seeker-sensitive model to minister to the children and students of the parents who were attending the Sunday morning services. Also, since the church maintained an atmosphere that was non-threatening, relaxed, and welcoming of all individuals, it attracted many people in various stages of recovery from addiction. In response to this, senior leaders launched a recovery ministry that focused on providing support groups for individuals who were working through addiction issues or who were recovering from divorce. The recovery ministry was led by a team of trained Christian counselors who specialized in these areas.

In addition to the various ministries that worked to support the Sunday morning venue, an organizational structure was established to govern the direction of CrossWinds. In order to secure a balance of power at the senior leadership level, an executive pastor also was put in place to manage the staff as well as work with the senior pastor in making executive decisions regarding the present and future direction of the church. Through prayer and discernment, the two pastors labored together to determine how the mission of the church would be lived out both presently and in the future. An elder board also was instituted to help with the oversight and direction of the church. The elder board houses a mix of men and women who are elected by the senior pastor and executive pastor. There are anywhere from six to eight members on the board at any time.

The elders serve as a sounding board for the suggestions and decisions that are made by the senior and executive pastors. They provide spiritual guidance and feedback
on proposed decisions and provide prayer support for both pastors. The elder board was and is not a decision-making body at CrossWinds. The group’s function is merely a support role. Final authority regarding decisions and the direction of the church rests solely with the executive and senior pastors. These are the structures and ministries that served as the basis of CrossWinds Church for its first fifteen years. Each ministry and governing body supplemented the evangelistic efforts of the Sunday morning service that were led by Merritt. Emphasis remained on evangelism.

Under this structure, CrossWinds’ attendance grew to eighteen hundred people in its first fifteen years.\(^1\) Since attendance hovered around this number during this time span, and individuals were being baptized on a regular basis, it was perceived that the seeker-sensitive model along with CrossWinds’ supplemental ministries were meeting the mission statement of developing fully devoted followers of Christ.

However, a concentration on numbers does not equate to spiritual growth. In this regard, CrossWinds fell victim to a trend experienced by many churches that have Baptist leanings. Baptist ecclesiologist R. Stanton Norman understands this and explains, “Baptists in particular are immersed in a culture that measures ministerial and ecclesiastical success numerically.”\(^2\) Primacy is placed on preaching and teaching to the point of conversion. Conversions and baptisms then are counted in order to measure the success of the church and denomination, with little regard to how one grows spiritually after that event. This statistical growth has replaced biblical fidelity as the standard for ministerial excellence.

\(^1\) Mitchell, “Going Pop For the Flock,” 51.

The emphasis on a regenerate church membership sometimes may be sacrificed in order to “grow the church” or to “have a big church.” In this regard, church growth typically is defined in terms of multiplication to the exclusion of maturation.21

While evangelism through the Sunday morning service was accomplishing the task of introducing people to Christ, it was not reaching the deeper spiritual growth needs of more mature followers in the congregation. In other words, Merritt’s original notion that evangelism and discipleship should go hand in hand was not actually being lived out in the body life of the church. Intentional discipleship platforms were not being established to take a person from seeker to new believer to fully devoted follower of Christ. Fully devoted followers of Christ were seen as those who were faithful in Sunday morning attendance, financial giving, attendance at Winds of Change, and involvement in small groups. Attendance numbers seemed to indicate success, but attention was not given to helping individuals personally cultivate their inner relationships with God. In addition, the staff was not mentored or discipled by senior leadership. They were merely managed to the end of getting their job done and being productive toward bringing new people into the church. Discipleship was not held as a value but was given a backseat to all evangelistic efforts. This discipleship gap led to a history of tension among leaders and discouragement for the congregation.

A History of Fallout

The lack of emphasis in discipleship has created a history of tension for CrossWinds Church. Since its inception, there has been a rocky relationship between the leadership and the congregation. The lack of intentional discipleship platforms has led to a lack of personal connection, resulting in a history of tension and discouragement.
senior pastor and teaching pastor. During its first fifteen years, the church cycled through
two different teaching pastors.\textsuperscript{22} The primary reason for the tumultuous relationships
centered upon Merritt’s priority of evangelism over discipleship. For Merritt, Sunday
morning is the most important ministry of the church.\textsuperscript{23} For most of its history,
discipleship platforms have been given a second-class status to the push for an excellent
Sunday morning program. Even though he has stated explicitly that there should not be a
distinct line between the act of evangelism and the process of discipleship, there is a
difference in how the two platforms of Sunday morning and discipleship efforts are
resourced and emphasized within the Body of Christ.

Regardless of the stated intent to foster discipleship, the Sunday morning program
received most of the staff resources and financial backing. In addition, stated goals
regarding discipleship often became sidetracked in order to keep up with whatever Sunday
morning trends seemed to be reaching the hearts of seekers. This was to the detriment and
discouragement of the mature believers who called CrossWinds their church home as well
as to both teaching pastors.\textsuperscript{24} Mature believers have expressed their discouragement at
CrossWinds, when they claim the church does not offer enough depth of teaching and that
it does not offer enough by way of discipleship platforms. As a result, CrossWinds

\textsuperscript{22} Carole Taylor, CrossWinds church historian, interview by author, Dublin, CA, March 8, 2011.

\textsuperscript{23} John Merritt, interview by author, Dublin, CA, May 2008.

\textsuperscript{24} CrossWinds teaching pastors, interviews by author, Dublin, CA, Fall 2004.
continually has had a history of people leaving. Those who abandon the church state that they were not fed spiritually and that CrossWinds preached a watered-down gospel.\(^{25}\)

During both of their tenures, the teaching pastors were aware of the loss that this lack produced and worked to bring spiritual growth platforms to the church. For this reason, the Winds of Change service was one of the platforms they both championed. Under their two separate leadership terms, the Winds of Change congregation grew to over four hundred people.\(^{26}\) Those who attended the weekly Winds of Change service felt like it was the primary place that they were being given in-depth Bible teaching as well as a central spot for being encouraged and challenged to grow in their relationship with God.\(^{27}\) However, both teaching pastors felt they had to fight for the approval to keep resourcing and growing the Wednesday night congregation. Their pleading met with resistance from the senior pastor, who felt like a thriving Wednesday night growth venue would compete with the Sunday morning evangelism effort.\(^{28}\)

The constant resistance to their desires to help the church grow spiritually left both teaching pastors discouraged and in need of recourse. Both teaching pastors followed an identical path. Each of them, at two separate times during their individual tenures, addressed the board of elders to request that Merritt be removed as senior pastor. Both teaching pastors cited that Merritt’s evangelistic agendas could not keep taking precedence

\(^{25}\) I have talked to several families who have left over the years. Time and time again, the response has been the same, as noted above. This unfortunate trend is so frequent and widespread it almost could be considered “common knowledge.”

\(^{26}\) Taylor, interview by author.

\(^{27}\) Winds of Change congregants, interviews by author, Dublin, CA, 2005.

\(^{28}\) CrossWinds teaching pastors, interviews; Merritt, interview.
over the other ministries of the church and that growth efforts needed equal time, press, and resources if the church was going to grow healthy disciples and not just produce converts. In the end, the elder board chose to keep Merritt as the senior pastor. As a result, both teaching pastors eventually left the church.

After the departure of each pastor the Winds of Change gathering at CrossWinds, which was made up primarily of mature believers, struggled. This was a group of individuals who had been awakened to what it meant to have an in-depth relationship with Christ. Many of them were involved in teaching Bible studies and leading small groups. Since both teaching pastors were passionate about discipleship and frequently taught on its value, many people in the Winds of Change congregation were actively involved in discipling other people. Without someone to champion these values, the Winds of Change congregation was left without a spiritual leader.

After each departure, many families left the church. This caused a decline in membership. By December 2005, attendance dropped to approximately one thousand adults. In response to this, Merritt and the elder board concluded that since the Winds of Change service caused so many problems, and because it had been a drain of resources, the service was to be canceled. As a result, attention was given to more departmental alignment around making Sunday morning more successful so that the attendance that was lost could be regained. In order to help with departmental alignment as well as assist all ministries to recover from its recent fallout, a new executive pastor was hired to lead the church from its downward tailspin and into a new era of ministry.

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29 Kim Kennedy, *CrossWinds Church Weekly Report* (Dublin, CA: December 2005). The number is an average of adults in attendance at all four Sunday morning services during that month.
Newly Revised Mission Statement and Its Platforms for Impact

One of the ways that CrossWinds sought to revitalize itself after this fallout was to adopt a new mission statement. In June 2006, the new executive pastor, senior pastor, staff team, and board of elders went on a prayer retreat to consider what the new mission statement for CrossWinds might be. The group spent three days praying and dialoguing about what kind of church they thought God was calling CrossWinds to be for the present and the future. In the end, the senior leaders, staff, and elders sought a mission statement that revolved around knowing, loving, and reflecting Jesus. As of this date, the new mission of CrossWinds Church is to “know, love and reflect Jesus in our communities and world.”

One of the main reasons for focusing on Christ in the mission statement, instead of on seekers, was due to the perceived image that CrossWinds had become merely a seeker church; that perception gave CrossWinds the image of being shallow. Again, it was accused of “watering down the gospel” in order to present a relevant message to those who were unfamiliar with church or who did not have a church background. Moreover, those who formed the statement believed everyone could be called a seeker of some sort, whether they were a fully devoted follower of Christ or someone actively seeking to discover the reality of Christ.

The new executive pastor, who was hired for the purpose of aligning the staff toward making the mission a reality, gave the staff pastors a mandate that they were to work together to arrange ministry in such a way that would make the mission happen. In his mind, the primary way people would know, love, and reflect Jesus was through small groups. These small groups would make their impact through something called “free

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30 Mitchell, “Going Pop For the Flock,” 52.
“Free market” small group ministry. Free market ministry is a way of organizing and doing small groups based on affinity. Affinity has to do with people sharing common characteristics such as age, life experience, life goals, personality type, and areas of need.\(^{31}\)

The idea behind this kind of small group arrangement is that people naturally gravitate to others who are like them. If people feel comfortable forming relationships with like-minded individuals, then these groups can be platforms where discipleship can happen. This only can happen in the context of genuine relationships where people are intentional about becoming people of God.\(^{32}\) In other words, as long as people were intentional about discovering what it meant to be disciples of Christ and live accordingly, affinity groups could be an effective way of organizing ministry and promoting spiritual growth. For CrossWinds, this was to be the primary platform for spiritual impact and growth among the adult congregation.

The free market side of the small group ministry refers to the kinds of ministry groups that are formed and how many of them are offered at any given time. In a free market arrangement, the church government sets up systems so that people can establish whatever ministry in which they think others might be interested.\(^{33}\) In order to make this type of free market ministry flourish in any given church setting, an organization has to find a way to transition from being permission-withholding to being permission-granting. A permission-granting organization is one whose default answer is “Yes.” The role of


\(^{32}\) Ibid., 63.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 83.
management is to find a way to facilitate the entrepreneur’s will. This empowers people to live out their God-given ministry callings. In essence, leaders empowered to carry out their ministries within the parameters of a healthy and stable local church are the church’s ministry.

This way of organizing and doing ministry made perfect sense given CrossWinds new mission statement. Within this structure, each CrossWinds member could live out his or her ministry calling. People living out their respective calling would be a grand display of the church to know, love, and reflect Jesus in the community and world. In order to make the free market model work, CrossWinds became a permission-granting organization. All of adult ministry was encompassed in these free market small groups and placed under a large umbrella called “Community Life.”

The Community Life ministry was overseen by five staff pastors, each one responsible for supervising a select number of groups. Under these pastors anywhere from twenty to forty small groups existed at one time. Special events and community projects also were included under the Community Life label. Groups ranged anywhere from Bible study groups to backpacking groups to women’s fitness groups. Special events and projects included such things as Family Fall Festivals, Operation Christmas Child, and Operation Cranberry Sauce. Whatever a leader felt called to do, the Community Life pastors made an effort to resource the leader and promote the group, event, or project.

Basic parameters for leaders also were established. In an effort to keep things simple, leadership requirements were kept to a minimum. All leaders had to fill out an

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34 Ibid., 89.

35 Ibid., 90.
application and a statement of faith describing their walk with God. In addition, each leader pledged that at each group, event, or project meeting, there would be prayer and at least one Scripture reading. Monthly trainings were held for leaders in order to encourage and resource them in areas such as small group facilitation and personal spiritual growth practices. When CrossWinds launched the new mission statement and Community Life ministry in the fall of 2006, success seemed to be apparent. Over eighty leaders applied to lead free market small groups. While not all of them started groups right away, approximately fifty leaders launched free market groups that fall. CrossWinds appeared to be on its way to successfully living out its new mission.

**Living Out the Mission: Strengths and Weaknesses**

The Community Life ministry at CrossWinds launched with success and still continues to this day. At the outset, it appeared to bring stability and fresh enthusiasm to a church that still was recovering from the two previous leadership schisms. The strengths of the ministry model appeared to be ample. The free market emphasis did empower people to experiment with their ministry callings by leading groups, events, and projects about which they were passionate. Since groups only lasted six to ten weeks, it gave leaders and participants alike the opportunity to try different experiences to see if the group, event, or project was a good fit. If it was not, both leader and participant could try something else as soon as the group, event, or project was over. Due to this structure, groups were easy to

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36 I processed all of the applications myself. This number was not recorded in any database. I have hard copies of the applications collected June through September 2006. The name of the application was the “Community Life Leader Application.”

attend and try out, which yielded varied entry points for people who were seeking community or who were curious about small groups but did not want to make a long-term commitment to any one gathering. New local and global initiatives sprang up every week, as people followed their passions by taking on service projects of every description. People with many kinds of unique needs in the community were being served.\textsuperscript{38}

The weaknesses of the Community Life model were found in its lack of platforms to embody the first two tenets of the mission statement, which are to know and love Jesus. In essence, the model lacked adequate discipleship platforms for spiritual growth and formation. The heart of spiritual formation can be defined as “an increasing love for God and for other people . . . based on Jesus’ description of the two greatest commandments: ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ (Matthew 22:37-39).”\textsuperscript{39} Part of loving God and neighbor is engaging in discipleship, both by being a student and follower of Christ and by walking alongside and instructing others so they can do the same.

Discipleship only can happen in the context of genuine relationships where people are intentional about becoming the people of God.\textsuperscript{40} While many CrossWinds leaders filled out the leader application and gave testimony of their relationships with God, it never was determined if they were currently intentional about actually becoming the people of God or


\textsuperscript{39} Hawkins and Parkinson, \textit{REVEAL}, 29.

\textsuperscript{40} Haggard, \textit{Dog Training, Fly Fishing, and Sharing Christ}, 63.
even if they knew how to do so. Moreover, many leaders could not articulate what it meant to be the people of God, let alone engage in a discipling relationship with those in their groups. It appeared that leaders did not know how to disciple, mostly in part because they had not been discipled by other leaders and church staff. These kinds of discipling relationships are precisely what postmoderns hunger for and seek.41

There is no doubt that the need for church-based discipleship structures exists in the postmodern world. The majority of faith-professing believers and even leaders at CrossWinds today are immature in their faith and are in need of shepherding. Postmoderns, above all, value authenticity and relationships. As a church-growth expert, Gibbs notes that “postmoderns, above everything else want to experience authenticity . . . credible communication requires honesty, humility, deep respect for the individual as a person of intrinsic worth.”42 Most individuals desire a mentor to help them in their spiritual growth. Such mentors are someone who has gone down the road before them, who has stories and wisdom to share, and who is looking for the same thing: a way to understand and integrate personal faith with everyday life.43 However, this is the kind of mentoring that the lay leaders of CrossWinds could not provide, because they simply had not been mentored themselves.

41 Gibbs, LeadershipNext, 60

42 Ibid.

Dallas Willard observes, “So far as the visible Christian institutions of our day are concerned, discipleship clearly is optional.”\textsuperscript{44} The Community Life model reflected this sentiment. There were various opportunities for leaders to be trained and discipled through classes. There were small groups that offered Bible study as well as instruction in spiritual disciplines. However, Community Life as a whole reflected a free-for-all agenda, where everyone and everything received equal press in the free market economy. There was no basic first-step opportunity or curriculum for the seeker. There was no well-trod path, spiritual marker, or relational benchmark to illuminate the process. Furthermore, there was no clear spiritual pathway for Christ followers who were looking to grow in their relationship with Christ. Even though activity both inside and outside the church walls reflected the desire of CrossWinds congregants to be the hands and feet of Christ, there was growing frustration over the lack of spiritual direction and formational opportunities afforded by the Community Life ministry model. This frustration and discontent were discovered in 2007, when CrossWinds participated in the Willow Creek Association REVEAL survey.

\textbf{Current Status of Spiritual Formation: Results of the REVEAL Survey}

Willow Creek’s REVEAL survey started in 2004 with the church doing a survey of its own congregation. The survey sought to answer two key questions regarding their congregations: “Are my people really growing spiritually?” and “What actions should I

help them take to grow?" The initial results provided exceptional insights into
dividuals’ spiritual growth and development. Consequently, Willow decided to open
the door to other churches of all shapes and sizes to work together to help people grow in
their love of God and others. In total, the REVEAL survey was taken by 280,000
congregants in more than 1,200 churches nationwide.

One of the more compelling discoveries that came from the national REVEAL
study was the emergence of a spiritual growth continuum. The continuum divided people
into four distinct spiritual growth categories. The four categories are represented in Table 2.
The spiritual growth continuum centers not on church activities but rather on how far or
how close people feel to Jesus Christ. This continuum came as a surprise to REVEAL
researchers, because it was not part of their preliminary hypothesis about what drives
spiritual growth.

Table 2. REVEAL Study Spiritual Growth Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploring Christianity</th>
<th>Growing in Christ</th>
<th>Close to Christ</th>
<th>Christ-Centered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“I believe in God, but I’m not sure about Christ. My faith is not a significant part of my life.”</td>
<td>“I believe in Jesus, and I’m working on what it means to get to know him.”</td>
<td>“I feel really close to Christ and depend on him daily for guidance.”</td>
<td>“God is all I need in my life. He is enough. Everything I do is a reflection of Christ.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The prediction made by Willow Creek at the outset of the project was that increased
church involvement and service opportunities would provide ample chance for spiritual
growth. The results of the survey proved the opposite. The REVEAL team discovered that

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45 Ibid.


47 Ibid.

48 Hawkins and Parkinson, REVEAL, 36.
higher levels of church activity did not predict increasing love for God or increasing love for other people. In other words, involvement in church activities did not predict or drive long-term spiritual growth. Instead, they concluded that there are four categories of catalysts that drive spiritual growth along the continuum. A catalyst is “something that makes change happen.” The first catalyst is core Christian beliefs. Core beliefs ground those who are exploring Christianity, helping them move toward growing in Christ. The second catalyst is organized church activities—such as the Sunday morning service, small groups, and adult education classes. The second catalyst helps those who are growing in Christ move close to Christ. The third catalyst encompasses personal spiritual practices. These move people who are close to Christ toward being Christ-centered. Finally, spiritual activities like discipling others and sharing one’s faith keep those who are Christ-centered growing in their spiritual development. All four catalysts need to be present in a church that hopes to reach individuals in every stage of the continuum.

The REVEAL survey was telling for CrossWinds’ leadership. A total of 255 people completed the survey, which is 17 percent of its weekend attendance. While this number does not reflect a large percentage of the CrossWinds population, it does represent a large number of those who have attended CrossWinds for over five years. Roughly 35 percent of those who completed the survey had attended CrossWinds for over five years.

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49 Ibid., 35.
50 Ibid., 28.
51 Ibid., 27.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 28.
54 Ibid.
55 CrossWinds Church, *REVEAL Survey Results*, 1.
percent have been at CrossWinds one to five years, 24 percent have been at the church six
to ten years, and 38 percent have been in attendance more than ten years.\(^56\) In other words,
these were not people who filled out the survey impulsively. They are people who call
CrossWinds their church home and who have made a commitment to the church.

Within the above CrossWinds survey group, 9 percent were exploring
Christianity, 37 percent were growing in Christ, 27 percent were close to Christ, and 27
percent were found to be Christ-centered.\(^57\) This indicates that the majority of people
surveyed had some kind of relationship with Christ and were seeking to grow in that
relationship. One of the most revealing aspects of the survey was that the church did not
challenge the queried population to grow spiritually. Across all four segments of the
spiritual growth continuum, the top need was for the church to provide next-step
opportunities for spiritual growth.\(^58\) Since the church was not providing enough in the
way of spiritual growth opportunities for each group, 23 percent of people felt like they
were stalled spiritually and perceived the church as letting them down.\(^59\) Of those who
were dissatisfied, 52 percent were considering leaving the church.\(^60\)

These sentiments among the more mature believers at CrossWinds make sense
given the leadership’s tendency to cater to seekers. The church and church activity are
important in early stages for those who are exploring and growing. However, the REVEAL

\(^{56}\) Ibid., 6.
\(^{57}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{58}\) Ibid., 18.
\(^{59}\) Ibid., 31.
\(^{60}\) Ibid., 39.
survey found that the main activities of the church (weekend services and activities) decline in importance as people grow more spiritually mature. As people blossom in their faith, the strong and central role of the church as it pertains to spiritual growth seems to shift to something more secondary as people advance along the spiritual growth continuum.

Instead of church activity, the survey found that personal spiritual practices (prayer, journaling, solitude, Scripture study) among those who are mature in their faith are what drive their growth. However, just because the church plays less of a central role in their spiritual growth does not mean that those who are dissatisfied do not want the church to help at all. They still want the church to help keep them on track and light the way ahead of where they currently are spiritually. According to the suggestions given by Cally Parkinson, one of the directors of the REVEAL study, “a tool like a personal spiritual growth plan might address some of those needs. But people also seem to want a personal growth coach or spiritual mentor. That may be what truly ‘keeps them on track’ and from walking out the back door.”

Given the level of dissatisfaction among CrossWinds congregants, it is evident that something needs to be done to address the lack of discipleship and spiritual formation platforms within the church. Some of the changes that are taking place within CrossWinds’ leadership structure are providing the opportunity for positive change to take place. New opportunities for a future discipleship strategy are on the horizon.

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61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., 43.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 53.
New Opportunities for a Future Discipleship Strategy

Currently, CrossWinds is a church in transition. After twenty-three years as senior pastor of CrossWinds Church, Merritt is looking to retire. In order to prepare and plan for his eventual retirement, a new associate teaching pastor was hired in 2008 to share the burden of Merritt’s teaching responsibility. Pastor Chris Coli is a young, dynamic teacher who was raised in ministry at Willow Creek. While Coli has served in several different churches, his longest tenure was at Central Christian Church in Las Vegas, Nevada. Central is similar to CrossWinds in that it caters to unchurched people who are seeking God. Since the two pastors are so like-minded in their desire to reach the lost, their working relationship has been peaceful and collaborative. While they share an equal amount of teaching responsibility on Sunday mornings, most leadership of staff and ministry have been passed on to Coli. In November 2010, Merritt and the elder board decided to let go of the executive pastor who helped usher in the Community Life model of ministry and give all executive leadership to Coli. He currently resides over the elder board and board of directors as well as oversees the staff pastors and their various ministries.

While Coli is passionate about evangelizing the lost, he is equally passionate about spiritual growth and believes that the two must go hand in hand in order for people to truly know, love, and reflect Jesus in their communities and world.65 As a result, one of the gaping holes that Coli currently is addressing is CrossWinds’ lack of spiritual formation platforms. While he recognizes that Community Life groups are effective places for people to connect and serve together, he recognizes that there must be additional resources that empower people to grow spiritually. In response to this, Coli initiated the launch of

65 Chris Coli, interview by author, Dublin, CA, January-June 2011.
CrossWinds’ first Spiritual Formation Department on January 1, 2011. The spiritual formation ministry is not based on small groups; rather, it is designed to resource CrossWinds congregants on an individual level, based on where they are in their spiritual journey. The overarching goal of the department is to help people grow in their love for God and others by experiencing inner transformation toward Christ-likeness. It is within this department that a new opportunity to design a future discipleship strategy exists.

The launch of the new Spiritual Formation Department also brought with it a new spiritual formation pastor, which is my new role at CrossWinds as of January 1, 2011. I have been at CrossWinds for over twenty years, and it is how I have witnessed so much of its history firsthand. During the first ten years, I was a congregant who attended during my college and seminary years. When I graduated from seminary, I planted myself at CrossWinds and began serving in women’s ministry, specializing in leadership training and discipleship. After three years of volunteering, I was hired officially as a staff pastor. I have served in various pastoral capacities over the past seven years, first as one of the women’s ministry pastors and later as the pastor of discipleship for an emerging young adult congregation. After that congregation was disbanded, I was made one of several adult education pastors responsible for leadership training and development. Now I am the pastor of spiritual formation. This always has been my passion and my calling; and for the first time since I was officially hired at CrossWinds, I will be able to live out both through my leadership. The strategy contained within this project is one way in which this is happening.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will present a brief literature review that will mine key insights about discipleship using past and present resources as a guide. Three primary insights will be discussed as they pertain to discipleship. The first will focus on the need for local churches to serve as guides and coaches for individuals who are seeking to grow spiritually. The next section will demonstrate that one of the ways the Church can serve as coach is to be diligent in presenting key foundational teachings that are essential to understanding a relationship with Christ as well as what it means to live as a Christ follower. The final section further expounds on how the Church can provide direction for individuals by offering customization and flexibility within discipleship methods.

The Need for the Church to Serve as Coach: *Follow Me: What’s Next for You?* by Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson

One resource that encourages churches to be proactive in providing guidance and structure for those who seek to grow spiritually is *Follow Me, What’s Next for You?* by Greg L. Hawkins and Parkinson. *Follow Me* is an in-depth, analytical look at the REVEAL survey research that was conducted by the Willow Creek association in 2007.
By surveying 157,000 congregants in over five hundred churches, REVEAL identified a spiritual continuum comprised of four segments of people at different stages of spiritual development: Exploring Christ, Growing in Christ, Close to Christ, and Christ-Centered. REVEAL’s value is found in its insights about what creates movement along that spiritual growth pathway.¹ Follow Me expands on these findings about the four segments in the spiritual continuum by describing the spiritual catalysts that are the most influential in moving people from one stage to another. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, these four catalysts are as follows: core Christian beliefs, which ground those who are exploring Christianity and help them move toward growth in Christ;² organized church activities such as the Sunday morning service, small groups, and adult education classes, which help those who are growing in Christ move close to Christ;³ personal spiritual practices, which move those who are close to Christ toward being Christ-centered;⁴ and finally, spiritual activities such as discipling others and sharing one’s faith, which keep those who are Christ-centered growing in their spiritual development.⁵ All four catalysts need to be present in a church that hopes to reach individuals in each stage of the continuum.

Regarding how churches in general are providing the necessary catalysts for growth, research uncovered that there are some serious problems with respect to how

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² Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, Follow Me: What’s Next for You? (Barrington, IL: The Willow Creek Association, 2008), 27.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 28.

⁵ Ibid.
churches facilitate spiritual growth along the continuum. The research revealed that more than one in five (22 percent) of those surveyed (eighty thousand people) describe their current spiritual growth as “stalled.” Moreover, 17 percent are dissatisfied with their church. The answer to why congregants were dissatisfied with their church was overwhelmingly that they were dissatisfied with “how the church helps me grow spiritually.” The astonishingly honest answers of those who were surveyed revealed that the church is an obstacle and not an aid to the spiritual development of many individuals. In light of these discoveries, this question then was asked of those surveyed: “What’s the most important thing you want from your church?” Here was one of the top answers: "Challenge me to grow and take the next step in my spiritual life."

In response to this, the writers of *Follow Me* suggest that one of the key ways that churches can keep people moving along the spiritual growth continuum is to act as a coach and mentor by helping them discern “tension gaps.” A tension gap is that space between where the reality of a person’s relationship with God actually is and where the individual desires to be with God. When the tension is felt between reality and the desired reality, it must be released. People either can lower their aspirations about where they want to be or create plans and strategies that move them closer to where they hunger to be. In essence, churches need to become something like “spiritual trainers or coaches

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6 Ibid., 85.
7 Ibid., 93.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 12.
10 Ibid., 14.
who help people process the two questions that can close their gap: “Where am I now? And, Where do I want to be?”\textsuperscript{11} Once the church helps an individual discern the gaps, it then can provide some kind of structure that guides believers through specific steps to help them close these gaps in their spiritual growth.

In light of the above insights, it appears that in order for churches to serve as coach or mentor to individuals who desire to grow spiritually, congregational leaders need to provide some sort of structure or process that not only helps people discern where they are spiritually but also offers the four key catalytic platforms for people to move from their current place on the continuum to the next level of growth. Consequently, a discipleship model must include key foundational teaching on core Christians beliefs, organized church activities including adult education classes that help people experience God on a deeper level, insight and information on spiritual practices and disciplines that provide a depth of experience for the believer, and opportunities to disciple others and be discipled as well. A discipleship design that includes these platforms would be able to cater to each type of person on the spiritual growth continuum and help catapult them to the next level of growth. Since this source addressed the specific problems within the Willow Creek seeker-style church, and CrossWinds adheres to this model, the source directly applies to CrossWinds’ present ministry challenge and presents no limitations toward application.

\textbf{The Need for Key Foundational Teaching}

As reported above, one way churches can serve as a guide to growing Christians is by offering key teachings that are foundational to the Christian faith. Traditionally, this

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 17.
has taken the form of catechism or catechesis. Catechesis derives from a New Testament word for teaching—the Greek verb *katecheo*. The primary definitions of this term are “to share a communication that one receives” and “to teach, instruct.” In effect, catechism can be understood as the process by which believers are grounded in the key foundational truths and rudiments of Christianity.

Two resources will be explored in this section, as they advocate for churches to help Christians mature by supplying foundational truths to them in the form of instruction. The first one is *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* by Alan Kreider. The second is *The Great Omission* by Willard. Kreider’s source supports the idea of the catechetical process as a means by which people are transformed. Willard’s source endorses the teaching of core tenets but also expounds upon what truths should be covered within the teaching discipline.

*The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*  
by Alan Kreider

In *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*, Kreider examines four centuries of Christendom as a means of discovering effective methods for producing genuine converts to Jesus Christ. Through his analysis, he uncovers that throughout the first four centuries of history, conversion to Christianity was imposed and even forced upon societies for a myriad of political, social, and economic reasons. As history has

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13 Ibid., 22.

14 Ibid.
marched forward, his discovery and analysis of current Western culture is that “no man is now Christian because of government compulsion, or because it is the way to procure favor at court, or because it is necessary to qualify for public office, or because opinion demands conformity, or because he would lose customers if he did not go to church.”

In other words, the compulsions that caused people to convert to Christianity in its first four centuries are no longer present in Western culture.

This insight is pivotal to understanding what strategies might be helpful in fostering current discipleship practices. Kreider suggests that Christianity’s past has much to teach today’s Church about how to proceed in the future. He states that “the earliest centuries can open us to some relevant clues for Christian mission in modern culture.”

Kreider then looks back to the earliest Christian converts to glean insight on what caused effective conversion before it became forced and compulsory. He notes that these earliest practices hold clues, because even during times of imposed conversion these practices were a mainstay in fostering spiritual growth.

One of the “relevant old ideas for Christianity’s future” is the “formative power of the catechetical process.” The catechetical process involves catechists, or learners, who are being introduced to the core truths of the Christian faith. As a person took time to

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16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 91.

18 Ibid., 103.

19 Ibid., 104.
learn about the foundational truths, there was a “commitment of sponsors” or mentors who helped the individual align behavior with the church’s understanding of truth.\(^{20}\)

Through this kind of catechetical process, right teaching led to right belief which led to transformed behavior. This consistent alignment of behavior was seen as a precursor to the act of baptism.

Early Christians did not focus primarily on experience and feeling as a means of conversion.\(^{21}\) The significance of the catechetical process was that it did not produce converts based on emotion but produced converts who were well informed about what it meant to be a Christian and what Christ required of individuals who followed Him. As a result of this knowledge, individuals were able to experience life-encompassing transformation and not just emotional transformation.\(^{22}\) Their experience of Christ encompassed both the head and the heart, making discipleship a more holistic endeavor.

Kreider’s source contributes significantly to the idea of reinstating some sort of catechetical process as a helpful building block for creating a current discipleship model, especially within a seeker-sensitive church. It might not be necessary to establish rigid rules and regulations as to how much information should be absorbed pre-baptism, as that would not be seeker-friendly. However, for a seeker church that is replete with individuals who have only a basic understanding of Christianity, core truths and content regarding who Christ is and what it means to be a disciple should be accessible to those seeking what it means to have a relationship with Christ. This is particularly important,

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 105.
because it brings awareness to them regarding what kind of commitment they are making when they accept Jesus as Lord and Savior. The assistance of a mentor or a discipler can also be vital in helping an individual understand and live out what it means to be a Christ follower in the postmodern world. This kind of catechism is not something to be reserved for seekers and new believers. Many who already consider themselves Christ followers are hungry—famished, really—for a rudimentary knowledge of the faith, because they never have been taught Christian beliefs in a serious way.  

_The Great Omission_ by Dallas Willard

Helping individuals understand and embody what it means to be a Christ follower is an essential aspect that is missing from many discipleship practices in the West. This is Willard’s key message in _The Great Omission_. In his book, Willard states that in the Western world “we have, in essence, lost what it means to be a disciple.” He goes on to explain and offers a helpful definition for the concept of “disciple”:

> Who, among Christians today, is a disciple of Jesus, in any substantive sense of the word, “disciple?” A disciple is a learner, a student, an apprentice—a practitioner, even if only a beginner. . . . It is also someone who does not just profess certain views as their own but applies their growing understanding of the Kingdom of the Heavens to every aspect of their life on earth.

It would seem, then, that the primary understanding today among professing Christians is that one can be a Christian but never become a disciple in the true sense of the word. This is due largely in part because core truths are not presented, understood, and applied to the

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23 Ibid., 22.

24 Willard, _The Great Omission_, xi.

25 Ibid.
life of the believer. People must first understand what it means to be a disciple if they are going to commit their lives to being one.

Willard concurs with Kreider’s argument that there should be core teachings; however, in *The Great Omission* he goes one step further and expounds upon what the content of the foundational teachings should be if individuals are to understand true discipleship. This work is a collection of published articles on discipleship, spiritual disciplines, and spiritual growth and formation. In it he explains that among Christ followers in the West, there is great disparity between the hope for life expressed in Jesus—found real in the Bible and in many shining examples from among his followers—and the actual day-to-day behavior, inner life, and social presence of most of His followers. In other words, Christ followers tend to be disappointed and discouraged because their experience of Christ does not match up with the hopeful, effective lives found in the pages of Scripture. This great disparity is caused because many individuals consider themselves to be Christians but never become a disciple in the true sense of the word. For this reason, Willard’s stated thesis is that the “great omission” from the Great Commission is not obedience to Christ but discipleship to Him. Without discipleship to Jesus, the great disparity of ineffective Christian lives will continue.

Several chapters in the book present possibilities for renewing growth in professing Christians who are stagnant in their spiritual growth. One of the most helpful

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26 Ibid., x.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 7.
ways that is proposed is found in his third chapter, entitled “Who is Your Teacher?” This chapter discusses the kinds of key foundational truths that can bring about transformation in the life of a believer. Like Kreider, Willard asserts that truth must be presented and understood. If a disciple is someone who applies a “growing understanding of God to everyday life,” then foundational teachings about Jesus must be provided.29

According to Willard, the kind of transformational information or content that must be imparted comes in three waves. First, one must learn from Jesus reliable information about “who we are, why we are here, and what the humanly appropriate motives are for doing whatever we do.”30 In addition, it also must be explained that, while individuals have fallen from God’s intentions for them, Jesus can resort people into the “flow of God’s life” and that they can recover the kind of life God has for them.31 The way this happens is through spiritual transformation. Thus, in the second wave of information, one must learn that it is possible to be transformed and be given a new internal character—essentially, the new “possible” nature of what a person can be under the direction of Christ.32 This happens as Jesus invites the disciple into spiritual disciplines such as solitude, silence, study, service, and worship. These disciplines, and others like them, are spiritual practices that gradually help individuals recognize their sinfulness or old nature. Through practice of the disciplines, Christ replaces the old nature with new “in-formation” about how to rightly align life with the purposes of

29 Ibid., xi.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 21.
32 Ibid.
Finally, as people grow in this new information, it brings an awareness of God’s interaction with disciples in everyday life which leads to God’s activity flowing through the disciple. The result is a progressively transformed life that glorifies God.

Willard’s sentiments on how to bring about transformation in the life of a disciple echo those of Krieder in that any new discipleship strategy must engage in some sort of catechetical process. Inherent in the catechetical process is the act of teaching. Therefore, a classroom setting where individuals are taught by a teacher and then are encouraged to share what they learn is ideal for this process. Having a mentor or coach present with the student during this journey helps the student process, articulate, and apply learned truths to everyday life.

Additional deeper teachings should include classes and exercises on spiritual disciplines, as Willard suggests (second wave of information). Along with the Spirit of God working to bring an awareness of God’s interaction with the disciple (third wave of information), guidance and relational interaction with a mentor also can help bring about this information. Seasoned mentors might be able to point out areas where individuals have grown and help identify where they see the disciple working in conjunction with God in the application of biblical truth to everyday life. Information as presented in the above three movements, taught by learned instructors, would be an effective means of instituting a kind of catechetical process for individuals seeking not only to understand what it means to be a disciple but to live it out on a daily basis and thus grow in their faith.

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33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., 22.
While this information is valuable and simple, the resource itself does not suggest practical steps in how to accomplish the task of imparting information within a church context. At the end of the book, the challenge is put forth specifically to readers as individuals to make sure they step into this discipleship challenge on a personal level. With regard to the church, he states that it is not the reader’s job to “straighten out the church” and if we “undertake on our own to straighten out the church and the world, we will hurt a lot of people and make ourselves miserable. It is God’s job and He will do it, and in the way it should be done.” Willard is correct in his sentiments; however, some pointers on what and how to impart information in a church-wide context regarding these discipleship truths would be beneficial.

The Need for Customization and Flexibility within Discipleship Models

While instating some kind of standard catechetical process is necessary for a discipleship strategy, it does not mean that all people are spiritually formed in the same way. In addition to the presentation of core beliefs and practices, attention must be given to make sure that the strategy that embodies this kind of teaching also offers flexible and customizable growth options given the uniqueness of individuals who participate. Two sources advocate this kind of discipleship approach. The first is *The Rule of Benedict for Beginners: Spirituality for Daily Life* by Wil Derkse, and the second is *The Me I Want*

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The first advocates looking at the unique needs of an individual in order to help foster and motivate the person toward growth. The second source expounds upon this sentiment by also upholding the value of taking each individual into consideration when crafting a spiritual growth strategy. Moreover, it solicits readers to customize their own spiritual growth strategies based on how God has uniquely wired them to grow, hinting at the idea that future discipleship strategies should be flexible and customizable.

**The Rule of Benedict for Beginners: Spirituality for Daily Life** by Wil Derkse

In *The Rule of Benedict for Beginners*, Derkse describes how individuals and organizations can emulate elements of Benedictine spirituality and follow the Benedictine motto of “work and worship” in their daily lives. The Rule of Benedict is one of the oldest spiritualities that seek to incarnate the Spirit of God in a lifestyle. Benedict wrote his rule for monks in the first half of the sixteenth century. The thesis of Derkse’s work is that Benedictine spirituality is a veritable “treasure-trove” of old and yet “new insights” which can be adopted by church leadership and congregants for the purpose of bringing about spiritual growth.

The heart of Benedictine spirituality centers upon the idea that “everything offers a chance to sing God’s praises.” Each activity of daily life presents an opportunity to

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39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 20.
connect with God and thus can be sanctified. The ordinary can be transformed into something holy as it is an opportunity to grow and learn from God if one will watch for Him, wait on Him, and listen for Him to speak during the everyday tasks of life.

According to Derkse’s summary of the rule, “Every place is a place to be sanctified, each moment is a moment to be sanctified.”

One of the most helpful contributions of the book is a chapter on what constitutes good leadership on the part of the Abbot. An Abbot is one who is responsible for the spiritual direction and growth of persons in an Abbey. Section 2.30-33 of the rule of Benedict states:

The Abbot should always remember what he is and what he is called, and should know that to whom more is committed, from him more is required. Let him understand also what a difficult and arduous task he has undertaken: ruling souls and adapting himself to a variety of characters. One he must coax, another scold, another persuade, according to each one’s character and understanding. Thus he must adapt and adjust himself to all in such a way that he may not only suffer no loss in the flock committed to his care, but may even rejoice in the increase of a good flock.

Derkse surmises from this passage that “giving leadership is ultimately a question of the spiritual life.” This means that good leadership goes beyond the surface and looks at the inner needs of an individual in order to help foster and motivate the person toward growth. Therefore, of all of the responsibilities bestowed upon the leader of the Abbey, or

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41 Ibid., 87.


43 Derkse, The Rule of Benedict for Beginners, 45.
any leader of an organization, is that of listening and responding adequately to the growth needs of an individual.\textsuperscript{44}

According to Benedict’s rule, this character trait is essential in a leader. In order to foster spiritual growth in individuals, people cannot all be treated the same and be given the same response to help them grow spiritually. The one leading must be able to listen carefully to how things are in the soul of an individual and give right response to each.\textsuperscript{45} How a leader responds to the spiritual growth needs of an individual should not be the same but different. Unique response is fitting and adequate and should be cultivated in order to bring about a congregation that is thriving in relationship with God.\textsuperscript{46} Leadership that does not include listening and responding in this flexible and customizable way is damaging, because it can lead to “loss in the flock.” When leaders do listen and respond to the different needs of each individual person, it is a means of leading that produces growth that will take root in the inner being of a person.\textsuperscript{47}

In essence, Derkse asserts that good leadership on the part of a church or individual takes the entirety of the circumstances of disciples into consideration when offering guidance in discipleship and formation. This sentiment also is echoed in \textit{Follow Me}, where Hawkins and Parkinson urge churches and leaders to consider that spiritual growth plans cannot reflect a one-size-fits-all strategy. According to Derkse, the plan needs to include “specific steps that also reflect other realities that need to be dealt

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 50.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 51.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
with—a plan that accounts for the specific realities of a person’s life. “Not everyone needs to take the same next steps; so much care and discernment must be used in helping someone figure out where to go next.

Derkse applies this to the Abbot’s quality or that of a leader who is responsible for another individual. Essentially, this can be said of any mentor who is in a discipling relationship with another individual. Mentors should take care to know the individual they are coaching and be sensitive to the individual based on age, gender, life stage, and current life challenges. The mentor should work to provide loving accountability and encouragement to disciples as they are exposed to the truth about God and themselves. This includes holding them accountable for areas of sin and struggle as well as acting as a sounding board for any questions related to growth and their relationship with God. This also implies that while discipleship must be flexible and customizable given the needs of an individual, a solid method also must involve relationship with others and occur within the context of community. Spiritual growth does not happen in isolation.

Derkse also intends for this knowledge to be applied to the Church at large, as stated in his thesis. If the quality of a good leader is the ability to listen and respond adequately, then the same must be said of any growth strategy in which the goal is to facilitate transformation in the life of a believer. While it is impossible for a strategy to physically listen and respond, church leaders can respond to this need by ensuring that the structure of the discipleship process provides options and possibilities for growth based on the unique needs of the individual. Such needs are individual and can depend on

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48 Ibid., 15.
many different things like the stage of life of disciples and how much time they have to spend on cultivating their relationship with God. The level of spiritual maturity also must be taken into consideration when providing suggestions for growth. People at different levels of spiritual growth do not all require the same information or share the same prescription of spiritual practices. Furthermore, not everyone has the same learning style or learns at the same pace. Such factors should be considered when guiding a person into a growth strategy.

While Derkse’s work articulates that leaders and churches should offer customized, individual options for growth, it does not expound on what this might look in practical terms. His suggestion is more of a description of leadership rather than a prescription for what this kind of leadership might look like practically in a church setting. He does not offer insight as to what tools or methodologies might help leaders or churches assess the unique needs of an individual in order for the leader to be flexible to people of “various natures.”

_The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God’s Best Version of You_ by John Ortberg

In his latest work, Ortberg presents new insight into what helps people flourish in their relationship with Christ. Flourishing encompasses the idea that a person’s spirit is connected with God’s Spirit and that the Spirit of God breathes life and vitality into the spirit of an individual. As people flourish, they will become more of who God has created them to be. Ortberg states, “When you flourish in the Spirit, you become more

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49 Ibid., 53

50 Ortberg, _The Me I Want to Be_, 39.
‘you.’ You become more of that person God had in mind when he thought you up. You don’t just become holier, you become you-ier.” According to Ortberg, this flourishing person is the “me I want to be,” and it is a direct result of God’s handiwork in one’s life.

The most helpful aspect of Ortberg’s book with regard to moving toward future discipleship strategies is his elaboration on what kind of nourishment causes a person to flourish in Christ. His insight reveals that there is a direct connection to flourishing and a person’s uniqueness. He writes: “Your uniqueness is God-authored—he did not create you to be anyone else. He pre-wired your temperament. He determined natural gifts and talents. He made each individual with certain passions and desires. He planned each individual: body and mind.” Consequently, God wants people to flourish by connecting with His Spirit in a way that uniquely fits the individual. In light of this, Ortberg encourages people to find out how they grow and take who they are into account in terms of spiritual growth. He explains it in this way:

Many approaches to spiritual growth assume that the same methods will produce the same growth in different people—but they don’t. Because you have been created by God as a unique person, his plan to grow you will not look the same as his plan to grow someone else. . . . The key is not treating every creature alike; it is finding the unique conditions that help each creature grow.

In order to individualize a spiritual growth strategy, many different aspects of a person’s wiring and life must be taken into consideration. This includes the person’s temperament, primary spiritual pathway, learning style, major personal obstacle to spiritual growth, and

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51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 29.
53 Ibid., 48–49.
general season of life. Once all of these distinctives are taken into consideration, a growth plan can be constructed that will bring about a connection with the Spirit of God so He can flow through the individual yielding a transformed and vibrant life. In this regard, Ortberg urges that “spiritual growth must be hand-crafted, not mass produced.”

Given what Ortberg presents in his book, he offers a solution to helping individuals create a hand-crafted spiritual growth plan. This new initiative is called “Monvee.” Monvee is an online resource designed to help people find a customized way to grow spiritually that will work for someone “exactly like you.” Each person who purchases a copy of The Me I Want to Be receives a code that they can use to take a free spiritual growth assessment on the Monvee website. The four-minute assessment tool helps people understand their temperament, learning style, spiritual pathway, spiritual growth obstacle, and season of life. Once the assessment is taken, Monvee then aids individuals in creating a spiritual growth strategy based on the discoveries in their assessment. While the spiritual growth assessment is free, the customizable spiritual growth plan that helps one flow and live in the Spirit costs money. It requires the purchase of a special pack that grants access to the online spiritual growth dashboard where the growth plan is housed. This is the limitation of the resource. While the content of the book is challenging and enlightening regarding a personalized spiritual

54 Ibid., 50.
55 Ibid., 51.
growth plan, it is unfortunate that readers do not have direct access to a plan without creating a Monvee account and paying for the use of the customized module.

Even with the drawback of having to pay for the module, Ortberg offers tips for developing a spiritual growth strategy. First, a solid discipleship method must cause the Christ follower to flourish. It must be customizable in a way that allows people to grow according to their unique wiring so that the spirit of the individual can connect with the Spirit of God.

A sound discipleship method also considers an individual’s personality. Every human being has a temperament, which means certain practices will come more naturally than others. Ortberg employs the example of Meyers Briggs, which looks at whether one is introverted or extroverted, whether a person prefers data or intuition, whether one is a thinker or feeler, and whether one likes things orderly or open-ended.57 When individuals discover their unique temperament mix, they are more likely to engage in practices that facilitate a flow of the Spirit through their life. Most individuals cannot be filled with God when they are engaged in activities that drain them of energy.

A solid discipleship method also tailors itself to a Christ follower’s learning style. People have distinct ways and preferences through which they learn. For example, some people are visual learners, while others learn by hearing. Some learn best by doing, while others learn best by talking and dialoguing about issues and topics. Others assimilate new information best in groups; and some employ a combination of methods by engaging

57 Ortberg, The Me I Want to Be, 53.
through art, story, and image.\textsuperscript{58} Most people only can engage in learning fully when they are immersed in a learning style that best fits them. This is why it is important for individuals to know how they are uniquely wired to learn.

In addition, Ortberg says a discipleship method also should take into consideration a person’s spiritual pathway. As explained before, a spiritual pathway is a means that naturally helps an individual experience the presence of God.\textsuperscript{59} Some people connect with God through nature, while others find God naturally when they are fighting for a cause.\textsuperscript{60} Intellectuals find their hearts filled with the Spirit when their minds are being challenged with stimulating information, while others are filled through service or contemplation. Whichever pathway is most desirable for an individual is the one that will be the most sustainable for them and thus produce more long-term, ongoing spiritual growth.

Finally, according to Ortberg, a solid spiritual growth strategy will take a person’s season of life into consideration, both spiritually and physically.\textsuperscript{61} For example, new believers might require more structure and information on Christian basics and practices than mature believers. They most likely will need to be in a community of structure and learning that a church can provide. However, as the years pass, that same individual might require something different in order to grow. Such Christians may need to be in community where they can discuss and dialogue, or they might need a season of quiet and solitude where they are not around people in order to process and think about what

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 56.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 55.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 58.
God might be saying to them. Ortberg emphasizes that individuals should be aware of what their spiritual growth needs are and take the time to pursue what will fill their soul at their given stage of growth. At the same time, individuals also need to consider their physical stage of life. A new mother might not have time to participate in a small group or attend regular church classes. However, if she is aware of the other unique ways she is wired to learn, she can capitalize on those until she is able to make room for other practices that will fill her in the same kind of way. Whatever the circumstance or life stage, Ortberg emphasizes that individuals should be aware of what their spiritual growth needs are and take the time to pursue the unique conditions that help each individual grow at any given time.62

By taking all of these factors into consideration and constructing a spiritual growth plan that accounts for individual uniqueness, sustainable spiritual growth can be facilitated. This kind of ongoing growth happens when individuals actually want to do what they ought to do, when it comes to finding ways to engage with God. What matters is not the activity itself, but whether or not the activity is engaged in through the Spirit. By customizing a growth plan that suits the individual, the quality of the presence and interaction of the Spirit is heightened for the individual.63

Any church looking to create this kind of facilitation can consider using Ortberg’s online spiritual growth tool, Monvee, as a platform for customized spiritual growth. However, while Monvee is a beneficial growth tool, it may really prove effective and useful to a technologically savvy congregation. While this source perfectly fits the Buster

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62 Ibid., 49.
63 Ibid., 53.
and newer generations to come, and therefore is a good match for CrossWinds, Monvee may not be appropriate for those at CrossWinds who are over the age of sixty-five and/or are not accustomed to using the computer as an interactive instructional tool. Moreover, the resource costs money and might be financially prohibitive for some who do not have disposable income to spend on the luxury of an online, spiritual growth mechanism.

**Final Thoughts**

In summary, the lines of thinking in the works cited can be brought together to paint a clearer picture of what some possible building blocks might be with regard to modern discipleship methods. First, the role of a church in this process is to serve as coach to provide structure and opportunity for people to take advantage of spiritual growth platforms. Such platforms should include information about core foundational beliefs and truths. These basic truths about who Jesus is and who He has created human beings to be help create a foundation for spiritual growth.

While foundational truths or foundational curriculum must be the same for everyone, options for future growth must be given. Elective classes on things like spiritual disciplines and deeper spiritual issues can serve to create momentum and give exposure to new ideas that challenge and inspire believers in their faith. Giving individuals the option to be personally mentored and discipled is a modern “catechetical” process that promotes adherence to truths and motivates toward transformation. Additional growth options that are offered should be flexible and customizable, based on the individual needs of the person. Inclusion of these building blocks in modern discipleship strategies involves proven means to effect change and conversion in the lives of believers.
CHAPTER 4
THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

This chapter will present an ecclesiology of the Church that is influenced by Baptist thought and doctrine yet takes the liberty to be influenced by other faith traditions. This ecclesiology focuses on tenets that outline a process for bringing people into the Church and helping them grow spiritually once they belong to the Body of Christ. The process begins with conversion and conversion-baptism as a means of initiation into the Church. It also stresses doctrine and the teaching of doctrine to bring about right belief and behavior, especially prior to conversion. Once individuals are properly initiated in congregational life, they are encouraged to find their unique fit within the body so they can be actively involved in the local church as it also carries out its unique mission in the world.

These themes of conversion, right teaching, and action/service heavily influence discipleship practices within the ecclesiology being examined. It will be argued that while this process is effective, renewal of these tenets is needed so that they become more comprehensive in terms of discipleship, with a concentration on more complete conversion, more complete teaching, and more complete action as it pertains to spiritual
formation. Finally, some insights from the Shepherding Movement’s renewal ecclesiology will be taken into consideration as to how it might inform ecclesiological renewal.

**Dominant Ecclesiological Themes**

Converge Pac West takes its ecclesiology from its originating denomination, the Swedish Baptist General Conference. This conference was founded in the United States nearly 160 years ago by Swedish immigrants pursuing religious freedom.¹ These Christ followers had a strong conviction about the Bible as the Word of God. They also adhered to believer’s baptism by immersion and had a strong conviction about living a holy life as followers of Jesus Christ.² Since Converge Pac West was birthed from this organization, it shares an emphasis on the same theological tenets.

As a means of articulating its ecclesiology, Converge Pac West states that it continues to affirm unequivocally the Bible as the Word of God. This means that there is an emphasis on the teaching of doctrine, especially as it leads one to Christ. It also maintains a clear conviction about believer’s baptism and regenerate church membership.³ This belief yields an emphasis on conversion and conversion-baptism. It also encourages strong, Christ-like living in a secular world, with each church committed to living out its diverse mission so that the common purpose of fulfilling Christ’s Great

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¹ Converge Pac West, “About,” http://www.convergepacwest.com/about/facts-and-info/converges-story (accessed August 14, 2011). The Baptist General Conference became the new name of the Swedish Baptist General Conference by 1945, as English became the predominant language used in the local churches and as more and more non-Swedish churches were planted and organized. In an effort to articulate the mission and message of Jesus in a more effective way all over the world, Converge was adopted as the missional name of the movement in 2008.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.
Commission can take place in the world. This primarily happens as individuals discover their unique gifting by which they can serve the Body of Christ so that the local church they are a part of can live out its unique mission in the world. The result is the encouragement of individuals to discover, develop, and deploy their gifts in order to serve the Church and act on behalf of Christ in the world. These three aspects make up a large part of Baptist discipleship efforts and will be addressed in order.

Discipleship as Conversion

An ecclesiology that is influenced by Baptist tradition must include an emphasis on teaching. James William McClendon, Jr., noted articulator of Baptist ecclesiology states that the mission of the local church is to be a disciple church that is actively engaged in the teaching task—a task that is centered on and grounded in the study of Scripture. In his Baptist vision of the local church, this is the objective content and character of any and all church teaching and praxis. Much of the teaching in the local church centers upon concepts that lead a person to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The reason for this emphasis has to do with the Baptist view of the true nature of the Church. Historically, Baptists have believed that a church submitted to the authority of the New Testament for faith and practice is a healthy church.

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{James William McClendon, Jr., }\textit{Doctrine: Systematic Theology}, \text{vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 34-35.}\]
Furthermore, Baptists have believed that the New Testament teaches that churches ideally are to be composed of something called “regenerate persons.” A regenerate person is someone who has been regenerated or has experienced a “new birth” in Christ in which “God infuses his Spirit into a sinner’s spiritual life the ability to participate in spiritual activities and to receive the privileges and blessings that God bestows on his children.” These individuals truly have become a new creation. Regeneration implies repentance of sin, a changed nature, a new heart, and a surrendered will to the authority of Christ as Savior and Lord. Those who have been regenerated are said to have had a conversion experience. Conversion refers to those who have made a decision for Christ and who can give testimony and evidence that they have been “born again” or who are living the regenerate life.

Once this event has taken place in the life of the individual, it is to be followed up by something called believer’s baptism. Baptism is the symbolic expression of a person’s conversion (cf. John 3:3). The act of baptism outwardly signifies the inward, saving action of God in the life of a believer. Baptism is the rite in which believers publicly profess their personal faith in Christ. Baptists regard baptism as the initiatory rite into the membership of the Church. Since conversion-baptism is a singular outward sign that a sinner has become a regenerate person, much emphasis is placed on this act. In fact,

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6 Norman, The Baptist Way, 49.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 62.

9 Ibid., 48.

10 Ibid., 131.
conversion-baptism has become a standard marker that is used to denote the success of the local church. Moreover, an emphasis upon a regenerate church membership has historically been so dominant in Baptist life that some Baptist leaders have contended that this theological tenet is the core distinctive for Baptists.\textsuperscript{11} With regard to this ecclesiology, church health has been and must continue to be shaped by the conversion of its members if it is to be a true New Testament church.

Discipleship as Teaching of Doctrine

The second tenet that makes up a large part of Baptist-influenced ecclesiology is the teaching of doctrine. Teaching right doctrine and accepting this right teaching make up a large part of discipleship efforts in a church. McClendon defines Baptist doctrine as “a church teaching as she must teach if she is to be the church here and now.”\textsuperscript{12} Christian doctrine, then, is right teaching that leads to right action—or, in other words, right belief that is acted upon. It is something that is “practiced in the church; even when it is not ‘practical’ in the popular sense of the world, its power and legitimacy come from the praxis in the church.”\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, if a church is going to teach so that each individual can actually be the Body of Christ here and now, the task of learning and studying key teachings, or doctrine, is the responsibility of every person. In this way, the emphasis on teaching and learning doctrine is a large part of what it means to be a disciple.

McClendon states that “learning and studying doctrine is the duty and task given to the

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 47.

\textsuperscript{12} McClendon, \textit{Doctrine}, 21.

\textsuperscript{13} Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, \textit{An Introduction to Ecclesiology} (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 142.
whole church, the gathered fellowship. The Christian gospel summons all to be students in the school of Christ. In the broad sense in which the church is itself a teacher, each member is engaged in its doctrinal or teaching task, centered on the study of Scripture.**14**

Scripture provides the objective content and character of teaching and action. A strong commitment to biblical authority determines all beliefs and practices regarding all aspects of church life. As a Baptist theologian Norman asserts, “Baptists believe what they do about all matters of the church because their convictions on these matters are governed by Scripture.”**15** The reason that all teaching and action are based upon Scripture is that there is a hope that in teaching and “living out” Scripture, a true New Testament Church will be brought about on earth. Baptists insist that the New Testament is the standard of belief about the nature of the Church. If a church, then, is going to be a true New Testament church, it must believe right teaching based on Scripture and live and act accordingly.

The preamble to the *Baptist Faith and Message* underscores this commitment to doctrine. It states that “Baptists are a people of deep beliefs and cherished doctrines. Throughout our history we have been a confessional people, adopting statements of faith as a witness to our beliefs and a pledge of our faithfulness to the doctrines revealed in Holy Scripture.”**16** Baptist commitment to teaching and learning doctrine can be seen in the Southern Baptist commitment to educating disciples. Within the *Faith and Message*,

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there is a section dedicated to the promotion of Christian education. It states that “Christianity is the faith of enlightenment and intelligence. In Jesus Christ abide all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. All sound learning is, therefore, a part of our Christian heritage. . . . An adequate system of Christian education is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people.”¹⁷ Therefore, if a person is going to engage in discipleship, it requires that a church have an adequate educational system in which doctrine is taught as well as disciples who are engaged in learning key doctrinal truths so that the local expression of the Body of Christ can be the Church “here and now.” Without an adequate system of education, effective discipleship cannot occur.

Discipleship as Unique Action and Involvement

The last main article of faith that will be examined is the commitment to discipleship as unique action and involvement. Baptist ecclesiology dictates that each local congregation, as well as individual members that make up a particular congregation, has a unique role to play in living out God’s mission for the Church in the world. This unique role is derived from the understanding of congregational polity. Congregational polity can be described as “that form of church governance in which final human authority rests with the local or particular congregation when it gathers for decision making. This means that decisions about membership, leadership, doctrine, worship,

conduct, missions, finances, property, relationships, and the like are to be made by the gathered congregation.”\textsuperscript{18}

This autonomous model of the church is a biblical model of the New Testament church—one that is not subject to external powers of control but subject only to the authority of Christ. The intention is that the congregation be given the freedom to govern itself under the Lordship of Jesus and the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The reason for this type of structure is that it gives churches the freedom to act according to God’s will. From the beginning, Baptists have believed that each local church body has a unique role to play in the work that Christ is doing in the world. They believe that God has “left a large range of initiatives to the churches as they are led by the Holy Spirit and as they keep within the boundaries of the NT principles.”\textsuperscript{19} The ultimate goal for each congregation is to discern and follow the will of the God regarding which initiatives it should undertake as a local church body.\textsuperscript{20}

Not only are churches autonomous and free to discern the unique role God will have a particular church play, but individuals are also free to seek God without interference from external control or hierarchical authority. In fact, it is the responsibility of individual believers to seek the will of God as to the specific role they will play within the larger body. Furthermore, each believer is responsible for seeking direction and

\textsuperscript{18} Norman, \textit{The Baptist Way}, 86.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 88.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 106.
wisdom from the Holy Spirit and expressing personal convictions within the decision-making structures of the local church.

The church doctrine that supports this freedom is the concept of the priesthood of the believer, which is found in 1 Peter 2:9 and reads: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” The idea behind this church teaching is that every believer has direct access to God through Jesus Christ. The Church, therefore, is a fellowship of priests serving together under the lordship of Jesus Christ. Each person is unique and has something to contribute to the mission of a church both in the decision-making process that determines the mission as well as in the unique role the individual will play in executing that mission.

Within the priesthood of believers, those who have accepted right doctrine and who have experienced conversion not only receive a regeneration of spirit but they also receive special abilities from the Holy Spirit called “spiritual gifts” (cf. 1 Corinthians 12). Spiritual gifts are unique capabilities and passions given to each individual according to how God has made each person. The gifts are to be used to serve the Body of Christ, so it can accomplish its mission in the world (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:7). God has equipped every believer with these gifts to perform the ministry tasks to which He has called them.22 Discipleship teachings encourage each believer to seek God in discovery of individual

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21 Ibid., 94.

gifts in order to live faithful lives, serve the Body of Christ, and therefore fulfill a unique mission both individually and corporately.

Renewing Dominant Ecclesiological Themes

The ecclesiological themes of conversion coupled with an emphasis on strong doctrinal teaching and the exercising of spiritual gifts have produced a strong sense of identity for Baptist churches in that they know who is committed to the body, they know what they believe, and they know their unique mission in the world. This does not mean, however, that these ecclesiological tenets are not in need of renewal. Within each ecclesiological idea, there is room for growth in the sense that the tenet can be made more complete or whole. The goal of making each aspect more holistic carries with it the implication that discipleship itself might become more complete. For this reason, ecclesiological renewal—as it pertains to creating a more complete strategy for discipleship—will be examined.

Holistic Conversion: Learning to Follow

It already has been argued that Baptists place a heavy ecclesiological emphasis on conversion and conversion-baptism. However, conversion and baptism are not the ultimate goal in spiritual growth in the life of a believer. As a Baptist theologian, McClendon articulates a series of guideposts or a sequence of significant communal practices in a church that mark progress in the life of the disciple. Conversion and baptism are the first two markers that serve to prepare an individual to follow Christ. The third marker is the practice of the Lord’s Supper. This sign reminds those on the journey
that they are part of the “countercultural way of discipleship.” The fourth marker is dubbed by McClendon as Christian “soaring,” which he calls the “more” of Christianity. By this he means the higher way some connect with God either through spiritual vocation and/or through ongoing sanctification within the Christian life.

This is the marker that connotes ongoing spiritual growth. This higher Christian life implies that disciples engage in ongoing learning of what it means to follow Christ. This higher Christian life requires that there are tools present or a process in place that helps people discover their God-given position within the Church, acknowledge and deploy their gifts, and help fellow disciples see their role within the rule of God.

Moreover, this process should help people engage with the Holy Spirit, who is the author of all ongoing transformation (cf. Romans 8:29; Galatians 4:19; Matthew 5:13, 16). The work of the Holy Spirit in transformation includes conviction, repentance, regeneration, indwelling, baptizing, sealing, and filling.

Discipleship is not simply about conversion. There is a “more” to the Christian life that must be addressed within ecclesiological renewal. Holistic conversion is not conversion for the moment or an acceptance of “once saved, always saved.” Conversion is not a matter of the head making a momentary decision. The will of a person also must desire to follow Christ and participate in the ongoing work He is doing in an individual

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23 Ibid., 142.
24 Ibid., 137.
25 Ibid., 144.
and in the world. McClendon’s hallmark of “soaring” implies that conversion is just the beginning and that effort must be put forth to fully disciple those on the journey to follow Christ. There must be a process in place that teaches people how to follow and how that following translates into a life of significance. In this way, a conversion-focused ecclesiology can become more holistic by not only focusing on conversion but also on the Spirit-led growth of the individual post-conversion.

Holistic Teaching: Core Curriculum Expounded

As stated in the Baptist Faith and Message, “An adequate system of Christian education is necessary to a complete spiritual program for Christ's people.” Education is about imparting doctrinal ideas and promoting a program that advances the execution of those teachings. While programs may impart appropriate knowledge, programs alone do not form people. It is true that most teaching is heavily grounded in Scripture. While Scripture is “living and breathing . . . and sharper than a double-edged sword” (Hebrews 4:12), and certainly has the power to transform lives, there are additional practices that can help with inward formation of the soul—practices that center both on Scripture and focus on engaging with God. These practices are called spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are “activities undertaken to bring one into more effective cooperation with Christ and his Kingdom” and are essential to the discipleship process if it is to become more holistic.

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In the past, spiritual disciplines typically were not practiced widely in Protestant traditions and were rejected due to their abuse in the pre-Reformation era. The abuses of disciplining the body in order to bring about a more devout following of Christ varied during these ages. During the Middle Ages, the term “disciplines” was used to refer to a whip of a certain kind that was employed to chastise the body during acts of penance. In the thirteenth century, flagellation, or whipping oneself, came into practice as a means of accounting for one’s sin. It was frequently thought of as an act of imitating Christ’s last hours.

With the emergence of early monasticism, the disciplines were practiced with more excess. These excesses were supported upon attitudes of body hatred and the belief that forgiveness or merit could be gained through suffering, whether self-inflicted or imposed by a religious superior. This idea of earning forgiveness through suffering was directly opposed to Martin Luther’s Reformation ideas of grace alone and faith alone as a means of salvation and forgiveness. Due to these abuses and the Reformation’s emphasis on grace and faith alone, there was a reaction against any essential role of spiritual disciplines in the process of redemption, says Willard. He goes on to write: “Luther and his followers seem to have thought that the teaching and preaching of the gospel, along with the administration of the sacraments, was all that was really essential for the

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29 Ibid., 139.
30 Ibid., 135.
31 Ibid., 139.
32 Ibid., 144.
formation of the spiritual life. Luther’s views on this matter have become almost totally dominant in all branches of Western Protestantism.”

The true spirit of the disciplines, however, is not about earning forgiveness or merit with God. It is about putting forth intentional effort in order to commune with God. The activities that make up the disciplines have no intrinsic value in themselves. Again, here Willard is helpful. He asserts, “The aim and substance of the spiritual life is not fasting, prayer, hymn singing, frugal living, and so forth. Rather, it is effective and full enjoyment of active love of God and humankind in all the daily rounds of normal existence where we are placed.” In other words, the disciplines are a way of making sure that love of God and love of neighbor can be brought about in all areas of life. They are a matter of taking appropriate measures, meaning that when the time comes to act in a way that is Christ-like and loving toward self and neighbor (which is not natural to sinful nature), disciplines can prepare the soul to interact with the Spirit so that love of God and neighbor can flourish.

An ecclesiology that is grounded in teaching platforms also must be inclusive of these practices within their discipleship efforts. The inclusion of the disciplines would provide “exercises unto godliness,” or activities undertaken to make individuals capable of receiving more of God’s life and power without harm to the self or to other people. The disciplines form a healthy balance between head knowledge, which can be transformative.

33 Ibid., 146.
34 Ibid., 138.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 156.
through the Holy Spirit, and concentrated effort to engage with God. The grace of God does not oppose intentional effort. It opposes earning. The effort disciples put forth ensures that a disciple is ordering life so God can intersect and intervene to bring about transformation. To reject spiritual disciplines in any spiritual growth strategy is to “insist that growth in the spirit is something that just happens all by itself.”

Holistic Action: Unique Inner Formation

As previously argued, each local church has a unique mission to execute in bringing about God’s Kingdom. Within each local congregation, each individual has a specific role to play with regard to bringing out the Church’s God-given mission. The church, as a priesthood of believers, is encouraged to “draw near” into the very presence of God. Each individual, as priest, has permanent access to God through Christ and is therefore encouraged to serve together as priests. With regard to service, it is up to individuals to connect with the Holy Spirit in order to figure out their personal gifting, passions, and strengths in order to discern their appropriate place in the Body of Christ.

In light of these statements, it is clear that uniqueness is crucial to the identity and mission of each local church as well as to the roles of individuals within the church. As much as each church is given a specific mission to the world and each individual is given special gifts to bring about that mission, disciples of Jesus also need plans for spiritual growth based on how God has wired them to learn. This is where Southern Baptist

37 Willard, The Great Omission, 60.
38 Ibid., 153.
ecclesiology can experience renewal—by becoming more complete in how it approaches discipleship. This can happen through something I call “holistic action.” Holistic action takes the whole person into consideration with regard to spiritual formation. It first entails awareness that the methods and processes of spiritual formation are just as individual as the missions of the church and the gifting of the persons within them. It also refers to a spiritual growth process where individuals investigate and act upon their particular spiritual gifts as well as take action steps toward growing spiritually through their unique spiritual pathway.

Gary Thomas, director of the Center for Evangelical Spirituality, states the following with respect to helping people grow spiritually: “All too often, Christians who desire to be fed spiritually are given the same, generic, hopefully all-inclusive methods—usually some variation of the standard quiet time. Why? Because it is simple, it’s generic, and it’s easy to hold people accountable to. But for many Christians, it’s just not enough.”

To supplement this thought, Thomas refers to A. W. Tozer’s warning on mechanized spirituality, which also addresses this problem. Tozer says, “The whole transaction of religious conversion has been made mechanical and spiritless. We have almost forgotten that God is a person and, as such, can be cultivated as any person can.”

The warning given by Tozer implies that meaningful approaches to the Christian life and to spiritual growth also must include the aspect of uniqueness. God created people with distinct personalities and spiritual temperaments. God wants people to

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40 Gary Thomas, Sacred Pathways (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 14.

worship and connect with Him according to the way he made them. What feeds one person spiritually does not feed everyone. According to Thomas, giving the same spiritual prescription to every struggling Christian is no less irresponsible than a doctor prescribing penicillin to every patient.

In order to revive spiritual growth practices, Thomas advocates that in addition to discovering spiritual gifts people also should discover their spiritual pathway. Spiritual pathways are mediums by which people best relate to God so they can draw near to Him. They indicate a predisposition for how an individual is wired to connect with God. For example, some people experience God in the beauty of nature while others experience him relationally in the fellowship of believers. Others grow spiritually through intellectual pursuits while some may find God in serving people in the church. Still others might want to be alone, have quiet time to think, and contemplate the mysteries of God and His Word. Most people are drawn naturally to a specific avenue or medium of growth. The goal in discovering the unique pathway and employing it in spiritual growth is to feed the soul so people can know God in a new way, love Him with all their mind and soul and strength (cf. Deuteronomy 6:5; Mark 12:30), and then express that love by reaching out to others. In other words, it means letting God’s Spirit have His way with individuals so that their hearts will be turned toward Him.

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42 Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, 16.
43 Ibid., 17.
44 Ibid., 30.
45 Ibid., 223.
Once individuals are aware of their primary spiritual pathway, they can order their time and energies around the pathway that maximizes that growth. Not only does this provide an avenue for maximum growth, but it also gives freedom to the individual. As Ortberg states, “Freedom is needed for the path to growth. One pianist might need to practice lots of scales. Another might do better improvising. Another might be helped by sight-reading. The same is true for spiritual growth: You are free to find the path that helps you best.”\(^{46}\) With members in a congregation taking holistic action—living out of their gifting and growing spiritually according to how they are uniquely wired—the Church can be more effective in living out its mission in the world.

**Insights from the Shepherding Movement**

In addition to the insights already offered for ecclesiological renewal, additional suggestions for renewal can be gleaned from the Covenant Movement or Discipleship/Shepherding Movement. The Shepherding Movement, as it is typically called, was born from the Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal movement of the 1960s. The term “Shepherding Movement,” as it came to be known, applied to the teaching and persons originally coming from The Shepherd’s Church in Fort Lauderdale. Its key founders were Bob Mumford, Charles Simpson, Derek Prince, Don Basham, Ern Baxter, and John Poole.\(^{47}\)

The movement came about because its founders were “greatly concerned over the marginalization and immaturity of the church.”\(^{48}\) In order to address this problem,

\(^{46}\) Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be*, 58.

\(^{47}\) Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 207. Kärkkäinen notes that the term “Shepherding Movement” is concise and more descriptive of the movement’s emphasis on personal pastoral care.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.
founders sought to revive the biblical concept of discipleship as a way of reversing this
trend. Two important insights can be gleaned from this revival. First, the founders
instituted the concept of a discipleship shepherd or mentor who was responsible for
providing accountability and pastoral care to growing Christians. Second, it emphasized
the importance of having structures within a church that can help bring about these
discipling relationships. Both insights will be discussed.

One of the main goals of the Shepherding Movement was to revive the biblical
concept of a discipling pastor in the form of a shepherd who provided one-on-one
pastoral care. The leaders of the movement believed that discipleship was “a very
fundamental and vital ongoing relationship which brings maturity to the believer.”49
The task of shepherds, as proposed by the founders, was to be instruments of authority and
care, which was characteristic of the New Testament Church. The model for this type of
arrangement was that of Jesus and His disciples. Within this context, discipleship carries
with it weight and responsibility. “Discipling” is seen as a comprehensive word that
denotes a God-given authority from Christ Himself.

In shepherding care, a believer was to submit to a personal pastor who would help
the individual develop Christian maturity.50 As the shepherd and disciple met together,
they talked about life struggles and challenges. The mentor was responsible for pointing
out the activity of God in the life of the disciple as well as holding the individual
accountable for applying Scripture to life in areas of weakness and struggle. This

49 Ibid., 205.

50 S. David Moore, The Shepherding Movement: Controversy and Charismatic Ecclesiology
responsibility included not just their spiritual well-being, but their full development emotionally, educationally, financially, vocationally, and socially.\textsuperscript{51} The result of this kind of relationship is that individuals are brought to maturity through encouraging and measuring growth in Christian discipleship through the behavioral change that results from a consistent application of biblical principles to personal and corporate Christian living.\textsuperscript{52} In other words, shepherds and disciples can measure growth based on changes that take place in disciples’ behavior as they apply Scripture to life. In this way, disciples receive personal pastoral care within the context of a loving relationship that brings about spiritual maturity.

The second insight for ecclesiological renewal is the movement’s emphasis on the importance of having structures within the Church that can help bring about these discipling relationships. Once an individual expressed interest in being a part of the movement, a shepherd was assigned. Then, most disciples and their shepherds joined established discipleship communities. Each community was under the care of an authoritative guardian. These communities practiced the discipline of renouncing self-centeredness and professed obedient reliance upon God through submission to the headship of the community leaders. In addition, communal sharing of lives and possessions often was emphasized.\textsuperscript{53} Common activities in discipling communities included corporate worship, prayer meetings, and the Eucharist. As individuals participated in the communities, their shepherds walked alongside them, instructing them

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{51} Ibid., 262.

\footnote{52} Kärkkäinen, An Introduction to Ecclesiology, 205.

\footnote{53} Ibid.
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and holding them accountable to the spiritual norms of the community. The community then provided a vehicle or structure by which the discipling relationship could take place. It also provided the content for the mentoring relationship between shepherd and disciple.

The Shepherding Movement eventually fell apart due to abuses of the authorities in power. Critics of the movement have termed it as “nothing less than spiritual child-abuse. Through intimidation by the instilling of fear and unfounded guilt, it bludgeons babes in Christ into obedience to the will of the shepherds in authority.”

Even though the movement met an undesirable end, there are still lessons to be learned from the ethos of the organization. As Kärkkäinen points out, the underlying agenda was legitimate: how to provide ecclesiological structures and practices that would give an opportunity for holistic care and discipling. These two insights, the emphasis on care and discipling and the need for ecclesiological structures that facilitate these relationships, provide insight for ecclesiological renewal.

Summary and Conclusion

It is evident that the articulated ecclesiology has some areas in which it can experience renewal. While conversion and conversion-baptism are essential to entry into the Baptist Body of Christ and signify entrance into a regenerate New Testament Church, emphasis also must be given to some kind of process that teaches individuals how to continue to grow in their journey of following Christ so that they can experience the “more” of the Christian life. Within this kind of holistic conversion, where a person has


55 Kärkkäinen, An Introduction to Ecclesiology, 209.
experienced new life in Christ, there needs to be a renewal in the use of spiritual
disciplines to foster ongoing growth. While studying doctrine and key biblical teachings
can produce transformation through the work of the Holy Spirit, spiritual disciplines
supplement doctrinal teaching in a way that brings the spirit of the individual in line with
the Spirit of God to bring about further inner transformation.

In addition to doctrine and the disciplines, this process for growth also should
encourage the use of unique gifts in service to the body so it can live out its unique
mission in the world. In order to accommodate that same kind of uniqueness regarding
the spiritual growth of individuals, a spiritual growth process also should be customizable
depending on a person’s spiritual pathway and temperament.

Finally, insights from the Shepherding Movement prove that there is a genuine
need for believers to disciple and mentor others in their day-to-day walk with God. In this
regard, a renewal of the priesthood of believers that promotes and encourages each
believer to take on the responsibility of discipleship in a loving and humble matter would
greatly facilitate spiritual growth in individuals. Moreover, the Shepherding Movement
also rightly instructed that there should be structures built into the church that help foster
spiritual growth in its congregants as well as facilitate the forming of these nurturing,
discipling relationships.
CHAPTER 5

A THEOLOGY OF DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH PERSONAL LEARNING MODULES

The theology outlined in this chapter emphasizes individual responsibility, unique approaches, and relational closeness as part of the discipleship process. It will begin with a discussion of two theological themes that inform the basis of discipleship: the priesthood of all believers and sanctification. The idea behind linking these two concepts is that if believers are aware and confident of their direct access to God (priesthood of the believer), they might risk a greater involvement in their own ongoing spiritual maturity (sanctification). The second section will examine key Scriptures that reflect relational aspects of discipleship and their importance as they impact discipleship efforts. In the last two sections, the traditions of early Christian catechism and Jewish discipleship will be reviewed to discover how they might inform future discipleship efforts.

**Significant Themes that Inform What It Means to Be a Disciple**

Before entering into a discussion of the significant themes that inform the weight and importance of discipleship, some explanation of what discipleship actually entails is necessary. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote that “Christianity without discipleship is
always Christianity without Christ.”\(^1\) In this way, discipleship is intricately linked to a relationship with Christ. A disciple is a learner or follower—usually someone committed to following a significant master. In the New Testament, the term “disciple” is the primary word used to refer to people who followed Jesus as their significant teacher.\(^2\) Being a disciple is different than the act of discipleship. While being a disciple carries the idea of a state of being, “discipleship” is the term that describes the ongoing life of the disciple or the actual process of following Jesus. The word “discipleship” implies a sense of journey and the idea of becoming like the master that one follows.\(^3\) The weight and importance of what it means to be a disciple first will be explored by examining two major theological concepts: the priesthood of the believer and the process of sanctification. This will be followed by an inquiry of Scripture in order to ascertain the impact of the practice of discipleship upon the life of an individual.

## The Priesthood of All Believers: Equal Responsibility to Grow

The theological tenet of the priesthood of the believer informs the notion of what it means to be a disciple. To reiterate, the concept of the priesthood of all believers states that every believer has direct access to God through Jesus Christ. Consequently, the Church is a fellowship of priests serving together under the Lordship of Christ.\(^4\) Several texts in Scripture teach this either explicitly or implicitly (cf. Romans 5:1-5; 1 Timothy

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\(^2\) Michael Wilkins, *Following the Master* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 38.


\(^4\) Norman, *More Than Just a Name*, 94.
Romans 5:2 alludes to the concept by stating that “by faith, we have gained access to Christ,” while 1 Timothy 2:5 emphasizes that “Christ is the great mediator between God and man.” Finally, Hebrews 4:14-16 says that since Jesus Christ is the high priest, human beings have direct access to God and can approach His throne with confidence. All of these passages taken together teach that all persons are capable of relating to God directly and that there is no need for any special intermediary.\(^6\)

However, the passage that is usually touted as the key discerning passage for this concept is 1 Peter 2:9 which states: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” The concept of the priesthood is important in both the Old and New Testaments, but the Old Testament concept sheds light on how it is integral to what it means to be a disciple. In the Old Testament, it was necessary that a special priesthood be chosen by God to represent the nation of Israel before Him. The ministry of the priesthood was given to the tribe of Levi. In Exodus 40:12-13, the Lord said, “Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the tent of meeting and wash them with water. Then dress Aaron in the sacred garments, anoint him and consecrate him so he may serve me as priest.”

The role that Aaron and his tribe played in the priesthood served a representative function. Once a year, the priests were allowed to enter the Holy of Holies in order to offer a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins for the nation of Israel. The Holy of Holies, which was seen as the dwelling place of God, was located behind a thick veil that


\(^6\) Ibid.
separated God from his people. However, this veil of separation was torn in two by the suffering of Christ on the cross. His death on the cross is described as a priestly act that has paid the penalty of sin once and for all. Christ shed His own blood to obtain eternal redemption for His people. In this way, Christ has fulfilled the representative role of the priesthood and is the one mediator between God and humanity, as explained in 1 Timothy 2:5 which states: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.” Under the grace of Christ, there is no need for a human priest to stand and represent others before God. According to Hebrews 10:19-21, Christ followers can “enter the presence of Christ with confidence.” Consequently, the Church as a priesthood of believers is now encouraged to “draw near” into the very presence of God.

The concept of drawing near is at the very heart of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The term “disciple” describes someone who is committed to following a significant master. It would be an impossible task to follow Jesus without getting close enough to observe and learn from Him. The first disciples committed their entire existence to following close (cf. Matthew 16:24). In fact, in the Jewish tradition of discipleship, it was said that a disciple was to follow his rabbi so closely that he would be “covered in the dust of the rabbi.” This close following was how the disciples learned to emulate their

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7 Ibid., 95.
8 Ibid.
9 Wilkins, Following the Master, 38.
teacher in a life of obedience and ministry to God the Father. Vander Laan, instructor of religion at Holland Christian Schools in Holland, Michigan comments:

For three and a half years, the disciples walked with Jesus. They followed him everywhere. They did everything they could to learn to be like Jesus—to know and interpret the Scriptures as he did, to obey God’s laws as he did, to pray as he did, to love as he did, to proclaim the news of God’s kingdom as he did, and to make disciples as he did.¹¹

This close following gave the disciples a unique opportunity to witness their master in action and absorb His ways so that they could become just like Him.

Within the priesthood, all individuals are followers of Christ and have equal access to God without the need of a mediator (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5). The royal priesthood shares the same invitation and responsibility to draw near to Christ as the first disciples did (cf. Hebrews 4:16). This means that, as disciples, believers must embrace their responsibility and privilege to grow in their relationship with Christ by drawing near to Him with confidence.

Sanctification: An Ongoing Spiritual Journey

The theological concept of sanctification is also a tenet that strongly influences what it means to be a disciple. Sanctification is the continuing work of God in the life of the believer, making an individual holy. In this instance, “holy” refers to “bearing an actual likeness to God.”¹² The process of sanctification begins at the point of conversion when an individual commits to a loving relationship with God and continues as a lifelong journey of being transformed into the likeness of Christ.¹³


¹² Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 980.

The American gospel, however, is one that tends to separate the point of conversion from the process of sanctification. Justification is the reality of having a new life in Christ (cf. Romans 3:4; 5:1, 9), while sanctification is the actual process of becoming like Jesus after that new life has been uncovered (cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:23). Separating conversion from sanctification gives the impression that being a Christian means obtaining a protected status before God. Author Bill Hull states that in Western Christianity, “we’ve taught that this act of justification settles the issue, that people can come in where it’s safe and secure rather than teaching people that a call to believe in Christ should also compel them to follow him.” At the moment when someone decides to follow Christ, the individual should not experience any interruption in the spiritual growth journey. As a new Christian, individuals do not take a second step toward becoming a disciple. Instead they embark on a seamless journey of growth that passes through spiritual childhood, adolescence, and adulthood to maturity.\(^\text{14}\) This is the lifelong process of sanctification in action.

The actual work of transforming an individual into the likeness of Christ belongs to the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit. The most telling is found in Romans 8 in which the apostle Paul has much to say about the Spirit and the Christian. In this passage, Paul notes that Christians walk according to the Spirit (Romans 8:4), set their minds on the things of the Spirit (Romans 8:5), and are in the Spirit (Romans 8:9). He also says that the Spirit dwells in them (Romans 8:9), by the Spirit they have put to death deeds of the body (Romans 8:13), and they are led by the Spirit (Romans 8:14). Finally, the Spirit bears witness that they are children of God (Romans 8:16).

\(^\text{14}\) Ibid., 33.
In this way, it is the Spirit in the life of the believer, bringing about likeness to Christ. The transforming work of the Holy Spirit might point to the conclusion that sanctification is completely a passive matter on the believer’s part; however, this is not so. While sanctification is exclusively of God—that is, its power rests entirely on His holiness—the believer constantly is exhorted to work and to grow in the matters pertaining to salvation.

The idea of God’s Spirit working in conjunction with the effort of the believer is seen in Philippians 2:12-13 which reads: “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” The word “work out” in this passage comes from the Greek word katergazomai, which means to “perform, accomplish or achieve, or to work so that there is a result.” It is a present-tense imperative and implies that the perceived suggestion is actually a command to God’s children to exercise their faith so that it produces a result. The willingness of the disciple to put forth effort invites God’s Spirit to move in order to bring forth transformation (cf. Romans 12:1-2). The grace of God is not opposed to effort but takes it as a sign of willingness and obedience to submit oneself to avenues through which God can work to bring forth transformation (cf. Romans 12:2). So while sanctification is God’s work through the Holy Spirit, the believer

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15 Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 983.
16 Ibid.
has a role as well: to engage in practices that bring about the development of holiness. This is an ongoing, lifelong journey and responsibility in the life of every disciple.

**Discipleship Practices of Jesus as Pointers for Spiritual Formation**

While the issue of what it means to be a disciple can be informed by the theological tenets of the priesthood and believer and the concept of sanctification, Jesus’ discipleship practices establish a biblical foundation for some key characteristics of discipleship. First, by examining the Great Commission given in Matthew 28:18-21, this section will serve to show that the process of making disciples is consistent, universal, and a rite and responsibility of every believer. Second, it will examine the idea that discipleship is a personal and unique process to each individual. This notion will be explored by looking at Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman found in John 4. Finally, the idea that encounters with Jesus can be transformational will be explored by looking at the story of Nicodemus in John 3 and 7.

**Universal and Consistent: The Great Commission-Matthew 28:18-21**

The Great Commission found in Matthew 28 yields that discipleship practices be both universal as well as consistent. This command of Jesus comes at the very end of the Book of Matthew and thus marks the final words of Jesus in this synoptic account. This imperative is given to His eleven remaining disciples, the first examples of His disciple making. Through the Great Commission, Jesus hands the baton of responsibility for

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18 Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 983.

discipleship to His Church. The Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-21 reads: “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Before actually giving the commission, Jesus sets the foundation for the impetus and success of the future ministry of His disciples. God the Father has given Him all authority in heaven and earth. Without the Messiah’s authority, the mission of the disciples would be “doomed to failure.” The authority of Christ as the voice of the commission enforces the reason why all of His disciples must carry out His orders. Once the authority of Christ is established as the basis for the imperative, He orders His followers to make disciples. The phrase, “make disciples,” comes from the Greek word, mathēteuō which means to teach and instruct. This Greek verb is in the active voice which denotes strong, emphatic emphasis on the action itself, yielding an imperative command. Christ’s current followers were charged to reproduce in others what Jesus had produced in them: faith, obedience, growth, authority, compassion, love, and a bold truthful witness of his witness. The disciples were to do this in a couple of ways: they were to go into the world and they were to teach all that Christ commanded.


21 Ibid., 484.


There are two participles in this passage that modify the central command to make disciples. Each of these clarifies the way in which Jesus’ disciples were to go about reproducing themselves.\(^{24}\) The first participle is the Greek word for “go” which is *poreuō*. The root meaning of this word means “to carry over, transfer, or to carry on in the same spirit.”\(^{25}\) The fact that this word is a present participle gives the impression of ongoing, continuous action that is taking place in the present. The subsequent translation then can be rendered as “going, carrying over, or carrying on.” The idea of “going and carrying on” is one of the two means by which to fulfill the central command of making disciples. It implies that believers emulate Christ in their reproduction of other believers. As one moves and “goes” through the movements of the day, there is purpose and opportunity to carry on in the same spirit as Christ and shepherd others toward discipleship.

The second participle, which is the word “teaching,” is found after the command to make disciples. It comes from the Greek word *didasko* which means “to teach or instruct.” In this passage, it is used in the present participle which renders a translation of “keep on teaching and imparting instruction.”\(^{26}\) Again, the idea is that the disciples are engaging in a practice of the consistent instruction of their own disciples. The content of this instruction is to teach other believers to obey everything Christ commanded. Therefore, the instruction was not only to teach content but to train people in obedience.\(^{27}\) By fulfilling the teaching

\(^{24}\) Ibid.


portion of the Great Commission, Jesus’ disciples would be able to take believers at every stage of spiritual maturity to the next stage of growth. In turn, those taught then would instruct in the same manner, passing on the same teachings with obedience.

The Great Commission yielded followers of Christ who were dedicated to the ongoing nature of His mission. As they moved and went about life, they continually made disciples by continually teaching them to obey all that Christ commanded. A thorough understanding of this command meant that the lessons and teaching of Jesus would be consistently handed from generation to generation as each disciple practiced obedience to the command. The disciples also understood that obedience meant the command was universal. It was not just for elite followers. They understood that to be saved was to be totally committed to a life of obedience—to walk as the Rabbi walked, to become like Him.28 The universal and consistent nature of the Great Commission is how eleven ordinary men from Galilee were able to turn the world upside down.

Personal and Unique: The Woman at the Well in John 4

While the Great Commission of Jesus presented a discipleship strategy that was both universal and consistent, His interactions with other individuals in Scripture reveal a unique method of discipling people through intimate and personal investment.29 Normally, traditional Jewish discipleship involved attending a rabbinical school in which young men would work diligently to memorize and learn the truths of the Torah (Genesis through


Deuteronomy) under the guidance of a rabbi. Rabbis usually required rote memorization of the text as well as strict observance of the rules that stemmed from the rabbi’s interpretation of the Scriptures. While there was a close relationship between the rabbi and his pupils, the relationship was not built upon an intimate knowing of life information between pupil and teacher and vice versa. The pupil was the one who studied his teacher in order to learn the teacher’s interpretation of Scripture, ministry, way of life, and character.

Jesus’ style of discipleship was different from that of traditional rabbis. His style was highly relational (cf. John 4:7). As the teacher, He took each life situation into consideration (cf. John 4:7, 13, 16, 18). He spent time trying to understand the person in order to figure out how to connect with the individual on a deeper level in order to present the truth of the Gospel (cf. John 4:10, 13, 21-23, 26). It was often through this intimate style of relating that individuals realized the truth of who Jesus was and would experience the transformation that He could bring (John 4:29, 39).

John 4:1-26, the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, depicts His intimate discipleship style. The story tells of a time when Jesus is passing through Samaria and comes to a town called Sychar. He encounters a Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well around the noon hour. Tired from his journey thus far, Jesus inquires of her, “Will you give me a drink?” (John 4:7).

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31 Ibid., 59.
32 Ibid., 64.
There are a few aspects of this opening scene that speak to the uniqueness of this situation. First, the time of day is important. During the noon hour there was intense heat, cueing the audience that this was not the time when most women would come to draw water. It leads the reader to consider why the Samaritan woman would be there alone, since women as a group were more apt to draw water later in the day. Jesus later uncovers that the woman is living in a sinful situation with a man who is not her husband. In Sychar, this story was probably widely known. Consequently, one can probably assume that she came alone because she was unwelcome among other women due to her colorful past.

Jesus engages the shunned woman by asking her for a drink of water. Upon his request for a drink, the woman responds to Jesus, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” In this period of time, Jews did not typically associate with Samaritans. This is the second area of uniqueness in the passage. Jesus crosses a socio-ethnic barrier in order to engage the woman in conversation. Samaritans and Jews had a long history of hostility. Samaritans were highly religious people who had their religious roots in the foundation of early Judaism before 70 CE. Samaritans were similar to Jews in that they accepted and followed the Torah. However, the Samaritans soon mixed pagan practices with their faith, probably largely due to the Gentile population that settled in Samaria. Therefore, Jews accused Samaritans of perverting the true faith and saw them as “less than genuine converts to the true Jewish religion.”

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34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 600.
Not only does Jesus cross this socio-ethnic barrier, but He also crosses a gender barrier in His effort to talk to the woman. Men and women did not typically converse with each other in public. According to Jewish sages, men were to avoid unnecessary conversation with women. Among six activities listed as unbecoming for a scholar is conversing with a woman, mostly because sages worried about sending the wrong message to onlookers.\(^\text{36}\)

Regardless of all of the reasons why He should not talk with her, Jesus engages the woman in dialogue by asking her for a drink. After she reminds Him that Jews and Samaritans should not converse, Jesus tells her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (John 4:10). The woman becomes confused and responds, “You have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?” (John 4:11-12). Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:13-14). After hearing Jesus’ claim to have water that will cure her thirst, the woman responds, “Give it to me so I won’t be thirsty again” (John 4:15).

The woman is confused by Jesus’ claim to give living water. As a Samaritan, she considers herself a descendant of Jacob. Since the location of this interaction is at Jacob’s well, she considered this well of a superior status. A well from which Jacob and his sons

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\(^{36}\) Ibid., 596.
and his cattle had drunk was considered pure, wholesome, honored, and quite as valuable as any that Jesus could furnish.\(^{37}\) The woman recognizes that to provide water the way He claims, Jesus would have to be greater than Jacob.\(^{38}\) When she asks Jesus if He is greater than Jacob, it is possible that her tone is mocking.\(^{39}\)

Jesus utilizes a personal approach in engaging the woman. This passage demonstrates that propositional truth is sometimes not enough to engage a person in a discipleship process that leads to transformation. Jesus’ propositional truth that He can give water that will quench all thirst is a foreign concept to her, given her background. She does not understand what he is saying. Nevertheless, she is willing to dialogue with Him because He crossed cultural, moral, and gender barriers in order to reach her. This act shows He is not afraid to meet people where they are in life. This kind of approach allows Jesus to articulate truth, a truth the woman later comes to understand as she continues to engage with Him and He further reveals to her who He is.

After this dialogue, Jesus instructs the woman, “Go, call your husband and come back” (John 4:16). The woman explains that she has no husband. Jesus replies that she has responded correctly; “You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is quite true” (John 4:18). The focus of this section is on Jesus’ power to know the secrets of the woman’s intimate life. Jesus’ knowledge of these personal, in-depth


\(^{39}\) Ibid.
facts is the turning point of the narrative.\textsuperscript{40} His claim to give living water was not something she could readily understand, but a person who tells her about the secrets of her life draws her attention. She shows the first signs of openness to Jesus as she confesses, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet.”\textsuperscript{41}

It appears, then, that Jesus knows exactly what will grab her attention. This interaction with the woman demonstrates that sometimes the most effective means of reaching people are not boldly stated propositional truths but tailor-made approaches, which take each individual into account in order to bring the individual toward knowledge of the deeper truth at hand. Based on Jesus’ approach in this situation, the woman continues to be drawn further into dialogue with Him. She appears intrigued.

After this, Jesus and the woman begin to talk about the proper location of worship, as Jews and Samaritans held differing opinions on this. Jesus attempts to explain to her the nature of true worship and what God seeks in a worshipping person. The woman does not understand what Jesus is saying but explains that “when the Messiah comes, he will explain the rest of the details” (John 4:25). Upon hearing that He is “the Messiah,” she heads back to the town and invites the very people she once avoided to see Him.\textsuperscript{42} John 4:39 amazingly states that many of the Samaritans believed in Jesus based on this disreputable woman’s testimony.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 596.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 131.
When Jesus states, “I am he,” He uses the Greek phrase *egō eimi*. This phrase is a formula of revelation and always is used to refer to the living presence of God who makes Himself known among His people.\(^{43}\) Since Samaritans and Jews shared a common heritage, the woman would have understood that Jesus was revealing Himself as the Messiah. Even though the story hits its climax with this dramatic revelation, this is not what captivates the woman’s attention. His intimate knowledge of her personal life is what dazzles her enough to bring her fellow Samaritans to Him.\(^{44}\)

The woman’s proclamation demonstrates that Jesus’ approach to bringing people to Himself is an intimate process that requires unique knowledge of the individual. While the woman could have told the Samaritans many things, she chose to share of Jesus’ in-depth knowledge of her. This proves that while truth is important to know, sometimes the way of arriving at the truth is by first capturing people at an individual level and relating with them based on how they are wired to learn. This stands in contrast to simply stating what should be obvious and expecting them to understand.

This passage depicts a discipleship approach that is unique and personal. It demonstrates that connections with Jesus can be created in many different ways. Approaches to God do not have to be narrow and reflect one style of relating or interacting. Sometimes, propositional means of introducing people to God are not the most useful way of forging a relationship. The most effective means are tailor-made, taking individuals into account based on who they are and where they are in their life.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., 130.

This style produces a compelling draw toward God. As Jesus demonstrates knowledge of a person, the individual is drawn into a deeper understanding and devotion to Him.

In addition, this story shows that all persons have the ability to come to Christ, no matter who they are or where they are in life. Jesus crossed several taboo barriers in order to engage a woman who did not know she was seeking God or who even recognized her deep need for a Savior. In this way, she represents the kinds of people that seeker-oriented churches are trying to capture. Once she was exposed to Jesus’ personal, relational style of engagement, she was compelled to believe in Him. She then had the ability to go and make disciples of others through her own proclamation of what Jesus knew about her. In this way, she contributed to the process of ongoing discipleship.

Transformational: Nicodemus in John 3 and 7

Not only was Jesus unique and personal in His interactions with individuals, but Scripture also reveals that interactions with Jesus were transformational. John 3:1-10 tells the story of a man named Nicodemus, who was a prominent Pharisee and a member of the Jewish ruling council. The narrative explains Nicodemus’ curiosity about Jesus and how he approaches Jesus at night, confessing his knowledge that Jesus is a teacher from God. He says to Jesus, “No one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him” (John 3:2b).

Several things about this opening set the scene for the dialogue that is about to take place. First, Nicodemus is a Pharisee and possesses a highly respected social rank. According to scholars, this reference connects him with the elite who oppose Jesus.\footnote{Ibid., 535.} The
Pharisees were fervent observers of the law and very prominent among the people. The laws they upheld and emphasized had to do with ritual purity, food tithes, and strict observance of the Sabbath. They were concerned with outward appearance by the keeping of these laws. Most Pharisees were intensely jealous of Jesus, because He undermined their authority and challenged their dedication to outward appearances. For this reason, if a Pharisee were caught dialoguing with Jesus, he risked being expelled from the synagogue.46

Nonetheless, Nicodemus came to Jesus. The fact that he approached Him at night indicates that he most likely wanted to avoid being seen. Night was the time for secret deeds.47 Nicodemus risked proximity to Jesus, because he was intrigued. While some men of God could still work signs, the general Pharisaic view that prophets were rare or vanished may have contributed to Nicodemus being impressed with the testimony of Jesus’ signs.48 Scholar Francis J. Moloney notes that there is open-mindedness in Nicodemus and that he might exhibit a partial faith experience but has not yet crossed into the threshold of discipleship. This movement toward Jesus, however, is a movement toward believing and receiving the one sent to make God known.49

Like the Samaritan woman, Nicodemus makes his confession that God must be with Jesus due to the incredible signs He is able to execute. Jesus answers Nicodemus in John 3:3 by stating, “Verily, verily, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 536.
48 Ibid., 534.
49 Ibid., 91.
they are born again.” With this statement, Jesus appeals to Nicodemus’ intellect as a knowledgeable Pharisee rather than appealing to his personal experience like he did with the Samaritan woman. In this regard, Jesus is exercising his personal and unique style of relating because He seeks to bring about transformation in order to lead people into discipleship.

According to scholars, Jesus’ attempts to build on Nicodemus’ limited understanding of who Jesus is and what He came to do. The word translated “again” has a double meaning in the Greek. The Greek word is anōthen, which means “again” as well as “from above.” One of the meanings lies on a temporal-horizontal axis (“again”) and the other on a spatial-vertical axis (“from above”). Jesus’ response to Nicodemus must consider both meanings. According to Moloney, Jesus’ words to Nicodemus ask for a birth that combines both the horizontal experience of time and the “vertical experience of the inbreaking of God from above.” What Jesus is saying is that in order to see the Kingdom of God, one must take the time to inquire and know the Savior as well as make room for the Spirit of God to move in and effect transformation in a person’s life.

However, Nicodemus does not yet understand what Jesus is saying. He responds to Him by asking, “How can one be born when they are old? Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!” (John 3:4). Nicodemus’ response is

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50 Ibid.


52 Moloney, The Gospel of John, 92.

53 Ibid.
limited to the horizontal, earthly understanding of birth and reveals that he cannot yet surrender to something outside himself, beyond what he can control or understand.\textsuperscript{54}

Nicodemus is stuck in his own head at this point. He does not understand that a relationship with God is more than just gaining knowledge, proclaiming propositional truth, or living within a religious system; it means engaging with God in a way that brings about a movement of His Spirit. While knowledge is certainly important as it pertains to truth about God, it is the Spirit of God that makes that knowledge a reality in the life of the believer.

Since Nicodemus misses Jesus’ point, Jesus takes the opportunity to try and clarify what He means by birth from above. In John 3:5-9, Jesus expounds more clearly on what he means by spiritual rebirth:

\begin{quote}
Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, “You must be born again.” The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.
\end{quote}

In his answer, Jesus explains that to be born of the flesh means to be content with what one can observe and control. Living in the “flesh” means making judgments on the basis of what one senses. This new kind of birth in the spirit leads to a different way of seeing and understanding.\textsuperscript{55} The only way this new understanding can take place is by a “gift from above.” This passage demonstrates that just because individuals are raised in the faith or are knowledgeable about the truths of God, this does not mean they necessarily understand how to personally walk with God. All individuals, whether they are leaders or

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
seasoned believers, must engage in the discipleship process on a personal, unique, and transformational level. They, too, must have a place to field their inner-most and secret questions and wrestle with the knowledge they have that sometimes might not make sense in light of their life experiences. They must not solely rely on things like participation in a church or religious system or a vast knowledge base to substantiate their faith. They, too, must be given time to put themselves in a position to be transformed by the Spirit of God.

In order to explain how this gift of rebirth occurs, Jesus enters into a small parable about the wind and the Spirit. The same Greek word, *pneuma*, can be used for “the wind” and “the Spirit.” Jesus starts with an everyday experience of the wind. While many individuals experience the effects of wind on a daily basis, one can never claim to discover and know where it came from or where it is going. One the basis of this observation, Jesus affirms that is the same way with the work of the Spirit. “The Spirit, like the wind, is entirely beyond both the control and the comprehension of man: it breathes into this world from another.” Jesus emphasizes how surrender needs to take place. This surrender involves an acceptance that one cannot control or define that to which one surrenders. There is a faith element that invites the mystery of God and the Spirit of God to intervene in the life of a disciple, but Nicodemus has not yet arrived at that place of surrender. His response to Jesus is equally as confused as his first one. In

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58 Ibid., 93.
John 3:9 he asks, “How can this be?” This passage suggests that understanding who God is along with the transformation He can bring comes through engaging in, even wrestling with the words of Jesus. Spiritual growth is a gradual process and requires time and patience. It is within the process of wrestling and questioning that God makes Himself known and brings about transformation.

After the scene in John 3:1-10, the reader is left not knowing what happens to Nicodemus. He does, however, show up two more times in the Gospel of John: once as he defends Jesus before the Pharisees in John 7:50-51 and once in John 19:38-42 when he accompanies Joseph of Arimathea to claim the body of Jesus. It is this last mention of Nicodemus that is the most telling of the effect of his first encounter with Jesus. Nicodemus has been transformed. He has gone from being a seeker to a believer in Jesus Christ, as evidenced by his actions in this passage.

In John 19:38-42, Pilate grants permission to Joseph of Arimathea to take Jesus’ body away (John 19:39). He was accompanied by Nicodemus who brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds (John 19:39b-40). The two men wrapped the body with the spices and strips of linen and laid the body in a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid (John 19:40-41). The way in which Nicodemus appears in this passage is significant. Time has passed, and something has happened to him. Both Joseph and Nicodemus render a service to Jesus that is potentially dangerous due to the cost of being associated with Christ. The service of a proper burial is one that even the long-term disciples were unable to offer.59 This secret disciple now has become a public one.

59 Ibid.
This public act demonstrates that a transformation has taken place. Where at first he came at night, now Nicodemus openly risks his reputation and security to honor Jesus.\textsuperscript{60} People do not usually risk their lives and reputation for something they do not believe in. This act is the result of an inner transformation that brings about obedient and devoted action.

In addition to this public act of discipleship, Nicodemus offers Jesus a lavish gift. The amount of spices he brought to prepare the body for burial was extraordinary; seventy-five pounds of burial spices would be the equivalent of 30,000 denari.\textsuperscript{61} This amount was abundant and would be fitting only for a king.\textsuperscript{62} Since Jesus also was bound in burial clothes and placed in a new tomb, it is noted that Joseph and Nicodemus must have known they were burying a king.\textsuperscript{63} Individuals of high rank frequently would be clothed in garments or burial shrouds while people of a lesser stature were wrapped in linen strips.\textsuperscript{64} Jesus was wrapped in a garment that suggests his burial was fitting for an honorable and righteous man.\textsuperscript{65} This act of burial is proof that Jesus now is surrounded by his “new-found friends, a community that handles his crucified body in a royal way.” Nicodemus and Joseph show both by word and deed that they belong to Jesus and honor Him as Lord.\textsuperscript{66} Again, Nicodemus demonstrates by word and action that he belongs to the

\textsuperscript{60} Keener, \textit{The Gospel of John}, 1162.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 1163.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{63} Moloney, \textit{The Gospel of John}, 510.

\textsuperscript{64} Keener, \textit{The Gospel of John}, 1162.

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 511.
truth of Jesus. While his response was not immediate, Nicodemus’ original inquiries of Jesus and his wrestling with Jesus’ words brought about a process whereby he could experience a rebirth in his spirit. That rebirth brought about obedient and devoted action toward his Lord. This demonstrates that the process Jesus invites the seeker into brings about change that is evidenced in the life of a believer.

In this story, Jesus’ discipleship style led to transformation. He gave open-minded Nicodemus room to inquire and process that which Jesus told him. During the span of time from Nicodemus’ initial inquiries of Jesus and his participation in the burial of Jesus’ body, both the horizontal and the vertical came into play. Nicodemus took time to process what he had heard as well as to surrender to the Spirit of God that comes from above. In the end, Nicodemus surrendered to that which he could not control and transformation took place. The Spirit of God brought about an inner transformation that was evidenced in his actions. The transformation was not based in ritual Judaism but in a life-changing belief and relationship with Jesus. Jesus’ discipleship style is one that gives time to inquire, room to process, and an opportunity to surrender. In this way, encounters with Jesus are transformational.

**How Early Christian Catechism Informs Current Discipleship Practices**

While the discipleship methods of Jesus lend insight as to who participates (universal and consistent), how it can be achieved (through personal and unique means) and what it can accomplish (transformation), there are other historical practices that inform the content and process of how these discipleship endeavors can take place. One

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of the earliest practices that inform the content of discipleship is catechism. Historically, the Church’s ministry of grounding new believers in the rudiments of Christianity has been known as catechesis. This is the task of teaching, grounding, growing, forming, and fashioning the people of God. This mode of rigorous teaching does not function solely to correct errors in action and thought but exists for the maturing of the faithful in themselves. The Church is to be a learning-and-teaching fellowship in which the passing on of what is learned becomes a regular part of the service members of a local church render to one another.

According to authors J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, “Catechesis is integral to the all-age Christian nurture that every congregation should be practicing.” However, many Western congregations have lost this emphasis when considering their discipleship efforts. Both Packer and Parrett perceive this as the deepest root of the immaturity that is so widespread in evangelical circles. In their view, a recovery of true discipleship means a rediscovering of the ancient practice of catechism. Catechism is a ministry that has waxed and waned throughout the centuries, mostly flourishing between the second and fifth centuries of the Church. With the impact of the Dark Ages, the ministry of catechesis diminished. It reappeared again during the Reformation of the sixteenth

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70 Ibid., 9

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 52.
century, led by Luther and John Calvin.\textsuperscript{73} This is known as the Golden Age of catechism.\textsuperscript{74} Since the Reformation age is not unlike the current Western situation, lessons can be learned from the use of catechism during this time.

At the dawn of the Reformation, there arose a sort of medieval Christian society.\textsuperscript{75} The masses suddenly had become part of the Church. Due to the sheer numbers involved in education, the rigorous grounding work of teaching Christian basics mostly had disappeared. Education at this time largely took place through sermons, the singing of hymns, Christian art, liturgical commemorations, and pilgrimages to holy places.\textsuperscript{76}

Before this age, catechism had been a part of daily Christian life. With the advent of the Dark Ages, the early Christian community that was dedicated to the firm education of new and seasoned believers had turned into a crowd of “nominal Christians.”\textsuperscript{77}

In an effort to reverse this trend, Luther sought to reinstate the practice of catechism into the Church. His chief concern was a return to the simplicity and power of the biblical gospel. The gospel must be made known and understood as well and as widely as possible. In order to accomplish this goal, Luther published and distributed large quantities of printed catechisms which centered on instruction in the basic elements of the Christian faith. The catechisms of Luther were structured around four basic tenets: the Apostle’s Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the sacraments

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 60.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 59.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
(baptism and communion).\textsuperscript{78} These were seen as the articles of faith that were “common among all Christians” and contained “everything a Christian needed to know.”\textsuperscript{79} In this way, Luther brought the Reformation to the common man.\textsuperscript{80}

The content of Luther’s catechism was strategic. The Apostle’s Creed reminded believers of the gospel of Jesus and his saving grace. The Lord’s Prayer taught believers how to pray, while the Ten Commandments and sacraments of baptism and communion were obedient acts undertaken by believers to demonstrate obedience to Christ. The scope of the summary listed above is holistic in nature, touching believers at the levels of their heads, hearts, and hands. In other words, the three summaries of the Apostle’s Creed, the Lord’s Prayer, and the Ten Commandments along with the sacraments provide training in doctrine (truth taken into the mind and heart), experience (the pursuit and enjoyment of a relationship with God), and practice (the specific and habitual response of obedience to the truth one has received).\textsuperscript{81} According to this model and tradition, the content of any foundational Christian teaching or catechism should instruct in three areas. First, it should teach and train the mind in gospel truth. Second, it should equip disciples in how to help people experience a joy-filled relationship with God and how to engage in human-to-human relationships. Third, it should guide disciples in authentic behavior that produces obedience toward Christ-like character in both word and deed.

\textsuperscript{78} Roland H. Bainton, \textit{The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1952), 74.

\textsuperscript{79} Packer and Parrett, \textit{Grounded in the Gospel}, 62.

\textsuperscript{80} Bainton, \textit{The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century}, 74.

\textsuperscript{81} Cf. J. I. Packer, \textit{Rediscovering Holiness: Know the Fullness of Life with God} (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 153; see also Packer and Parrett, \textit{Grounded in the Gospel}, 64.
Not only was the content specific but the mode of instruction also was to take a certain form. In order to ensure the catechisms did not become rote memorizations that turned into mechanical “duty,” students of catechism were encouraged to engage in lively and interactive dialogue with their teacher as well as with other students. Sometimes this dialogue took the form of a student asking a question and a teacher/mentor providing an answer. Sometimes it took the form of students dialoguing among themselves about the subject matter. This exchange of questions and answers as well as dialogue helped individuals solidify what they learned as they articulated their belief. It was thought that within this tri-fold, interactive curriculum of catechism, true transformation was to take place. This pattern came to mark nearly every major catechism produced by Christians of all camps in the succeeding centuries. ⁸²

As long as catechism continues to be overlooked as a means of effective discipleship, spiritual immaturity along with superficial “smatterings of truth,” blurry notions about God and godliness, and thoughtlessness about the issues of living a faithful Christian life will persist. ⁸³ Again, Packer and Parrett urge churches to re-instate some type of catechetical education back into the mainstream life of congregations. These authors are not under the impression, however, that church leaders will resolve to follow the ancient catechetical formula exactly. They admit that there are “other ways to identify and frame the content for catechesis.” ⁸⁴ So they urge church leaders to answer the

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⁸² Ibid., 62.
⁸³ Ibid., 16.
⁸⁴ Ibid., 186.
question: “What do we consider essential teaching for our members?” Then, they recommend finding a way to package the catechism so it can be faithful and effective in grounding for doctrine, devotion, duty to God, and delight in relationship with Him.\(^85\)

**How Early Jewish Discipleship Informs Current Discipleship Practices**

While the ancient practice of catechism informs some of the necessary content for discipleship, early Jewish discipleship practices inform how discipleship can be effective. Discipleship in the ancient world was a common phenomenon. Under the Jewish model of discipleship, learning did not take place in isolation. It always took place in relationship between a teacher and his pupil. It primarily involved commitment of an individual to a great master or leader. For Jews, it meant commitment to a great rabbi.\(^86\)

In this educational tradition, young men could join a variety of schools, each led by a prominent rabbi or teacher. In some cases, students were able to choose their teacher. Once a teacher was chosen, he either could accept or reject a student’s application. Once a student was accepted, he became a *talmid*. *Talmid* is the Hebrew word for “disciple.” Once a *talmid*, the student entered a program of rigorous study, mostly of memorizing and examining the Hebrew teachings. At the same time, the *talmid* willingly left home, family, and occupation to be with the rabbi because he wanted more than anything else in the world to be like his teacher in his walk with God. As the rabbi lived and taught his understanding of the Scripture, his *talmid* listened to him, watched

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\(^85\) Ibid.


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him, followed him, memorized his words, and imitated his walk with God. The nature of the relationship between a rabbi and his student was also very unique. It can be best summed up in the word *haver*, which is the Hebrew root word that refers to deep social bonds between people. It is translated as “friend” but contains a meaning that is much deeper. It describes a relationship that is stronger than death itself and often is used in reference to disciples and their rabbi who are deeply committed to each other and to their common goals.

This unique teacher/student relationship went through several stages. In the beginning stages, the student was solely an observer who could sit in the back of the classroom and watch but could not speak. As the student became more learned, he was able to question his teacher with his own thoughts and ideas. At the next level, he became a disciple-associate, who sat immediately behind the rabbi during prayer time. Finally, he achieved the highest level, a disciple of the wise, and was recognized as an equal of his rabbi. In all of this, the objective of the disciple was to learn his teacher’s stories, his life habits, and his interpretations of Scripture. Once a disciple learned everything his teacher knew, he then could go and make disciples of his own.

In this tradition, a disciple’s commitment to follow his teacher was at the very heart of the transformational process. This type of learning environment created a powerful bond of learning and accountability as they walked through life together. While

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88 Ibid.


90 Ibid.
it might be impossible to attain this type of relational closeness within a modern discipleship model, the Hebrew mindset of discipleship provides a framework for the type of mentoring relationship that can bring about transformation. This type of relationship provides stability and a framework for the discipling relationship. Within this relational dynamic, there is an aspect of coming alongside that facilitates and enhances the intake of knowledge as teacher and student are able to dialogue together, minister together, and make mistakes and correct them together. This kind of relational closeness and accountability is something that needs to be recovered if the content of catechism is to lead to transformation.

The most telling aspect of this discipleship method is that Jesus Himself used it to train His disciples. In *The Forgotten Ways*, Hirsch asserts that disciple making operates best with this Hebrew understanding of knowledge in mind. He writes: “We need to take a whole person into account in seeking to transform that person. This is how Jesus did it. His disciples lived with him and observed Him in every possible circumstance but also ministered with him and made mistakes and were corrected by Him, all in the context of everyday life.”91 Under this model of discipleship Jesus effectively prepared twelve young men to start and lead His Church and, in the process, change the course of history.

**Summary and Conclusion**

In summary, a theology of discipleship must include a consideration of its weight and responsibility. The examination of the idea of the priesthood of all believers linked with the tenet of sanctification yields a responsibility on the part of each disciple to

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continually draw near to God for the purpose of ongoing spiritual growth. This is both a charge and a privilege as a disciple of Jesus. In addition, by looking at the discipleship practices of Jesus found in Scripture, it can be seen that discipleship is first and foremost universal and consistent.

The Great Commission commands that all followers of Jesus practice and participate in the teaching and instructing of other believers so that the Kingdom of God can be made known on earth. In looking at Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman, it can be seen that the manner in which Christ approaches discipleship is both unique and personal. He took the woman’s past and present into consideration and still crossed multiple social, moral, and ethnic boundaries in order to meet her in her current circumstance. Ultimately, Scripture shows that interactions with Jesus are mysterious and transformational, as demonstrated through His interaction with Nicodemus. In addition to these characteristics of discipleship, an observation of early Christian catechism provides ideas for content and structure for future discipleship models while early Jewish discipleship efforts present an effective mode of relational mentoring. This paper now turns its focus upon a strategy that encompasses these objectives for those at CrossWinds Church.
PART THREE

STRATEGY
CHAPTER 6

GOALS AND PLANS FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION MODULES AT CROSSWINDS CHURCH

This chapter will focus on the strategic content of the proposed discipleship strategy for CrossWinds Church. It will begin with a summary of the preferred future which is a high-level overview of the strategy itself. Then, it will outline the goals for the strategy and touch on three areas of learning: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The next portion of the discussion will address the strategic content that includes four main modules: a discipleship series called the “Knowing Series”; a seminary-type learning experience called the “Going Deeper Series”; a customizable, online spiritual growth dashboard called Monvee; and, a one-on-one mentoring module. Finally, the target population will be described as it pertains to the roll-out strategy followed by a brief discussion of my role as the spiritual formation pastor.

Theological Conclusions Underpinning Spiritual Formation Modules at CrossWinds Church

A summary of the theological conclusions gleaned from the investigation in this paper sheds light on the essential elements that are needed for a new discipleship strategy.
Given what has been presented, three theological conclusions can be surmised. First, since discipleship is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor, it requires an organic and personalized approach. Second, discipleship entails a process or spiritual pathway which teaches people how to follow Christ in a way that transforms earthly existence into a life of significance. Finally, discipleship begins with the teaching of the foundational truths of Christ, which need to be adhered to in order to facilitate an effective discipleship strategy for CrossWinds Church.

As has been pointed out in both Parts One and Two of this project, discipleship requires an organic and personalized approach. Given the diverse population of the CrossWinds congregation, both in the combination of Boomers and Busters in attendance as well as the varied cultural backgrounds present in the Tri-Valley, there simply cannot be one method of discipling individuals. Great past and present thinkers in the area of discipleship, such as Benedict and Ortberg understand this and advocate for diverse discipleship methods in order to account for the uniqueness of the individual. While Benedict encouraged looking at the unique needs of an individual in order to motivate one toward growth, Ortberg took this a step further by encouraging leaders and individuals to consider their personal learning style, life stage, and level of spiritual maturity when crafting a growth plan. Moreover, biblical investigation reveals that Jesus used unique discipleship approaches when dealing with people. He modeled that effective discipleship is tailor-made and not mass-produced.¹

This is in line with what expert educators say about effective teaching and what is required to bring about true learning. Research done by Rita Dunn et al. at St. John’s

¹ See Part Two of this discussion for details.
University suggests that students whose learning styles are accommodated would be expected to achieve 75 percent of a standard deviation higher than students who have not had their learning styles accommodated. This finding indicates that matching students’ learning-style preferences with educational interventions compatible with those preferences is beneficial to their academic achievement. This means that when learning styles are taken into consideration, students are able to absorb and retain more information. This shows that a plethora of learning options within a discipleship method is something that must be considered, if a strategy is to be effective.

This is impactful. If people recognize that there is more than one way to grow spiritually, they might be more willing to engage in a growth process. Moreover, as they experience a strategy in which true learning takes place, their hunger and thirst for growth will be fueled rather than frustrated by methods and practices that do not make sense to them. This renewed fervor for spiritual growth and learning represents the preferred future for both the Boomers and Busters of the East Bay Area as well as those who are to come through the doors of CrossWinds Church.

The second theological conclusion is that discipleship entails a process or spiritual pathway which teaches people how to follow Christ in a way that transforms earthly existence into a life of significance. Significance is not just about fulfilling an individual purpose or calling; but, as pointed out in Part Two, it is about experiencing internal transformation so that one can live out the two greatest commandments given by God—loving Him with all of one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength and loving others as one loves

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oneself (cf. Mark 12:29-31). In addition to loving God and others, as one engages in a growth process, the fruits of the Spirit are made manifest in the individual through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, thus producing Christ-like character (cf. Galatians 5:22).

The ability to love and to display radical Christ-like character is a supernatural work that takes place as one engages in the growth process by following a spiritual pathway and by participating in spiritual disciplines. As described in Part Two, spiritual pathways are mediums by which people best relate to God so they can draw near to Him.\(^3\) Spiritual disciplines are similar in that they are practices that invite the Holy Spirit into the life of the believer in order to transform and give life to a new internal character—the new “possible” nature of what a person can be under the direction of Christ.\(^4\) As individuals follow their pathway and engage in disciplines that help them grow, their lives are aligned with the purposes of God.\(^5\) Also referenced in Part Two, the impact of engaging in a pathway and discipline is called “soaring.” Soaring is the “more” of Christianity. This is the higher way some connect with God in order to bring about sanctification within the Christian life.\(^6\) This higher Christian life requires that there are tools present or a process in place that helps people discover their God-given position within the Church, acknowledge and deploy their gifts, as well as help disciples see their role within the rule of God.\(^7\)

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3 Thomas, *Spiritual Pathways*, 16.


5 Ibid.

6 McClendon, *Doctrine: Systematic Theology*, 137.

7 Ibid., 144.
Moreover, built into this idea of soaring is the aspect of community. Individuals who soar in their spiritual lives must choose community in order to do so. True disciples do not grow in isolation but flourish within the Body of Christ among other believers. As pointed out in the literature review, one way to purposefully choose community is by allowing the Church to serve as a mentor. This is done when disciples submit themselves to the discipleship process that is in place at their local church. As also pointed out in the literature review, individuals can select a mentor or spiritual director to act as a sounding board by helping them process biblical truths and apply them to everyday life. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, this also is done as individuals within the Body of Christ act as priests to one another. As the priesthood of believers serves one another, they not only build one another up in their faith but also provide a context in which people can learn as they process biblical truth together.

The impact of this kind of Christian soaring should be a community of believers who are magnetic, enthusiastic, and energized about their faith. They are individuals who remain aware of God’s vision for their life and are able to live out that vision within the context of the local body of believers. As the body learns and processes together, members collectively discern as a church the unique vision to which God is calling them in their unique ministry context. If God’s future and vision live among His people, then “soaring” is proof that people actively seek to live transformed lives as the intentional Body of Christ. This is how a church becomes a “city on a hill” that radiates Christ’s love and light to the world (cf. Matthew 5:14).
The last theological conclusion refers back to the importance of teaching and processing biblical truth. Essential discipleship begins with the teaching of the foundational truths of Christ, also known as catechesis. As pointed out with the woman at the well, Jesus served as a spiritual coach to her by challenging her Samarian understanding of worship and Messianic salvation and by progressively revealing truths about Him in an effort to draw her into a true relationship. He did the same thing with Nicodemus, the Pharisee. Jesus sought to enlighten his understanding of eternal life by engaging him in dialogue over what it meant to be born again. In both cases, Jesus was laying foundational teachings on which each individual could believe in Him and build their faith. He did this for both the newer (woman at the well) and seasoned (Nicodemus) believer and catered His approach accordingly. This demonstrates that catechesis is not just for new believers but for leaders and learned believers as well. Through effective coaching, Jesus also reinforces that teaching and discipleship do not fit a one-size-fits-all category but embrace an approach based on the unique needs of the individual.

The impact of resurgence in catechesis within the discipleship process can bring about monumental change within the lives of believers and within CrossWinds Church. A catechetical process can help curb current biblical ignorance that is prevalent among believers, which leads to immature faith and faulty belief systems. It also can empower people be able to articulate the foundational truths of what they believe with an eye toward being able to share the foundational truths of their faith with others, either through mentoring or evangelism. In addition, if CrossWinds Christians truly understand the basic tenets of their faith, they might be more inclined to take the privilege and responsibility
of spiritual growth more seriously and seek to more actively cultivate their relationships with Christ to bring about internal transformation.

**Overview of Strategy**

Based on what has been argued in this project, it is evident that a new discipleship strategy must be employed in order to meet the spiritual growth needs of the congregation of CrossWinds Church. This preferred future utilizes customizable learning modules that produce transformative growth toward Christ-like character. These modules will include certain components based on the arguments offered thus far in the paper. First, by even offering the strategy, the church will serve as a coach to provide structure and opportunity for spiritual growth. The discipleship strategy will focus on offering four basic customizable modules. The first module is a series of new catechism classes called the “Knowing Series.” This series offers classes about core foundational beliefs and truths, basic spiritual disciplines, and an introduction to spiritual gifts. Classes may be customized in that they may be taken in any order and with any frequency given where individuals are on their spiritual journey.

From each of these growth classes, an opportunity will be given to each individual to engage in an additional, customizable learning module called “Monvee.” Monvee is an online, spiritual growth assessment tool which helps individuals to build a spiritual growth plan based on their spiritual pathway and learning style. Within this online spiritual growth plan, participants can pick and choose Monvee-suggested growth opportunities that fit personal life stage and time allotments. In addition to the core catechism classes and Monvee, additional classes on spiritual disciplines and deeper
spiritual issues will be offered in a third module called the “Going Deeper Series.” These classes provide a pseudo-seminary experience with the goal of challenging and informing people’s faith and knowledge of God in order to provide ongoing momentum toward growth. The fourth and last module is a coaching/discipleship module that gives each person the opportunity to be personally discipled through any or all of the previous modules in order to provide accountability and promote adherence to key truths.

Taken together, these modules not only introduce people to Christ but also provide a structure and process so that they can continue in their spiritual growth post-conversion. They also make available modes for learning that are adjustable depending on a person’s age, time allotment, life stage, spiritual pathway, and learning style. Participants can engage in one module or all at the same time. The goal is for each individual to take full advantage of all of the resources by moving through all of the Knowing Series classes and progressing into the Going Deeper classes with the guide of a discipleship coach. Ideally, this coach also will help to fashion the participant’s Monvee growth plan. Additionally, coaches will walk alongside disciples as they move in and out of other growth modules.

**Strategic Goals for Discipleship Learning Modules**

The learning modules outlined above make up the strategic elements of the new discipleship plan for CrossWinds Church. Taken as a whole, these modules will be implemented with the hope of achieving specific learning goals for the congregation of CrossWinds. The goals encompass three areas of learning: cognitive, affective, and behavioral. The cognitive goal focuses on specific knowledge or understanding that an individual will gain by engaging in the discipleship process. The affective goal reflects a
specific attitude or behavioral mindset that individuals will have an opportunity to embrace as they walk through the process. The behavioral goal reflects the actual change in attitude, action, and practice that is desired as a result of engagement with the strategy. The collective and expected result of the learning goals is that individuals will undergo personal transformation and experience increased satisfaction with regard to their spiritual growth process.

Cognitive Goal: Understanding and Internalizing the Significance of Spiritual Growth

As has been previously stated in this paper, the area of discipleship and spiritual growth has not been a priority among Baptists and CrossWinds in particular. It has been treated as an optional endeavor even though it ranks as God’s top priority. Jesus Himself practiced discipleship, He commanded His disciples to do it, and His followers continued it.\(^8\) CrossWinds is not alone in this deficiency. Willard makes the following comment regarding discipleship in the West:

> For at least several decades, the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian. One is not required to be, or to intend to be, a disciple in order to become a Christian, and one may remain a Christian without any signs of progress toward or in discipleship. . . . So far as the visible Christian institutions of our day are concerned, discipleship clearly is optional.\(^9\)

Most of CrossWinds’ history involves an emphasis on evangelism through the Sunday morning, seeker-sensitive venue. This has led to a lack of emphasis on ongoing discipleship efforts. In this kind of context, it is easy to remain a passive participant without understanding that God has intentioned more for the Christian life than just going

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to church and watching a service. Consequently, the cognitive goal for this strategy is for each individual who participates in the learning modules to understand and internalize the importance of spiritual growth. This entails understanding that spiritual growth is not an optional endeavor in the process of following Christ; rather, it is the goal in following Christ. Internalizing this truth means that participants in the strategy will learn to make spiritual growth a personal goal in their relationship with God.

This internalization happens as people become engaged in the transformation of their minds so that they will “no longer conform to the pattern of the world” but be driven toward behavior that will spur individual growth (Romans 12:2). Individuals who recognize that God has intentioned more for their lives than just church attendance pursue supplemental means of connecting with God as well as additional avenues for discipleship. In this regard, this new knowledge encourages individuals to demonstrate pro-active behavior with regard to spiritual growth practices that hopefully will result in Christ-like character.

Affective Goal: Taking Responsibility for Spiritual Growth

The affective goal relates to the cognitive goal. Once individuals internalize and understand the significance of spiritual growth, the hope is that this understanding will drive future behavior. Influenced by the cognitive goal, individuals will begin to be motivated by the actual experience of effective discipleship and spiritual growth. Their creative interest in the process will be sparked, moving them away from assumptions that there are only certain ways to grow spiritually.

Within the proposed model, individuals are encouraged to pursue their relationship with God based on how He has uniquely wired them to learn and grow. Once individuals
experience the kind of revitalization that a uniquely designed spiritual growth strategy can produce, attitudes toward growth will be transformed from being optional practices to practices that are vital to sustaining spiritual health and vitality in the life of a believer. People’s experience of intimacy with God and personal growth in their lives will serve as an impetus to continue being intentional about discovering and engaging in growth practices. By engaging in ongoing spiritual growth experiences, participants will display through their actions any fruit from this new discipleship strategy. Essentially, new attitudes will lead them step by step to take personal responsibility for their spiritual growth.

Behavioral: Exhibiting the Characteristics of Christ-like Character

The final goal for the new discipleship strategy is the behavioral goal or the experiential aspect of the ministry project. The behavioral goals are related to exhibiting Christ-like character in the life the believer. Christ-like character first and foremost can be demonstrated in the act of obedience. Just as Jesus was obedient to His Father, Jesus taught His disciples to be obedient to Him by doing everything He commanded. He commanded 212 things, which are summed up in three statements. The three statements are to love God with all of one’s heart, mind, soul, and strength; to love one’s neighbor as oneself; and, to love one’s enemies.10 As people submit to Christ in obedience and as they experience transformation, their love of God, neighbor, and enemy should become more apparent in their life as believers.

In addition to displaying genuine love for God, neighbor, and enemies, the behavioral goal of discipleship is a desire to imitate Christ and display His characteristics.

10 Ibid., 30.
This often is cited as one of the primary goals of discipleship. While human beings cannot fully imitate Christ in all that He did on earth, they can exhibit the same characteristics as Christ. These characteristics are called the fruits of the Spirit and are listed in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

An effective discipleship strategy, then, is one that informs and helps renew the mind by helping individuals understand and internalize the significance of spiritual growth. This renewal then motivates and drives people to take personal responsibility for their spiritual growth. This results in individuals becoming true disciples who more fully love and display Christ-like characteristics in their day-to-day lives.

Through the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, these learning goals primarily will be fulfilled as individuals participate together in interactive and lecture-based classes that facilitate dialogue and discussion over catechetical content. The pedagogy that supports this type of learning is found in the work of Jane Vella. Vella’s conclusion with regard to affectively teaching adults is that the best way to invite energy and excitement around a topic is to encourage and facilitate discussion and participation. This approach is called “Dialogue Education.” Dialogue Education encourages individuals to actively engage with the content they are learning rather than solely depend on the instructor for their understanding.

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11 Ibid., 114.


13 Ibid.
learning. Consequently, it switches the focus from what the instructor says about a topic to what the participants do with the content to demonstrate their learning. As individuals dialogue and discuss what they have learned and immediately apply it in their current situations, they are able to assess whether or not the content is effective at bringing about new knowledge, skills, or attitudes. In this way, this form of learning is helpful in assessing whether or not individuals are experiencing spiritual transformation as a result of participating in the spiritual growth strategy.

**Content of the Strategic Action Plan**

The content of the strategic action plan is designed to provide an environment in which the learning goals can be articulated and fulfilled. Implementation of the strategic action plan is my personal responsibility as the spiritual formation pastor of CrossWinds Church. It should be noted that this department, along with the growth modules, is strictly focused on the individual and does not reflect a primary emphasis on community or small groups. This is not to say that community and small groups are not a priority in bringing about spiritual growth; however, there is a separate department at CrossWinds that focuses on community and small group ministry. While CrossWinds’ philosophy of ministry advocates spiritual growth and transformation through community and groups, senior leaders recognized that there were no tools or resources being offered to help people grow on their own and in their own time. Growth options were limited to being involved in a small group without regard to other more personal options for growth.

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14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
In response to this challenge, the Spiritual Formation Department was launched in January 2011. As part of the departmental launch, I focused on resourcing individuals and crafting this strategy. The plan involves four customizable learning modules. The first module is the Knowing Series, which comprises core, catechetical teachings and practices that are foundational to the Christian faith. Within this module, individuals can pick and choose the basic curriculum they would like to engage in based on where they are in their spiritual journey. The second module is Monvee, which is a spiritual growth assessment tool that helps individuals construct a customizable spiritual growth strategy that they can track and follow online. The third module is Going Deeper: the seminary-style course series designed to inform, challenge, and inspire people to walk with God wholeheartedly. Individuals can select classes that peak their curiosity based on their various passions and interests. The last module is personal mentoring, which provides participants with personalized guidance and coaching through the spiritual growth process. Each component is designed to provide intentional activities that people do on their own in an effort to breed personal ownership and responsibility for their spiritual formation in Christ.

A New Catechism through the Knowing Series: God, Disciplines, and Design

As the first module in this strategy, the purpose of the Knowing Series is to offer a new kind of catechism that provides core Christian tenets to individuals at various stages of their spiritual journey. It contains three classes that deliver core curriculum and content with regard to being a Christ follower at CrossWinds Church. These are the
classes that the senior leadership of CrossWinds has deemed to be essential and foundational for every believer in the congregation. The three classes revolve around the themes of God, spiritual disciplines, and the unique gifting and design of each believer. The series is offered three times per year and is taught by various pastors on the CrossWinds staff. The primary responsibility and role of individual participants in the Knowing Series is to discover who God is, where they are in their spiritual growth, and to take the next step that will propel them forward in their relationship with God.

This module is contextually sensitive in that it provides consecutive opportunities for seekers, new believers, and seasoned Christians. Depending on where participants are in their faith, they can take the appropriate class which then will catapult them into the next step in their spiritual growth. The range of class offerings does not presuppose that everyone is at the same place in their spiritual journey but accounts for the variance by offering classes in both core beliefs and practices. For example, the core truths examined in “Knowing CrossWinds” are critical for those who are seekers or new believers. More seasoned believers might not need to attend that class but might not ever have had the opportunity to explore their gifts or learn about spiritual disciplines. Since classes are offered multiple times per year and on different days each time, it helps account for individual schedules and availability. Each class mixes teaching, discussion, and dialogue in order to account for different learning styles. While individuals are encouraged to make their way through all of the classes, they can customize the order in which the classes are taken and do not have to take them all based on where they are in their journey.
“Knowing CrossWinds”

The first class in the Knowing Series is a class called “Knowing CrossWinds.” It is primarily for people who are new to CrossWinds and the Christian faith. It is also appropriate for seekers who are exploring the church and who might be interested in knowing about a relationship with God. This class is co-taught by the associate teaching pastor and me. The content of the class includes a brief history of CrossWinds Church, an explanation of the church’s mission statement, core theological truths upheld by the church, how and why CrossWinds has chosen to provide a seeker-sensitive environment, and the four main environments where people can experience consistent spiritual growth within the congregation. The four main spiritual growth environments consist of the Sunday morning service, small groups, service in the church and community, and spiritual growth options offered by the Spiritual Formation Department (the four learning modules contained in this strategy).

While all of the information is important for seekers and new believers to hear, the bulk of the time is spent reviewing the core theological truths that are upheld by the church. This is done in two ways. First, as part of the general explanation of the identity of CrossWinds Church, the pastors read and explain a list of core belief statements entitled “What We Believe.” This includes key declarations about the sovereignty of God, the authority of Scripture, the nature of man, and the saving grace of Christ. These tenets are presented as non-negotiable with regard to the Christian faith. They are also presented as the foundation of belief for Christians at CrossWinds.

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Once these concepts are explained in terms of how they play out in a relationship with Christ, participants are given the opportunity to pray and receive Christ. After the prayer, a scriptural basis for baptism is given followed by an open invitation to the class to participate in the next baptism event. As part of the conclusion of the class, participants are asked to fill out a “Next Steps” form, indicating what next step they would like to take in their spiritual journey at CrossWinds. At this point, special attention is given to encouraging individuals to participate in the learning modules. Within this explanation, the next three classes in the Knowing Series are explained. The Monvee module is outlined verbally, and the mentoring module is described in detail. Before participants leave this first Knowing class, they are asked to take the next step in their spiritual journey by committing to at least one of the learning modules. If individuals choose to attend another class in the Knowing Series, participate in Monvee, or enroll in a Going Deeper course, it is highly recommended that they make the mentoring module a non-negotiable so that there will be a mentor with them as they process key theological concepts and/or use Monvee to formulate a spiritual growth plan.

Once the detailed explanations are given, participants can either sign up to enroll in another Knowing Series classes, take the next series of Going Deeper classes, engage in the Monvee spiritual growth assessment, or sign up to participate in the mentoring module. They also can indicate whether or not they have accepted Christ for the first time or if they would like to be baptized at the next baptism event. For people who do not check a box, I will follow up with them within a week to see how I can help in a personalized process of moving forward in their spiritual search or Christian growth.
The impact of the Knowing CrossWinds class is that individuals are introduced to the growth components of the church. These components comprise the next steps that they can take in their spiritual growth. They also are introduced to key theological concepts that directly help to articulate what it means to have a relationship with Christ. Growth occurs as participants increase their understanding of what it means to be a part of the Body of Christ as well as what it means to have a personal relationship with Christ. For many seekers who attend, this is the first time they hear the gospel message presented in its entirety. It is also the first time they have been given an opportunity to pray and receive Christ. For believers who attend, they walk away feeling encouraged that the church has various avenues for their spiritual growth. Many also leave with a deeper understanding of the gospel message as it applies to their own faith journey.

“Knowing Spiritual Growth”

As the second class in the Knowing Series, “Knowing Spiritual Growth” is a three-week course designed to introduce individuals to basic spiritual disciplines and give them an opportunity to participate in the disciplines they have learned. It is taught by the Community Life pastor (small groups pastor), who has a desire to help new believers grow in their relationship with Christ. Richard J. Foster’s book, *Celebration of Discipline*, provides the basic explanation and purpose of each discipline. The four main disciplines outlined are prayer, meditation, worship, and fasting. The primary
responsibility and role of participants in this class is to engage in the disciplines and find one they would like to commit to practicing as part of their personal spiritual growth.\textsuperscript{17}

The first meeting focuses on the discipline of prayer. Prayer is explained as a means of communicating and listening to God, not manipulating God to get a desired outcome. Participants learn that it is the most central of the disciplines, because it brings a person into conversation with God Himself.\textsuperscript{18} Not only is it a way to communicate with God, but it is how God can transform an individual. Through prayer, individuals can begin to “think God’s thoughts after Him: to desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves, to will the things He wills.”\textsuperscript{19}

As a means of offering a guide for prayer, the Lord’s Prayer is used as a model for how to pray. In class, participants spend time reading through the prayer and discussing it line by line. The intent is to use this prayer as a means of ordering one’s prayer life. Homework for the week involves memorizing the Lord’s Prayer and praying it throughout the week. Participants are encouraged to keep a prayer journal of broad and specific requests as well as how they sense God is answering their prayers.

The second week focuses on meditation of Scripture. Meditation is presented as the ability to hear God’s voice and obey His Word. It involves listening to God’s Word, reflecting on God’s works, and thinking about His commands.\textsuperscript{20} As God’s truth is

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Richard J. Foster, \textit{Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth} (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998).
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 33.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 16.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 15.
\end{itemize}
meditated upon, it shapes how participants think, feel, and act. At the beginning of the class, participants begin with a prayer to ask the Holy Spirit to help them understand God’s truth as they read. As a group, they read through various Scriptures and are asked to write down any impressions or images of God that come to mind as they engage the text. Then they are asked to apply those impressions and images to their lives and share how they see God operating in their lives. Participants are encouraged to meditate on the Scriptures and images they discussed during class.

Their homework is to spend the next week reading through a psalm of their choice. First, they are to pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide them in their reading and then repeat the exercise that they did in class. As they record images and impressions they receive from Scripture, and then apply them to their lives, they are able to see how God might be speaking to them and moving and working around them. This type of scriptural meditation often yields insights that are practical for the living of everyday life, providing participants with greater perspective and balance.21

The second week also introduces participants to the discipline of worship. Worship is described as a “human response to a divine initiative”22 or as a heart response to who God is and what He has done in the life of a believer. With regard to worship, individuals are asked to dialogue about what they think worship is and how they worship God in their own lives. Then they read through Psalm 100 as an example of what worship

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21 Ibid., 22.

22 Ibid., 158.
looks like in Scripture. For their homework, they are encouraged to find similar passages that depict worship and use them as a model for worshipping God during the week.

The final discipline that is introduced during this second meeting is the discipline of fasting. It is explained briefly at the end of class. Fasting is defined for participants as abstaining from food for spiritual purposes.\(^{23}\) It requires giving up food for an allotted time in order to hear from God. During the time one normally would prepare and eat food, the individuals are encouraged to spend time with God using the disciplines learned thus far. Participants are instructed to engage in a twenty-four-hour fast prior to class the next week. They are to journal about their fast and bring it to class the following week. During their twenty-four-hour fast, participants are encouraged to drink water and fruit juice as a means of keeping up their energy. For those who have health and or medical issues that require them to eat on a regular basis, they are encouraged to fast from something else on which they depend. This may include abstention from the internet, watching television, or playing video games.

The last class focuses exclusively on the discipline of fasting. When individuals arrive, they are at the end of their twenty-four-hour fast. The class shares a meal together to break the fast, after which all are given an opportunity to share their experience. As individuals share, it is pointed out that often times fasting reveals controlling forces in a person’s life.\(^{24}\) Participants learn how fasting also clears away distractions and enables a person to hear from God regarding life direction and decision making. After everyone has

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 48.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 55.
had an opportunity to share about their fasting experience, the three-week class is concluded with prayer and an encouragement to continue in the disciplines. Students also are invited to take any of the other Knowing Series classes as well as participate in the Monvee learning module.

The intent of this class is to introduce participants to some basic spiritual disciplines. The desired outcome is for people to engage in spiritual disciplines, experience a renewed and deeper relationship with God, and become hungry for transformation. The work of producing inner righteousness and transformation does not belong to the individual. It is something that is solely God’s work and happens over time.\textsuperscript{25} Participants learn that the disciplines are a vehicle by which God often enters in and does His transforming work. Foster explains, “God has given the disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, by engaging in the disciplines that produce transformation, individuals can grow and become more like Christ as they practice the spiritual growth practices of Jesus.

**“Knowing Your Design”**

As the last class in the Knowing Series, “Knowing Your Design” is a four-hour intensive class that is taught by the pastor of Volunteerism. The purpose of this class is to help people understand spiritual gifts and discover their own gifting so they can rightly discern their role in the Body of Christ. The class is divided into three sections. The first

\begin{footnotes}
\item[25] Ibid., 6.
\item[26] Ibid., 7.
\end{footnotes}
section deals exclusively with defining spiritual gifts as described in Scripture (cf. Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:4-11; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:11). Participants learn that spiritual gifts are unique abilities possessed by Christians, with the purpose of building and strengthening fellow Christians and extending the influence of the Church to the community at large. These gifts are given by God to each person who possesses the Holy Spirit. Participants are guided to see themselves as a steward of God’s grace through their gifts and are led to understand that all have something to contribute in the entire life of the church. Within this explanation, attention also is given to which gifts are affirmed at CrossWinds, how each gift is used, and how the particular gift benefits the Body of Christ.

In the next section, participants are introduced to the concept of passion with the idea being that God gives to individuals distinct arenas of service that motivate them more than others. People’s passion is the area, or arena, where they feel most motivated to use their spiritual gift. Learning about the spiritual gift answers the “What?” question. Identifying the passion answers the “Where?” questions: “Where shall I use my gifts?” “Where do I feel most motivated to serve?” and “Where do I sense a calling or an attraction?”

The last section deals with practical matters. Participants are offered the opportunity to take a spiritual gift inventory that helps them determine their top three spiritual gifts. They also are given a passion questionnaire that aids them in assessing

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27 Ogden, Discipleship Essentials, 189.

what their areas of passion might be. At this point in the class, the director of Volunteerism brings in a team of individuals who sit down with participants in the class to help them determine what ministry in the church might be a good fit, given their gifting and passion. At the conclusion of the class, participants are able to identify their spiritual gift, area of passion, and area of ministry at CrossWinds that might help them deploy their gifts. As a means of helping individuals continue to take next steps toward growth, students also are invited to take any of the other Knowing Series classes as well as to participate in the Monvee learning module.

The impact of this class is that participants are given the opportunity to discover and deploy their gifts. They are provided with information, insight, and guidance in order to learn how to serve in the Body of Christ in the way that God has uniquely wired them to serve. As individuals make strides in obedience and submission to what God has called them to do, they are inspired to serve others more readily and put themselves into a position where God can use and transform them as they submit in obedience to Him.

Monvee: Customizable Online Spiritual Growth Tool

The second learning module in the discipleship strategy is the Monvee online spiritual growth tool. This module is introduced during all three Knowing Series classes as a means of taking a next step toward growth. Monvee exists in order to help people discover what is getting in the way of their spiritual growth and then to craft a plan to address it. Monvee combines solid theology with innovative technology to deliver a tool that connects people with resources, ways to spend their time, powerful experiences,

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and relational connections that fit the unique way God has designed them to grow.\textsuperscript{30} It originally was created and inspired by Ortberg as a means of helping individuals hone in on their unique way to connect with God. In order to assist individuals in this task, Monvee has created two components that are to be used together: the spiritual growth assessment tool and the online, customizable spiritual growth plan.

First, Monvee is an online spiritual growth assessment tool. Individuals log on to Monvee with a special access code which is given to them by their church.\textsuperscript{31} This access code takes them to a visually based assessment tool. The assessment gives a series of statements regarding current spiritual growth practices and currently held beliefs. Under each statement are a series of pictures. Individuals are asked to choose a picture that best describes them based on how they feel about the statement. Based on the responses, the assessment tool compiles a snapshot of the individual that includes a depiction of the individual’s personality, learning style, primary spiritual growth pathway to God, and the likely spiritual inhibitor that gets in the way of spiritual growth.

Once individuals complete the assessment, they are able to purchase a Monvee pack that enables them to craft a spiritual growth plan based on their personality, learning style, and primary spiritual pathway. The Monvee packs are available directly from the Monvee website and cost $19.99 each.\textsuperscript{32} Once individuals purchase a pack and create an account with Monvee, they are taken to an online dashboard where they can create their

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} CrossWinds pays $199 per month in order to have unlimited distribution of the access code.

\textsuperscript{32} Monvee, “Monvee Resources,” http://shop.monvee.com/collections/frontpage (accessed July, 26, 2011). The price of the Monvee pack gives individuals lifetime access to the Monvee website. There is no monthly fee once the initial payment for the pack has been paid.
own spiritual growth plan. There are four components of each plan: “My Mind” (resources that fuel knowledge such as books, podcasts, and videos), “My Time” (ways for participants to spend their time that will foster spiritual growth), “My Relationships” (small groups, accountability partner, mentor, and family), and “My Experiences” (serving in the church, missions, sharing one’s faith). Based on the individual’s unique assessment, Monvee offers several options in each category that likely will help the individual grow spiritually. Participants pick one option in each category and commit to engaging in it as part of their spiritual growth plan.

In addition to Monvee-generated resources, churches who partner with Monvee are able to add their own resources and available options in order to further customize growth options for individuals in their congregation. Monvee churches are encouraged to upload resources, books, small group curriculum, small groups, serving opportunities, so that individuals can select opportunities that are available through their local church. As options are completed, individuals continue to receive ongoing, targeted suggestions for growth from the Monvee global library. Churches also can update their suggestions at any time throughout the ministry year.

Once the growth plan is designed, individuals then can log on to their dashboard each day and track their progress in each area of growth. They also can follow their church’s blog, receive daily devotionals, get a Bible verse for the day, download a free

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34 Ibid. Monvee churches pay an additional fee in order to be able to include their own resources among the Monvee options. For CrossWinds, this initial set up fee was $971.75 billed and was paid on June 10, 2010.
book, or update/change their plan at any time. Once individuals feel like they have outgrown their plan, they can retake the assessment and create a new plan at any time. The goal is to always have a plan that accurately reflects the unique wiring of the individual.

This tool is contextually sensitive in that it provides individuals with options to grow based on who they are, where they are spiritually, and how they learn. As noted above, individuals choose from options that maximize their growth based on their unique wiring. They also can choose options that are appropriate for where they are spiritually. The tool is convenient and can be used at any time. Since it is web-based, progress can be tracked from any computer. For example, a single or working mother might not have time to attend a small group, but she can log on to Monvee and engage in other practices or activities that can help her stay connected with God in the absence of a small group option. If her schedule opens up at some point, she can opt into a small group given the Monvee and church’s suggestions. Given these points, Monvee is a highly customizable tool that provides for the maximum growth of the individual.

Going Deeper Series: A Pseudo-Seminary Experience

The third module in the customizable spiritual growth strategy is the Going Deeper Series. This series is comprised of seminar-style courses that dive deep into spiritual topics, issues, and practices. The classes offer a pseudo-seminary experience by providing strong academic content in a wide variety of subject matter such as church history, apologetics, science and faith, biblical Hebrew and Greek, and the like. The classes are designed to challenge, inform, and inspire thinking about God that will engage

\[35\] Ibid.
the pupil in a deeper experience with Him. Classes range anywhere from four to six
weeks and, based on the teacher, may or may not include homework assignments.
Students can take as many classes as they desire. This module offers a variety of topics to
account for the varied interests of the congregation.

Classes are grouped in a series that follow the academic calendar year: fall, winter, spring, and summer. Each series of classes is unique and depends upon who is available to teach at any given time. Each class is distinct with regard to its strategy and purpose. Before a class can be admitted into the Going Deeper course catalog for a particular season, instructors first must be approved by me. The requirements for being approved are that the individual have the gift of teaching, possess passion and experience with the subject matter, and display an active and growing relationship with God. Once they are approved, teachers provide a syllabus for their class that includes a course description, learning outcomes, format, schedule, and suggested reading.

The purpose of each class is to provide learning outcomes that foster spiritual growth. Although learning outcomes differ from class to class, there is a basic framework that governs them. The outcomes are to be categorized in terms of providing a “knowing” outcome, an “experience” outcome, and a “doing” outcome. In other words, the goal is not just to provide informative content but also to help individuals experience the content in a way that will engage them in a spiritual practice related to the subject matter. For example, if one of the classes is on an introduction to the basics of spiritual formation, the learning outcomes might look like this: “knowing outcome,” to acquire a foundational knowledge of the language of spiritual formation to better frame the experience of the
spiritual life; “experience outcome,” to develop an initial sense of companionship with other class members on the lifelong journey of spiritual formation; “doing outcome,” to metabolize the content of the class into our souls by beginning one of the spiritual disciplines talked about in class. The impact of structuring the learning goals in this way is for individuals to be exposed to information that can renew the mind and breed an environment that invites transformation and growth. The learning goals also help individuals experience that content by engaging in spiritual practices that can bring about continued growth and transformation.

Through these varied classes, people start to transform through this combination of knowledge, experience, and spiritual practice. The varied subject matter of the classes brings in a wide variety of people based on their interests. The hope is that the series will not just cater to people who are academically inclined but to anyone who has an interest in the subject matter. This is why the subject matter must offer a wide variety of choices. The intent is that through the various topics offered, participants will be exposed to modules that will help them grow in their spiritual journey. Classes are short enough that a variety can be taken in a single season. They are offered on different days and times to account for schedules. In these ways, the modules remain contextually sensitive to the needs of the CrossWinds congregation.

Personal Mentoring: The Relational Approach

“Personal Mentoring” is the fourth component in the spiritual growth strategy. While all of the other modules provide resources to engage the individual on an

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36 These outcomes are from Jim Matthews, “Introduction to Spiritual Formation” (course, CrossWinds Church, Dublin, CA, January 2011).
individual level, this module adds a more relational component. Personal mentoring is
designed to provide guidance and accountability to anyone who is moving through the
various other modules of the discipleship strategy. The mentoring module is explained in
each Knowing and Going Deeper class. It also is explained in detail to anyone requesting
a Monvee access code. In all cases, the mentoring relationship is presented as a necessary
ingredient in helping to facilitate personal spiritual growth.

In order to obtain a mentor, individuals fill out an application indicating key
things about themselves such as age, gender, life stage, interests, and current life
challenge. They submit it to me, and then I match individuals with a seasoned believer
who shares some of the same affinities listed above. An introduction is made, and the two
schedule their first meeting. After three meetings, the mentor and mentee decide if their
match will work. If so, they both enter into a formal agreement that they will commit to
meet for a period of six months. They agree to a time and place to meet each week and
begin their formal meetings.

The content of the meeting depends upon the mentee. Ideally, the mentee will
learn about core truths as well as participate in spiritual practices that guide growth. The
purpose of the mentor/mentee relationship is for the mentor to provide accountability and
encouragement to mentees as they are exposed to the truth about God and themselves.
This includes holding the mentee accountable to commitments made (such as attending a
class or completing the Monvee assessment) as well as acting as a sounding board for any
questions that might come up in the course of engaging with the learning modules.
Covering content is not enough. While getting answers to questions is helpful, the content itself is a vehicle that helps bring about a transparent relationship. The impact of the mentor/mentee relationship is that it invites transformation. As the mentor and mentee dialogue about spiritual issues, there is an opportunity for both to be vulnerable and transparent with regard to life issues and struggles. This kind of self-disclosure is integral to transformation.\(^{37}\) Transformation occurs when people grapple with the truth of God’s Word in the context of relationships. It is a biblical truth that the Holy Spirit will have free sway in the life of a person to the extent that people make themselves vulnerable to one another.\(^{38}\) Openly admitting struggles and areas of weakness to another person gives the Spirit of God the opportunity to intervene and bring about a life-changing work. In this way, the relationship is beneficial for both the mentee as well as the mentor. While seasoned believers might not feel the need to procure a mentor for themselves, they still can engage in growth by serving as a mentor to a newer Christ follower.

The Collaborative Nature of the Learning Modules

Taken together, the four learning modules provide a contextually sensitive learning environment for the people of CrossWinds Church. Given the varied nature of the modules, they are suitable for seekers, new believers, and seasoned Christians. Although it is suggested for people to make their way through the Knowing Series, Going Deeper Series, and Monvee modules with the assistance of a mentor, individuals can pick and choose to mix and match the modules depending on where they are in their spiritual

\(^{37}\) Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 11.

\(^{38}\) Ibid., 10.
journey, time allotment, learning style, and interests. The Monvee module, in particular, offers a tech-savvy option for those who are inclined to work with computers while the discipleship module is better suited to those who prefer a more relational approach to discipleship.

The key ingredient in this strategy is choice. This strategy does not present a one-size-fits-all solution to spiritual growth but offers a menu of options that can be customized while still moving the individual forward in growth. As discussed in Chapter 1, flexibility, customization, and choice are necessary characteristics in a growth strategy for the congregation of CrossWinds Church.

**Leadership and Target Population**

This last section briefly addresses the people resources for this discipleship project. While the growth strategy is intended for the entire population of CrossWinds Church, the project itself will be extended among two different groups as a means to this end. The first group encompasses key leaders with an interest in discipleship and formation who will serve as mentors for the mentoring module of the strategy. The second group is a focus group that will participate in the pilot and then provide feedback to help refine the strategy before it is launched to the entire church congregation. The purpose of these two groups is for them to participate in the strategy and then provide feedback to ensure that the strategy meets its learning goals before it is launched to the CrossWinds congregation at large.

**Stage One: Key Leaders with an Interest in Discipleship and Formation**

In order to provide leadership and insight for the pilot project, a group of leaders who have a desire and passion for discipleship and spiritual formation will be selected to
participate in the pilot. These leaders will serve as the mentors for the discipleship module and will work to provide feedback on the modules once the pilot project is over. These leaders will be chosen based on their passion and desire to see others grow in Christ. This is evidenced by their ongoing and active engagement in intentional discipling relationships with others in the church body.

The leaders will be selected through a collaborative process between me and the Community Life pastor. The CrossWinds database contains a list of over two hundred leaders who have been involved in leading small groups, church events, and service projects. Individuals will be hand-picked by me and the Community Life pastor who oversees all of the small groups, events, and projects at the church. Based on our combined personal knowledge of the leaders’ spiritual maturity, gifting, and passion for discipleship and formation, individuals will be selected to participate in leading the project. Once individuals are selected they will be invited to attend a vision-casting meeting for the strategy in order to see if they would like to participate.

Stage Two: Dual-Demographic, Forty-Person Focus Group

The strategy must be effective for both Baby Boomers as well as Busters. For this reason, forty people spanning across both demographics will be selected for the focus group and will be solicited to participate in a pilot project. As noted in Chapter 1, CrossWinds is a church that ministers to both Baby Boomers and Busters, with a focus now leaning toward the Busters. In order to adopt a discipleship strategy that will serve both populations, the focus group must include enough of both age groups in order to test the strategy for its value in each group. Consequently, the focus group will be divided
into two age groups: people who are twenty to forty years old and people who are forty years and older.

The Community Life pastor and I, both of whom have ample knowledge of participants in the congregation, will select individuals for each group. In addition to age, there are other key factors in determining who will be invited to participate. These include the level of desire to grow spiritually and the level of commitment to previous programs. In terms of a desire to grow spiritually, we will select both individuals who have stagnated in their spiritual growth as well as individuals who feel like they are already growing. The reason for this is due to the strategy’s twofold purpose and design: to help individuals who feel like they do not know or cannot take the next step in their growth and to help these and other individuals to maintain momentum in that growth once it starts. In addition to this, only people who have demonstrated a commitment to previous church programs will be asked to participate. This is to ensure that a commitment will be kept throughout the entire pilot project and that individuals will not drop out halfway through the experience.

Stage Three: Church Congregation

The overall intention of this strategy is to help facilitate the spiritual growth effort throughout CrossWinds Church. Ultimately, the strategy will be launched to the CrossWinds congregation. Once the leadership team has walked the pilot group through the project and has received feedback, necessary revisions will be made to the strategy. It then will be launched on a larger scale to the entire church.

It is important to note that since CrossWinds is a seeker-sensitive church, it is likely that many individuals might be intimidated by the options or not feel ready for the
process. However, vision will be cast in terms of the benefits that participation in the strategy can bring. The benefits of spiritual growth, such as loving God and neighbor as well as personal transformation in terms of exhibiting the fruits of the Spirit, will be emphasized as a means of encouraging individuals to participate. People then will be advised to start at least with one module and move their way through the various components, possibly combining the four modules for maximum effectiveness. The overall goal of the launch will be to invite each person to commit to experiencing at least one of the modules.

The Role of the Spiritual Formation Pastor

Beyond the human resources already mentioned, the last human resource for this strategy is me, the Spiritual Formation pastor. I am responsible for two primary aspects of the project: training and implementation of the strategy and management of the overall endeavor. I am able to accomplish all of these aspects of my job serving twenty-five hours per week at the church.

A large part of my job involves training leaders to implement the various learning modules. This includes selecting leaders, interviewing them, assessing their strengths, and training them for the module in which they will participate. In addition to training, I am also charged with overseeing, implementing, assessing, and refining the strategy at each phase as modules are completed and feedback is given.

In addition to the oversight of the strategy and training of leaders, additional responsibilities include managing various other aspects of the strategy. I am responsible for setting the budget for the initiative as well as managing the resources throughout the
fiscal year. Part of keeping budgetary costs down means procuring resources for the learning modules that might cost money such as soliciting food donations for classes that require food and securing volunteer staff to set up and break down so the church does not have to pay a facilities team to do the work. I also manage support staff for the various components of the strategy and work out logistics for the various classes within the modules. A large part of this pastoral role also includes communication of the strategy using various mediums such as stage announcements on Sunday mornings, website promotion, descriptive announcements in the weekly bulletin, and upscale print pieces. In essence, my role as pastor of Spiritual Formation is chief executive officer of the strategy.
CHAPTER 7
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

The final chapter of this paper presents the implementation of the pilot project, the portion of the discipleship strategy that integrates the three customizable discipleship modules. It also outlines the timeline of the project’s development, launch, refinement, and re-launch of the pilot for the congregation at large. Additionally, this chapter will introduce the leadership development strategy for all three modules and will highlight the specific leadership criteria needed for each one. It will address the issue of further resources that will be needed to support the healthy execution of the strategy. Finally, an evaluation process will be explored to shed light on the effectiveness of the overall strategic plan.

Overview of the Pilot Project

The pilot project for this discipleship strategy consists of a carefully selected dual-demographic focus group that will walk through three of the learning modules over a three-month period. The three learning modules include the Knowing Series, Monvee module, and the Going Deeper Series. Participants will be assigned a mentor (which is
the fourth module), who will walk through the modules with them in order to offer encouragement, support, and accountability. For seasoned believers who do not find it necessary to walk through the process with a mentor, they will be encouraged to go through mentor training prior to the pilot launch and to serve as a mentor to someone else in the focus group.

Before the focus group can begin participating in the pilot project, several action steps must be completed. First, the focus group is selected and invited to participate in the initial launch of the pilot. Along with the selection of the pilot group, the individual modules for the Knowing Series, Monvee, Going Deeper Series, and personal mentoring component will be developed. Following the development of the modules, the potential leaders for the various modules will need to be identified and trained so that they are ready for the pilot launch. Once the leaders are trained, the project will commence.

**Timeline**

The timeline for the pilot project covers a two-year time frame. Part of this pilot is already in progress at CrossWinds Church. During the summer of 2010, the pilot group was selected and three learning modules were developed: Knowing Series, Going Deeper Series, and Monvee. Once the three modules were completed, the leaders for each module were chosen and trained the following winter. The mentoring module is still in the process of being created. Mentors for the mentoring module will be trained once the module is finished. Once all modules are in place and the leaders for them trained, the pilot group will be launched in October 2011. The pilot modules will take three months to complete. Surveys and interviews will be used to evaluate the success of each module.
The data will be used to refine the modules during the following winter of 2011. The refined modules will be launched to the entire congregation during the fall of 2012.

Pilot Group Selected and Modules Developed:
June through December 2010

The first step in the pilot project timeline was selecting the focus group. The Community Life pastor and I, both of whom have strong relationships with many people in the congregation, hand-selected individuals for this group. Since this was a process that required much dialogue, it took three months to complete. First, we set weekly meetings to formulate a list of potential participants. We went through the list of candidates and talked in detail about what our thoughts and hesitations were for choosing each one. We prayed over each individual and asked for wisdom and discernment as we thought about each person on the list. After three months of dialogue and deliberation, we finalized the list of potential candidates.

The criteria for selecting the candidates were based on three things. First, the focus group was divided into two age groups: those twenty to forty years old and those forty and older. Based on this age criteria, the church’s database pulled a list of congregants that fit each demographic group. This is the list that we used to make our selections. In addition to age, two other factors also were considered: level of spiritual maturity and spiritual momentum. Within each group of twenty people, care was given to select individuals who were both newer to their faith as well as seasoned believers. Care also was given to choosing both individuals who demonstrated spiritual stagnation as well as momentum in their spiritual journey. Since one of the goals of the strategy is to instill the value of taking
initiative for one’s own spiritual growth, people who are stagnant in their walk can provide insight as to whether or not the strategy is effective at motivating them toward self-initiated growth. Those who are already taking this initiative prove helpful in assessing the modules in terms of how it propels individuals to take the next steps of growth.

In conjunction with choosing the pilot group, I also worked to develop the learning modules. Each learning module had a unique process. Since the Knowing Series makes up the core curriculum for CrossWinds attendees, it was determined by the executive pastor that each of the three classes in this module should be taught by a staff pastor. “Knowing CrossWinds” was to be team-taught by me and the associate teaching pastor, “Knowing Spiritual Growth” was assigned to the pastor of Community Life, and “Knowing Your Design” was assigned to the pastor of Volunteerism. It should be noted that the pastors assigned to each class have the spiritual gift of teaching as well as a passion for the content of their class.

In order to develop this module, I had an initial meeting with the other three pastors to talk about the content and purpose of their class. Since all are gifted teachers, liberty was given to each pastor to structure and design their class in accordance with their teaching style as long as the class contained the necessary content as outlined in Chapter 6. I met monthly with these pastors to review their progress regarding content as well as to discuss logistical needs, such as classroom setup and print pieces for each class. By the end of December 2010, each class was developed and the curriculum went to print.

The development of Monvee was a more automated process. Since Monvee is a module that is already created, the only development that needed to take place was to get
it ready to implement for the pilot group. Each church that decides to adopt the Monvee module is assigned something called a “Crew M partner” by the Monvee organization. The Crew M partner is responsible for three things: training churches in the use of Monvee assessment tool and dashboard, helping churches customize the module so it includes the church’s resources, and answering ongoing questions regarding the module.

The Crew M partner worked closely with me to get the module ready for launch. First, The Crew M partner hosted a one-hour webinar as part of my training. The webinar included a detailed overview of how to use the assessment tool and spiritual growth plan dashboard. It also provided a comprehensive overview of how to customize the module so that spiritual growth options also included resources from CrossWinds Church. During this webinar, additional resources were provided: all print pieces needed to promote the module, a leadership guide for implementation, and further training assets. All supplemental training pieces were available on a resource website hosted by Monvee.

After the webinar took place, I worked with my administrative assistant to input all of the appropriate CrossWinds resources into the Monvee module as well as print pieces ready for the launch. Once all of the CrossWinds resources were put into the Monvee module, the Crew M partner reviewed the resources and made suggestions for improvement via a detailed email. With his assistance, I was able to make the recommended changes in order to get the module ready for launch.

In order to develop the Going Deeper module, I sought the direction of one of the counselors who works in the CrossWinds Counseling Department. He is a licensed spiritual director who provided great insight into how to structure the Going Deeper
classes. Since the pilot group only will have three months to move in and out of the four modules, there will not be time for the group to go through an entire series of Going Deeper classes (three to four courses). So we worked to come up with a single Going Deeper class that embodied the purpose of the series, which is to challenge and inspire thinking about God as well as introduce individuals to spiritual disciplines. Over a one-month period, a class called “Introduction to Spiritual Formation” was developed.¹

The pilot class is a six-week course that includes an overview of spiritual formation as well as an introduction to three disciplines that will be practiced by the group. The responsibility for writing the curriculum and developing the exercises belonged to the spiritual director. Given his expertise, he was offered the liberty to design the class according to his teaching style and comfort level, as long as the content and experiences within met the objectives outlined in Chapter 6. Once the curriculum for the class was completed, the spiritual director and I met to review the content as well as discuss logistics for the class, including room setup, required class supplies, and needed print pieces. The class is currently ready to launch.

The last module, which is currently in the process of development, is the mentoring module. This module is harder to develop since it is not a class or an easily definable structure. This module heavily revolves around the relationship between two people. In order to figure out what the mentoring relationship might look like, I have been seeking the guidance of a woman in the congregation who was active in a discipleship ministry in her former church. She and I have been meeting twice a month during the summer of 2011 to flush out several aspects of the mentoring relationship.

¹ Matthews, “Introduction to Spiritual Formation.”
First, we determined that the mentor and mentee should be paired using a questionnaire that helps determine their compatibility. We came up with a questionnaire that accounted for affinities that might draw people to each other. Some examples of these include proximity (how close they live to each other), life stage, hobbies, past and current life challenges, and availability (days and times). Next, we determined that the mentoring relationship should last for a certain amount of time in order to give individuals a chance to get to know each other and to establish trust. The actual strategy designates that the mentoring relationship should last six months. Given the time constraints of the pilot project, the mentoring relationship only lasts the length of the project which is three months.

Finally, in order to ensure the commitment of both people, we determined that the mentor and mentee should sign an informal discipleship covenant. The covenant outlines the terms of the relationship, including the stipulation that the two meet weekly for approximately one hour, contribute openly and honestly to the relationship, and commit to prayer throughout the process. Once we decide what the general form of the relationship looks like, it will be tested for effectiveness in the pilot group. The details of these decisions still are being drafted and the necessary documents for each are being produced.

Leaders Chosen and Training Completed:
January through September 2011

Now that the pilot group had been chosen and most of the modules have been developed, the next step included selected and training leaders specifically for the discipleship module. This process is currently taking place. Again, the Community Life

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2 Since the Knowing Series was taught by staff pastors, there was no need for extra leadership in this module. The Going Deeper Series class was taught by the spiritual director in the Counseling Department, so
pastor and I selected potential leaders. We have decided on three criteria for choosing potential leaders: commitment to the church, ministry experience, and passion for discipleship.

In order to determine church commitment, we first pulled a list of long-time CrossWinds attendees who had been at the church for five years or more. Of this list, we were able to query the database to filter out those who were seasoned leaders, meaning they had multiple instances of leading small groups, church events, or service projects. We then sat down and selected leaders who we thought would be effective leaders in the pilot. After this, we made special note of individuals who had been or currently were involved in intentional discipling relationships. Those who demonstrate a history of discipleship were invited to attend a vision-casting meeting for the strategy.

The vision-casting meeting happened in September 2011. At the two-hour meeting, I presented a full vision of the strategy that included detailed descriptions of the learning modules. Careful attention was given to explaining the importance of the mentoring module. At the end of the meeting, the participants were asked to consider serving as mentors for the pilot project. Participants were given two weeks to ponder and pray over their involvement. After the two weeks, I followed up with each person. Those who agreed to participate then were invited to a training day in late September 2011.

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3 The Fellowship One database tracks what each person leads on a seasonal basis. It is possible to pull up a record on an individual and see everything that a person either has led or participated in over the last five years.
I personally led the training for this group. It consisted of a four-hour training that covered four essential areas: review of the learning modules, basic discipleship principles, importance of the questionnaire, and significance of the covenant. The training opened with a recap of the four learning modules along with an overview of the content for each module. Attention was given toward emphasizing the goals of each module so that the mentors can help ensure that those goals are being met for the mentee.

The second hour revolved around a basic explanation of the role of discipleship and its purposes. *Discipleship Essentials* by Greg Ogden was given to each leader as a help tool for the discipleship process. This book provides detailed insight on the role of the discipler as well as effective contexts for discipling. In addition, much of the material mentees encounter in the Knowing Series is contained within the book. It covers content such as key theological concepts, spiritual disciplines, what transformation looks like in the life of a believer, and ministry gifts. The mentors were instructed to use the book as a resource when questions arise. They even were encouraged to use the Bible study resources in the book in the event that the meeting time between mentor and mentee becomes stagnant. The mentors were advised to read the book prior to entering into the pilot project.

The mentors also will be given the contact information of the Crew M partner for Monvee. While the mentors are not expected to be Monvee experts, it is possible that their mentees might need to sit and review their spiritual growth plan with their mentor. The contact information is given so that at any point in the mentoring process, the mentor can have access to someone from Monvee who can answer questions or provide advice on how to maximize the effectiveness of the tool. The Crew M partner also serves as a
valuable resource to help troubleshoot in the event that users experience difficulty using their online assessments or dashboards.

The final two hours of the meeting were spent discussing the questionnaire and the covenant. The reasons behind the use of the questionnaire were outlined in order to explain how the mentors and mentees will be paired together. In addition, the terms of the covenant was reviewed, so the mentors are clear regarding what the expectation will be in terms of how often to meet, for how long, and for what length of time. At the end of the meeting, a time was given for questions and answers as well as for a time of prayer over the mentors and their future mentoring relationships.

Pilot Group Launch into Modules: October 2011

Now that the discipleship leaders have been identified and trained, they are ready to be paired with the members of the pilot group. In October 2011, both the mentors and the pilot group will be emailed the pairing questionnaire. They will be given a deadline to complete and return the documents. Once they are returned, the Community Life pastor and I will couple each member of the pilot group with a mentor. Those who choose not to receive a mentor are asked either to serve as a mentor or sit in with another mentor and mentee upon my approval. Once everyone is paired with a mentor, the pilot group will launch into the learning modules. The learning modules will take three months to complete.

The first module for the focus group is the Knowing Series. The original strategy encourages individuals to pick and choose their class order and/or module order depending on where they are in their spiritual journey; however, for the sake of the pilot,
the group will start with the Knowing Series as its first module. They will proceed through the classes in the following order: Knowing CrossWinds, Knowing Spiritual Growth, and Knowing Your Design. After each Knowing Series class, there will be a one-week break in order to give people time to process what they have learned. Participants will be asked to engage in the fourth learning module and meet with their mentors weekly, even when classes are not in session. The off weeks will provide time for individuals to take the Monvee assessment and work on creating and implementing their online spiritual growth plan (second module). These classes will take six weeks to complete.

The second group of classes for the pilot group will be the flagship Going Deeper class, which is the third learning module of the discipleship strategy. This class will meet every week for six weeks, taking the pilot group to the end of its three-month trial. During this time, participants still will meet with their mentors to discuss issues from the class or content they learn from previous weeks. In addition, they will be encouraged to work on their spiritual growth plans or to implement some part of their plan. It should be noted that since CrossWinds is able to customize the Monvee growth suggestions, participants will be able to use their Knowing Series classes, Going Deeper classes, and relationship with their mentor as part of their customized growth strategy with Monvee. This customization prevents an overload of tasks on the part of the participants. Once the pilot group completes the Going Deeper class, the evaluation process can begin.

Evaluation and Refining of Modules: January through March 2012

In order to ensure that the strategy is effective at meeting its learning goals and meeting the growth needs of the pilot group, it will go through a process of evaluation
and refinement. The evaluation process involves several steps. After each Knowing Series class and after the six-week Going Deeper class, a survey will be given to each participant to fill out and return to the Spiritual Formation Department. Survey responses will be compiled in January 2012. An additional set of interview questions will be emailed to each participant. The interview questions directly relate to the participants’ experience with the Monvee module as well as with their experience with their mentor. Participants will not be asked to supply written responses. Instead, they will be asked to schedule an interview with me so that I can personally sit down with individuals and assess their experience with each module as well as with the growth strategy as a whole. Then, I will compile the input and discern the strengths and weaknesses of each module, specifically noting areas that need to be reworked and refined. Afterwards, I will assess the effectiveness of the strategy overall.

Once the evaluation process is completed, I will work to refine the modules and improve the strategy. More specifically, I will meet with the staff pastors and discipleship mentors to modify the modules according to the feedback given in the surveys and interviews. I also will work to add additional modules if needed to fill in any gaps that might be missing that will improve the overall strength of the strategy. The refining process will take place February through June 2012.

Launch of Refined Modules: Fall 2012

In order to meet the spiritual growth needs of the entire CrossWinds congregation, the refined modules will be released to them in fall 2012. This will take place through two mediums. The first medium is through the Sunday morning service. The launch will
happen over a one-month period starting in January and ending in mid February. Every Sunday morning for four weeks, I will be given a featured slot in the service in which I can explain the strategy. In addition to articulating the strategy, each week I will give specific attention to one of the modules, casting vision for what the module can accomplish and how it can facilitate growth for the individual.

The second medium involves print pieces and lobby presence after the service. After each service, individuals will be invited into the lobby to preview class content and pick up a print piece that features the strategy as well as the featured module. They will be given the opportunity to ask me questions about any aspect of the modules and voice any concerns they might have about participating in the launch.

At the end of the four-week promotion, individuals will be given a two-week window to register for the modules in which they wish to participate. Individuals will be able to register online or through a paper registration form that they fill out and drop in the offering basket. At the end of the two-week registration, all of the modules will launch in their entirety.

**Additional Resources**

In addition to the suggested timeline, there are some additional resources that are required to make the strategy successful. First, finances will be needed to fund various aspects of the modules. Second, since two of the modules are classroom-centered, they will require adequate facilities in which to hold the various courses. Next, there is a small need for administrative support with regard to handling class registration and materials.
Finally, once the full strategy is launched, there will be a need for additional leaders within the modules. Each of these will be discussed briefly.

Finances: Resources for Classes, Monvee, and Training

With the launch of the new Spiritual Formation Department at CrossWinds, I proposed a budget to fund the learning modules. The below budget was approved in June 2011. The fiscal year for this budget begins in July 2011 and runs through June 2012.

Table 3. Spiritual Formation Department Budget Proposal for 2011/2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget Item</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowing Series (food and class supplies)</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going Deeper Classes (food and supplies)</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monvee</td>
<td>$2,400 per year ($199 per month)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Formation Special Event</td>
<td>$1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Event Training / Team Meetings</td>
<td>$400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total For 2011/2012 Fiscal Year</strong></td>
<td><strong>$5,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above budget accounts for course costs associated with both the Knowing Series and Going Deeper Series, such as class supplies and any food items that might be purchased for the class. It also accounts for the monthly service fee charged by Monvee for the use of the code that grants individuals access to the Monvee assessment tool. The fee is $199 per month which yields a total of $2,400 annually.

There is also a line item that allots for Spiritual Formation special events. This is earmarked for guest speakers and presenters who might come in to lead special classes and seminars as part of the Going Deeper series. Finally, there is a line item that is designated
for any training events that might be held for future discipleship mentors or Going Deeper teachers. The total strategy budget approved for the 2011/2012 fiscal year was $5,000.

Facilities and People Resources

In addition to the financial resources needed to fund the strategy, there are a few other resources that will help facilitate its implementation. First, classroom space is needed in which to hold the Knowing Series classes as well as the Going Deeper series classes. Next, administrative support is needed to help with database tracking and the gathering of classroom supplies. Finally, future leaders will be needed to carry on the strategy once the initial project is launched. All of these resources are essential and vital to the success of the overall project.

The only facilities resources required for the strategy is a room that can serve as both a meeting space and classroom. Due to financial trouble last year, CrossWinds opted to close the bookstore that it operated in its lobby area. The senior leaders decided to turn the former bookstore into a seminar-style classroom for the courses in the learning modules. The room was modified and now includes an audio/visual system with wireless microphone capabilities, a DVD player, and a laptop hook up. All of the A/V equipment was automated so that it can be controlled from the front of the class with a small remote control. The room was outfitted with new tables, chairs, and a wall-mounted white board. The room also was supplied with a coffeemaker and refrigerator in the event that one of the teachers opted to serve food during a class. This room has been designated as the “Knowing Series Room.” All spiritual formation classes and meetings are given priority for using this room so that there will always be a quality venue for individuals to learn.
While facilities are important, a solid program runs smoothly with the proper human resources. Administrative support for the learning modules is minimal. For the most part, the only support that is needed in this area is for class registration and preparation of class materials. The Spiritual Formation Department has been given an administrative assistant to handle these responsibilities. She is charged with being the contact person for each of the learning modules. She answers questions regarding the modules and handles the registration for each of the classes. She also forwards appropriate questions and inquiries to me so that I can address them promptly. In addition to this, she is responsible for contacting teachers prior to their classes and assessing their material needs. This can be anything from nametags, pens, notebooks, or dry-erase markers. Once she is aware of the needs, she prepares a class materials box and puts it in the Knowing Series room prior to the start of the class. After the class, she re-stocks the box and replaces it in the Knowing Series room for the next class.

The last resource, and perhaps most important, that is needed for the project is future leaders. In particular, future teachers will be needed for the Going Deeper series classes. Mentors also will be needed for the discipleship module as current leaders step down or take a break from participating in the module. With regard to finding future teachers, the following criteria will be used: ministry experience, passion for discipleship, and the gift of teaching. Due to the influx of new people into the church at any given time, it is quite possible to have a new congregant who demonstrates all of the above criteria. The process for finding new teachers will be an organic one. I will contact the staff and current leaders quarterly to request names of capable individuals (based on the
criteria). Then I will follow up with the names supplied to see if any of the leads are interested in teaching.

With regard to discipleship mentors, the process for selecting new mentors will be the same as the one outlined for the pilot program. Vision-casting meetings will be held four times per year in order to keep a steady pool of mentors involved in the module. In the event that there are not enough mentors for the number of participants, individuals still will be encouraged to continue in their modules until a suitable mentor can be found. Former mentors also will be contacted and asked to serve until other mentors can be supplied.

**Evaluation**

The final section of this chapter will deal with the evaluation of the overall discipleship strategy. First, it will give a description of the tools that will be used to evaluate the pilot project, namely surveys and interviews. The reasons for using each will be explained. Then it will briefly touch on the assessment plan for the pilot project. The assessment plan will give a brief description of how each tool will be used. The purpose for choosing these evaluative tools is to ensure that the strategy is meeting the learning goals as well as meeting the needs of people who desire to grow spiritually. The goal of the evaluation process is to discover aspects of the modules that can be improved and strengthened before the launch of the overall strategy to the church congregation. In addition, the evaluation process will help me to see what is working well in the strategy so I can make sure these aspects remain strong during the launch.
Assessment Tools: Surveys and Interviews

In order to evaluate people’s positive and negative experiences with the modules, the primary tools that will be used to measure the success of the learning goals with regard to the pilot project will be surveys and interviews. The surveys will measure the success of all of the class-based growth components, while the interviews will be used to evaluate the experience of each individual with the Monvee module, discipleship module, and overall experience of the strategy. The surveys to measure the success of the Knowing Series classes and the Going Deeper classes will be created by me and are specific in their design. As Nancy Ammerman notes, “Self designed [sic] questionnaires can be very useful in addressing highly specific research issues.”

While the survey measures some of the logistical components such as classroom setup, length of class, and the day/time of class, the meat of the survey focuses on measuring the learning goals stated at the beginning of Chapter 6. Specific questions regarding the learning goals and their specific areas—such as knowledge of the importance of spiritual growth, increased intentionality in pursuing growth options, and resultant Christ-like character produced—are part of the focused questioning of the survey. This portion of the survey gives individuals the opportunity to assess the success or failure of the classes in meeting these specific goals.

In addition, surveys are helpful in measuring the satisfaction level with personal spiritual growth among CrossWinds attendees. As data in Chapter 2 revealed, many individuals are dissatisfied with how CrossWinds is helping them grow spiritually. If the discipleship strategy is effective, then data collected among individuals who have walked

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through the process should indicate an increase in satisfaction not only with how the church is helping them grow spiritually but also with their own progress in spiritual growth.

I also created the interview questions in order to assess the success of the learning goals as well as the individuals’ personal experience. They are a great tool in helping to measure a participant’s experience with the Monvee module, mentoring module, and overall experience in the pilot project. While the learning goals can be evaluated through the interview questions, the interview medium is also a great way of collecting additional information such as stories, criticisms, and explanations that provide valuable insight into individual impressions and attitudes regarding the overall strategy.⁵

Since Monvee is an impersonal, computer-based learning tool, it is important to assess the individual’s personal experience with it to ensure that it is truly facilitating spiritual growth. While people may not like the non-relational nature of the tool, care will be taken to assess the growth produced by the tool and not necessarily the tool itself. This is why the interview can work well here. It will help me to be able to look beyond the criticisms of the tool and get to the heart of whether or not the tool helped move an individual toward growth in the stated learning goals.

The interview also will be important in evaluating the success of the relationship between the mentor and mentee as well as the pilot project overall. Through the interviews, individuals can tell the stories of their experience and shed light on what worked and did not work with their mentor. They also will be able to provide insights on how to improve the working relationship in order to facilitate growth toward the specific learning goals. Finally, the interviews are helpful in gauging people’s attitudes toward the

⁵ Ibid., 203.
strategy overall. It will allow individuals to tell their stories of success and failure as well as register their likes, dislikes, and preferences within each module. All of this information will be taken into consideration when the modules are refined in the future.

Assessment Plan

The pilot project will be evaluated at various stages. After each Knowing Series class and after the six-week Going Deeper class, I will have each participant fill out a survey. Participants can either stay after class and fill out the survey or take them home and do it after having some time to process the class. Those who take the survey home will be given a self-addressed stamped envelope to mail their responses back to me. A three-week deadline will be given to complete the survey and return it. Weekly email reminders will be sent of the impending survey completion deadline. The surveys will remain anonymous.

Also, once the participants have completed their three-month commitment with their mentor, I will email an additional set of interview questions to each participant. The interview questions will relate directly to the participants’ experiences with their mentor. Additional questions will inquire about their experience with the Monvee module. A cover letter will be attached explaining that participants are given two weeks to schedule an interview with me so that we can sit down together and assess their experience with each module.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The intent of this paper was to outline a spiritual growth strategy that would meet the unique needs of the people of CrossWinds Church. The individuals in this congregation have been dissatisfied with the efforts of their church to help them take the next steps in their spiritual journey. The result is that many people are experiencing spiritual stagnation and lethargy in their relationship with God and in their spiritual growth progress. In order to reverse this malaise, it was suggested that CrossWinds embrace a spiritual growth strategy that allows people to have flexible options in their spiritual journey. This strategy embodied the need for options and choice due to the growing diversity of this congregation.

The means proposed to accomplish this were four learning modules that individuals could customize based on their own unique makeup that would take into consideration spiritual maturity, spiritual pathway, life stage, and learning preference. The key to these modules was that they would be flexible and customizable, yielding greater choice and variety of growth options. The desired goal for the congregation at CrossWinds Church is for spiritual vitality to be regained and for individuals to start to feel increased levels of satisfaction, not only in their relationship with God but also in the sense that the church cares and actively wants to be involved in providing avenues that help individuals take next steps in growth toward Christ-like character.

The benefit of outlining a strategy such as this one is that it might be able to serve as a help for other churches, where congregants experience the same kind of dissatisfaction and malaise regarding their church’s efforts at discipleship and spiritual
formation. This model serves as an example of an option that does not conform to the one-size-fits-all modus operandi of discipleship and growth. Instead, it offers a menu of choices to choose from based on individual wiring. Each choice then catapults the individual into another step or growth option, creating a sense of momentum and progress.

This kind of unique discipleship approach produces three benefits. First, individuals have a chance to experience less fatigue and failure in their spiritual growth because they will not be given a universal approach to their unique growth needs. The strategy helps people to own and design a growth plan where they can experience maximum growth. According to Ortberg, “People have a crying need to find a way to follow Jesus that is not mechanical or legalistic and that is concrete. Disciples of Jesus cannot be mass produced— they have to be handcrafted.”¹ By engaging in practices that fit how they are wired to connect with God, people can once again experience intimacy with God in a way that satisfies the deep needs of the soul. Failure to give people the freedom to choose leads to spiritual stagnation and discouragement because the typical, spiritual growth mediums are not working. This can lead people into a soul-numbing rut.²

Second, this handcrafting not only brings vitality and life to the spiritual growth journey; it also teaches people how to feed themselves spiritually in that they become familiar with the practices and experiences that will help them continue taking next steps in their spiritual journey. Once people become familiar with what fuels them, and they experience the growth that this unique fueling produces, they will be more inclined to seek out similar options that will keep them on their path toward spiritual vitality. In

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² Thomas, Spiritual Pathways, 15.
addition, they become advocates for encouraging others to do the same in an effort to help them reignite their spiritual fire. The momentum that arises from this kind of strategy becomes self-propelling as people work to disciple others in helping them find their unique growth path.

The last benefit is that when people thrive spiritually, the Body of Christ benefits. As people grow in their knowledge and love of God and neighbor, the face of Christ is reflected and brings strength, encouragement, and support to the body. Also, as individuals hone in on their unique spiritual wiring, they become more and more in tune with what the Holy Spirit is doing in and around them. Roxburgh once said that “God’s future lives among God’s people.” If this is true, then God’s future is brought about by those who are intimately involved with Him and who are sensitive to how He is leading.

While these insights are important to note, two other insights from this strategy also must be noted. The most significant reminder that has come about through the development and deployment of this discipleship process is that God, first and foremost, guides and directs the process toward His desired outcome. Nothing can thwart the ultimate plans that God has purposed for a congregation. The strategy is not a means of controlling God or a magic formula to bring about change. Ultimately, God will have His way with individuals and with a congregation. The strategy, as well as the tools used to measure effectiveness, serves only as a resource that facilitates engagement with the Almighty. How God chooses to direct the process is up to Him.

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The second reminder is that God alone effects the transformation of the individual. While the effort put forth by an individual demonstrates a desire to grow, the effort itself does not produce transformation. It is God who produces change, and that change is unpredictable and mysterious. In this regard, it is helpful to reflect on Jesus’ words to Nicodemus. In talking to him about the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus says, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit” (John 3:8). In other words, the Spirit will do what it wants to do. The work of the Spirit is beyond planning and strategizing, no matter how biblically based and researched a growth strategy might be. “The Spirit, like the wind, is entirely beyond both the control and the comprehension of man: it breathes into this world from another.”

In wrapping up these thoughts on the implications of the proposed strategy, the desire is that God will have His way with the people of CrossWinds Church. Whether or not the strategy is a success or a failure, the important thing to remember is that every step is an arrival. Every step toward figuring out the discipleship puzzle puts the church in a position to be taught and formed by God to continue humbly in the process of daily transformation as the Body of Christ.

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196


