

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

(Except for private personal use).

We appreciate your respectful
cooperation.

Theological Research Exchange Network
(TREN)

P.O. Box 30183
Portland, Oregon 97294
USA

Website: www.tren.com

E-mail: rwjones@tren.com

Phone# 1-800-334-8736

ATTENTION CATALOGING LIBRARIANS

TREN ID#

Online Computer Library Center (OCLC)

MARC Record #

Digital Object Identification

DOI #

Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

A STRATEGY FOR HOLISTIC DISCIPLE-MAKING AT
VICTORY'S CROSSING CHURCH

Written by

ARLIE WHITLOW

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

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:


Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: February 13, 2014

A STRATEGY FOR HOLISTIC DISCIPLE-MAKING AT
VICTORY'S CROSSING CHURCH

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

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

BY

ARLIE WHITLOW
OCTOBER 2013

ABSTRACT

A Strategy for Holistic Disciple-Making at Victory's Crossing Church

Arlie Whitlow
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2013

The purpose of this ministry project is to help Victory's Crossing Church (VCC) develop a solid plan for making disciples for Jesus Christ through a self-multiplying network of life groups that focus on three areas – personal spiritual growth (reaching up), fellowship (reaching in), and outreach through welcoming the stranger (reaching out). Such a ministry focus is needed in the life of Victory's Crossing Church. After experiencing some strong initial growth initially, the church has recently declined and plateaued after ten years of ministry. The realization of this project will enable VCC to be faithful to the biblical mandate to go and make disciples and will stimulate ministry revitalization.

Using Mark's account of Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler, this study highlights in a renewed way the true nature of discipleship. The study shows that discipleship is a universal call for every believer, and that it can only be realized in self-surrender to Jesus and in community with others. It also focuses on the hospitality Jesus modeled in this account. This study will help build a theological foundation for discipleship through life groups at VCC. Many in the surrounding area are much like the rich young ruler – successful, self secure, spiritually empty, and alone.

A pilot group will be assembled to help launch the new ministry initiative, and will be comprised of core members and future leaders. As the pilot groups meets for training, a series of sermons on the rich young ruler will be prepared and presented to the congregation. Each week a new discipleship theme will be discussed. At the conclusion of the series, new leaders will be presented and members will have an opportunity to join. Life groups will be monitored to ensure they are meeting the goals of spiritual growth, fellowship, and outreach. Assistance will be given as needed.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD.

Words: 303

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
PART ONE: MINISTRY CONTEXT	
Chapter 1. LIFE IN A WASHINGTON, DC SUBURB	6
Chapter 2. THE MINISTRY CONTEXT OF VICTORY'S CROSSING CHURCH	26
PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION	
Chapter 3. LITERATURE REVIEW	43
Chapter 4. PERSONAL ECCLESIOLOGY	61
Chapter 5. A THEOLOGY FOR DISCIPLE-MAKING THROUGH LIFE GROUPS	78
PART THREE: MINISTRY STRATEGY	
Chapter 6. MINISTRY PLAN	96
Chapter 7. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION	117
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	127
APPENDICES	133
BIBLIOGRAPHY	134

INTRODUCTION

When it comes to fighting traffic and struggling with long commutes to work, the Washington, DC area is one of the worst places in America. In a recent “top ten” list of the most congested cities in the US, this area came in sixth. The District of Columbia is the key focal point in the region for business, government, tourism, and opportunity. The average commuter wastes forty-five hours a year sitting on Route 66, the main artery leading into the nation’s capital.¹

To beat the traffic many are willing to make substantial sacrifices. Bernard Throckmorton, a resident of Bristow, Virginia, gets up at four in the morning for a forty-five minute drive into the district’s neighbor city, Roslyn, where he works as an information technology consultant for a government contractor. The early start allows him to leave before the afternoon rush hour to have time with his family. He has made this commute now for five years.

Bernard’s sacrifices are not unusual. Michael Delapenha also lives in Bristow, but has to travel to Gaithersburg, Maryland for his information technology job. His commute takes two hours one way, and is a combination of commuter buses, subway trains, and walking.

Desperate to save time and money, many resort to “slugging.” Slugging is the practice of a driver picking up a complete stranger at an organized stop, allowing the driver to take the “High Occupancy Vehicle” lane (HOV), which benefits both driver and

¹ Tim Newcomb, "Going Nowhere: 10 Worst U.S. Cities for Traffic," Time News Feed, www.newsfeed.time.com/2012/05/22/going-nowhere-10-worst-u-s-cities-for-traffic/ (accessed June 14, 2012).

passenger. The “slug” gets a free ride and the driver gets to work faster because he or she can use a restricted lane. Currently twenty-five slug routes are listed on slug-lines.com.

The driver pulls up to the stop, rolls down the window, and announces his final destination. There is an unspoken “slug etiquette.” No casual talking. Friendship is not the goal. Unless the driver initiates conversation, the “slug” is to stay silent. A simple “thank you” at the drop off point is all that is expected.²

Some government workers are fortunate to have the flexibility to telecommute. They either work in the confines of their homes, or venture out to take advantage of the free Wi-Fi at local coffee shops. One example is the Caribou Coffee in Bristow where each day telecommuters can be found huddled around their laptops, sipping coffee.

This is the weekday reality for many in the greater Washington, DC area, and it has an impact on the quality of relationships in the region. With so much time spent in traffic, in addition to long hours in the work place, many have no time for friendship and deeper connection. The constant, daily struggle with traffic is fatiguing. Any remaining energy is given to family and to recuperation. For many this can lead to loneliness and feelings of isolation. There seems to be a connection between longer commutes and disconnectedness. Robert D. Putnam, the author of *Bowling Alone*, believes that every ten-minute increase in a work commute makes it 10 percent less likely that a person will create and maintain close relational ties.³

² David LeBlanc, "About Slugging," http://slug-lines.com/Slugging/About_slugging.asp (accessed June 14, 2012).

³ Shankar Vedantam, "Social Isolation Growing in the U.S.," *The Washington Post*, June 23, 2006.

The traffic, workplace pressure, and relational disconnection in the area actually provide a unique opportunity for the Church. While many in this area struggle with isolation from others, and especially isolation from God, the Church has a chance to provide a solution. Life groups are perfect places to overcome seclusion through face-to-face encounters, and to experience a deeper connection with God.

Victory's Crossing Church (hereafter, VCC) is located in central Prince William County, in the community of Bristow, a suburb of the greater Washington, DC metropolitan area. As one travels from the interstate into the heart of Bristow, an appearance of normalcy settles in. New neighborhoods with brick fronts, two-car garages, fences and playgrounds abound, providing families a place of refuge on the weekends. Each neighborhood has its own community pool. The public school system is one of the best in the state. Bristow is also home to *Jiffy Lube Live*, a large outdoor concert venue.

VCC began ten years ago, through a Bible study in the pastor's home. With a small core of thirty, public worship services began in September of 2003. Since that time the church has experienced slow growth, with some conversions. The average attendance so far in 2013 is 168. Unfortunately, over the last three years, growth and conversions have plateaued.

In the last year, VCC has taken some positive steps – the purchase of eighteen acres at a major intersection in Bristow, and relocating to a new high school next to the future church site. Even with these exciting developments VCC struggles to grow. While Prince William County, including the town of Bristow, has grown exponentially, VCC has remained somewhat stagnant.

Since the beginning, VCC has been very attractational in ministry approach. Great effort is expended to make Sundays a quality experience – relevant preaching, safe children’s ministry, and high quality contemporary music. While those elements are critical, it is now obvious that Sundays are not enough. VCC must now give attention to meeting one of the big needs in Prince William – relational and spiritual disconnectedness.

In the past the church has given sporadic effort to developing a life group ministry. The church-wide campaigns developed by Saddleback Church and Rick Warren have been used with some short-term success. Many members believe life groups are essential for spiritual growth, but are hesitant to make long-term commitments to them, and fail to see groups as opportunities for outreach. Reggie McNeal’s words in *The Present Future* would describe VCC’s current condition: “In reality, the church culture in North America is a vestige of the original movement, an institutional expression of religion that is in part a civil religion and in part a club where religious people can hang out with other people whose politics, worldview, and lifestyle match theirs.”⁴

I am personally convinced a healthy life group ministry at VCC will bring about greater health, new growth, and new conversions. The long commutes and stressful hours of work have taken their toll on many in our area. Behind the nice homes, cars, and polished smiles there is the aching sense something inside is missing. The answer to the emptiness is to first connect with God through faith in Jesus Christ and then with

⁴ Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 4.

other believers. Life groups will provide a safe, non-threatening place for these connections. There is a passion in my heart to see our church live out our call to reach the lost and develop new disciples for Jesus Christ through life groups.

Creating a balanced strategy to meet this need is the focus of this paper. The purpose of this final project is to help VCC go and make disciples of Jesus Christ through a self-multiplying network of life groups that focus on three areas – personal spiritual growth (reaching in), welcoming the stranger (reaching out), and fellowship (reaching across). The project will be divided into three sections. The first section will focus on the community context of Prince William County and then the ministry setting of VCC – its history, mission, values, and current challenges.

The second section will build a theological and ecclesiological foundation for discipleship, community, and evangelism. This foundation will be constructed through a survey of several scholarly works on discipleship, and through a brief look at discipleship in the Pentecostal / Charismatic tradition, highlighting its weaknesses and strengths. Several passages from Mark's gospel will also be studied.

The final section will lay out the ministry plans for a healthy network of life groups at VCC. A timeline will be given. This will be followed by a strategy for evaluation.

PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

LIFE IN A WASHINGTON, DC SUBURB

There is one distinguishing feature that separates Prince William County from the other counties in Virginia and Maryland that surround Washington, DC. The very first major battle of the Civil War, The First Battle of Manassas, was fought here on July 21, 1861. President Abraham Lincoln ordered untrained union troops to march to Centreville and on to Manassas Junction. Their mission was to capture the railroad junction to prevent the movement of troops and supplies from the Shenandoah Valley. They failed. The Confederates used rail transportation to move troops under the command of Joseph E. Johnston, to defend the Manassas gap junction where they joined forces with P.G.T. Beauregard. This was the first time in history that troops were transported by train to a battle. Union soldiers under the leadership of Irvin McDowell then engaged the Confederate forces.¹

The battle began awkwardly. No one expected to see blood shed. It was almost as if each side was waiting to see who would make the first move. Not only were the

¹ Peter Luebke, "First Battle of Manassas," Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, http://encyclopediavirginia.org/Manassas_First_Battle_of (accessed July 1 2012).

troops untrained, they were wearing similar uniforms and flying similar flags. Onlookers from Washington, DC, politicians and reporters, gathered on the hills to witness the possible battle. In the confusion, some shots were fired and the fighting erupted. In the end, there were 868 dead, and 2,600 wounded. The Civil War had officially begun. This first conflagration was followed by a much larger battle, The Second Battle of Manassas, a year later.² Today, the main attraction to Prince William County is the Manassas National Battlefield Park which commemorates these historic battles. Thousands of visitors come each year to walk the park and to learn from history.

Central Prince William has changed greatly since the Civil War. Developers have eaten up the rich, rolling meadows that once produced tobacco and pasturelands, and have spat out sprawling developments. Newly constructed neighborhoods have outpaced the roads needed to service the increased traffic load.

One thing has not changed. There is still a war raging, but now it is a spiritual war for the souls of those living in this area. As Paul writes in Ephesians 6:12, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”³

God has a strategy for victory and it involves his Church. While the battle is spiritual, there are steps that can be taken in the natural to partner with God. An important first step is to understand the current community context.

² Ibid.

³ The English Standard Version will be used throughout this paper.

The Upper-Middle Class Demographic

VCC is located in the heart of Prince William, just two miles from Linton Hall Road. A drive down Linton Hall reveals a lot about the church's community context. Linton Hall Road is seven miles long, stretching from Route 66 through the community of Bristow. On both sides there are new neighborhoods fully equipped with bike trails, swimming pools, new schools, and well-manicured landscaping. The homes have brick fronts, half-acre lots, and two-car garages.

Economically, Prince William County is strong. While the nation has been reeling from an economic recession, the northern Virginia area has not experienced the same hardship. In the *Prince William Report*, a quarterly county newsletter, the unemployment rate as of December 2012 was just 4.5 percent compared with the national rate of 7.8 percent.⁴ Much of this can be attributed to its close proximity to the nation's capital and the availability of government jobs and contracts. Northern Virginia is home to the Pentagon, the CIA, Langley Air force Base, Marine Corps Base Quantico, and more.⁵

The economic strength has produced a population surge. From 2000 to 2010 the county grew 43 percent, by 121,189 persons, from 280,813 to 402,002.⁶ According to

⁴ Prince William County Government, "Prince William Report: The Prince William County Demographic and Economic Newsletter," <http://www.pwcgov.org/demographics> (accessed July 10, 2012).

⁵ Sharon Cohen, "Virginia Escapes Worst of Recession, but State's Fortunes Could Change with Sequestration," The Huffington Post. www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/13/virginia-economy_n_1963805.html (accessed Thursday, April 18, 2013).

⁶ Prince William County Government, "Prince William Report."

the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments the county is forecasted to grow to 535,629 persons by 2030.⁷

Local economic stability can also be seen in home ownership and income. A Percept Study that encompassed Bristow and the surrounding areas of Nokesville, Manassas, Gainesville, and Haymarket, found that 78 percent own their homes.⁸ For 44 percent of the homeowners their median house value falls between 300,000 and 500,000 dollars. The average household income is 107,906 dollars, while the average U.S. salary is 67,315 dollars. Of those in the study area, 31 percent own three or more vehicles.⁹

Poverty rates in Prince William remain low. Just 6 percent live in poverty compared to a national rate of 15 percent. Only 8 percent of households have an income of less than 25,000, while 46 percent have incomes of 100,000 or more. In Prince William 10 percent have average incomes of 200,000 or greater.¹⁰

According to the 2011 Census data, Prince William residents have a level of education that exceeds the national average. Almost 40 percent of adults in the county have a bachelor's degree or higher. The national average stands at 28 percent.¹¹

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Percept Group, "Ministry Area Profile 2012.," <http://www.perceptgroup.com> (accessed June 20, 2012).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bill Vaughn, "Prince William County Demographics and Economics," Prince William County. www.mmrdata.com/pwchamber/Bill%20Vaughan%20Economic%20Demographic%20Presentation%20to%20PWC%20CoC%201%2018%2012.pdf (accessed Thursday, April 18, 2013).

¹¹ Prince William County Government, "Prince William Report."

While the upper middle class demographic and strong educational experience would seem to be a significant positive factor in Church growth, these factors are often hindrances. Money and success often create a sense of self-sufficiency, invincibility, pride, and self-centeredness. This was Paul's experience as he wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:26, "For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth." Prince William's demographic makeup could create a significant challenge for helping residents see the importance of connection through life groups for personal spiritual growth and outreach.

Minority Growth and Tension

Prince William County has changed rapidly in the last twenty years. In the 1980s it was known as a quiet, rural, bedroom community. In an article in the *Washington Post*, Jane Cunard, a county resident of more than twenty years shares her experience: "I still remember when we moved in that summer, on the front page of the paper was who won first place for their raspberry jam at the county fair...Now what you read about is what new companies are being brought into Prince William. We have changed so much from a rural to a suburban community."¹²

Much of the county's growth in the last decade has come from minority groups. Prince William has transformed into a kind of "mini-melting pot."¹³ In a 2011 American

¹² Jennifer Buske, "Minorities Become Majority as Population Booms in Prince William," *The Washington Post*. www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/09/AR2011020906632.html/ (accessed April 18, 2013).

¹³ Ibid.

Community Survey, it was found that Prince William now has a foreign born population of 19.4 percent, compared with just 6 percent in 1990.¹⁴ The greatest surge has been in the Hispanic community. In ten years, between 2000 and 2011, the Hispanic population in the county grew by 213 percent.¹⁵ Now the once rural, white county is known as a “minority majority” county. For the first time non Hispanic Whites make up less than half the population.¹⁶

The population shift has created some tension over illegal immigration. Many illegal immigrants have flocked to Prince William for construction opportunities in the booming development sector. Some residents are bothered that taxpayer funds are being spent on services offered to those who are here illegally. For instance, schools must accommodate many children of illegal immigrants who know little English.¹⁷ To curb the flood of illegals in the area, the county passed a controversial measure requiring police officers to check the immigration status of anyone arrested if there was suspicion. While the Hispanic community protested, many long-time residents offered wholehearted support.¹⁸ The growing population of minorities has created a fear in many residents. Many worry that if the minority population continues to rise, crime will also rise, and quality of life will decrease.

¹⁴ Prince William County Government, “Prince William Report.”

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Vaughn, “Prince William County Demographics.”

¹⁷ Buske, “Minority Become Majority.”

¹⁸ Ibid.

This demographic shift and the reaction it created are important because it sheds light on the area's practice of and appreciation for hospitality. Hospitality is the practice of welcoming strangers. This timeless practice is a lost art in the Church today. The Church struggles not with just welcoming immigrants, but with anyone new, different, and unknown. For a healthy system of life groups to develop this lost art must be recovered and practiced with those of other nations and with those across the street. As David Fitch writes in his book, *The Great Giveaway*, "Postmodern evangelism incubates in the climates of hospitality, in the places of conversation, posing questions and listening to the strangers in our midst."¹⁹

Commuter Culture

The real problem in the area is not securing employment, but with the daily commute to work. About 37 percent of workers have jobs in the county, while almost two out of three, or 63 percent have to commute out of the county each day.²⁰

Commuting for most in the county is a daily battle.

A 2011 American Community Survey found that some 27 percent of county workers have to travel one hour or more to work, one way.²¹ The DC metro area ranks as one of the most congested areas in the country, and it will only grow more difficult as the

¹⁹ David E. Fitch, *The Great Giveaway: Reclaiming the Mission of the Church from Big Business, Parachurch Organizations, Psychotherapy, Consumer Capitalism, and Other Modern Maladies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 60.

²⁰ Vaughn, "Prince William County Demographics."

²¹ Prince William County Government, "Prince William Report."

population continues to surge. The average commute for those in the county is forty-one minutes one way. This is up from thirty-seven minutes in 2000.²²

Commuting and Working Alone

One way to solve the traffic problem would be an increased use of public transportation and carpooling. Another advantage carpooling would seem to provide would be a more enjoyable commute through conversation and companionship. However, most prefer to drive alone. Of those who commute to work, 76 percent of drive each day by themselves. Only 13 percent choose to carpool.²³

For most, after making the long commute to work, the majority of their day is spent in front of the computer. In times long ago, men and women would work by the sweat of their brow in the field. Their physical exertion was great. Tired in body and mind from the day's labor, the farmer would sleep soundly. Those days are no more. Men and women expend very little physical energy during the day. Instead of a tractor or shovel, they grab hold of the keyboard and stare not into the soil, but into the computer screen.

This means that loneliness and isolation are real ministry challenges for the DC metro area. A revealing study conducted by Duke University, surveying 1,500 adults, found that a quarter of Americans say they have no one to share their personal troubles. The number of close friends has dropped from three to two.²⁴ Loneliness is on the rise in

²² Ibid.

²³ Percept Study, "Ministry Area Profile."

²⁴ Vedantam, "Social Isolation in America."

almost epidemic fashion. Another major study found that 20 percent of Americans, or about sixty million people, are not happy in life because of loneliness.²⁵

While social networking is a powerful tool for getting connected, often Facebook and Twitter become poor substitutes for real human relationships. In a Stephen Marche article for *The Atlantic* entitled, “Is Facebook Making Us Lonely,” he writes how Facebook offers the chance to relate without the messiness of relationships. Much of the interaction online – photo uploads, likes, updates, etc., are superficial. Facebook can easily become a platform for promoting a false – more accomplished self.²⁶ This only heightens feelings of loneliness and isolation, as one hides behind his or her virtual persona. Real relational interaction is messy, awkward, and sometimes embarrassing.

This is a real obstacle but also an opportunity. Through life groups VCC can offer a better way to live for those trapped in isolation and loneliness. Groups will offer safe places to connect, but also to know true, personal friendship with God.

Migrating Military Families

Another layer of the commuter problem in the Washington, DC area is related to migrating military families. Military bases from all branches surround the nation’s capital.²⁷ The base closest to central Prince William County is the Marine Corps Base at

²⁵ Stephen Marche, "Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?," *The Atlantic Monthly* www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/308930/ (accessed Thursday, April 18, 2013).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Military Bases in the DC Metro area include: Andrews Airforce Base, Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Fort Meade, Fort Belvoir, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Fort Detrick, Marine Corps Base Quantico.

Quantico, just twenty miles from Bristow. Service men and women battle with the daily commute as well as the challenges of relocation every three to four years.

Frequent moving disrupts the relational stability that children need as they grow and develop. Relocations create regular stress for families. To really connect with a community takes time. At the moment when relational investments finally begin to pay off, military families have to start all over again. In an article for the *USA Today* Catherine Chretien, an associate professor of medicine at George Washington University and a military wife, highlights the stress and detachment military families often experience. She writes, "Frequent moves also place undue stress on children. Ask any adult who grew up as a military 'brat' about the anxiety that consumed the family when moving orders arrived. Children who experienced frequent moves report lower life satisfaction and psychological well-being as adults. Such teenagers have higher suicide rates."²⁸

Churches in this area see migrating military families flow in and out over the years. Meaningful connection and long-term relationships are hard to develop because there is a move in the near future. While churches welcome military families, there is a reticence on the part of military members to fully commit relationally. It may be a form of self-protection, to make their next transition less painful. The detachment makes it challenging for members to offer needed support and encouragement to military families in times of need.

²⁸ Katherine Chretien, "Help Military Families by Limiting Moves," *USA Today*, March 1, 2011.

Haven of Family

Prince William is home to many young families. The average age of the county is thirty-three years, just below the national average, and 29 percent of the total population is under the age of eighteen.²⁹ Almost every school in the county is filled to capacity.

When it comes to family, Bristow and the surrounding area would be considered very traditional. Of those in the study area, 61 percent are married, exceeding the national average of 52 percent. When it comes to households with children, 77 percent of those homes represent a married couple. Just 16 percent are single mothers, and only 6 percent are single fathers. The average home has three children.³⁰

While residents of Prince William are certainly career driven, there is a deep love for family. If rejuvenation is possible in this fast paced area, many find it in their families. The home has become the haven for rest. Tired and desperate to spend time with family, many neglect regular weekly worship.

Reaching the families of central Prince William will require a change in strategy for VCC. A thriving life group ministry will be central to this new approach. Life groups will not only disciple and connect, but also serve as hubs of outreach where the spiritually lost, physically exhausted, and relationally can be welcomed into a relationship with Jesus. Ultimately, the hope is to connect them to the larger church family for greater growth and service.

²⁹ Prince William County Government, "Prince William Report."

³⁰ Percept Group, "Ministry Area Profile."

Cultural Challenges for Mission and Discipleship

Marginalization of the Church

In May of 2011, VCC purchased a farm in the Bristow area for the building of a future church home. The land was purchased from Harry Butler, a sixty-five-year-old, long time resident of Bristow. Harry had purchased the farm twenty years earlier, desiring privacy and the capacity to border horses. However, surrounding development and congestion frustrated his plans. He was eager to sell in order to find more peace and quiet.

Over the yearlong negotiation period there was ample time to build a friendship, and to discuss values and personal beliefs. Harry was often invited to church services, small groups, and church picnics at VCC. Each time he politely declined. When asked if there was a particular reason, Harry was ready with a quick answer. He said he believed in God, but not in the Church. He said his church was the land around him, his animals, the trees, and his home. His farm was his place of worship, the place where he talks to God. He said he sees no need for the Church with its politics and hypocrisy. His response was not acrid, but heartfelt.

For Harry the church is another club or organization. The Church is a place where people with similar beliefs and preferences come together. One can find a similar connection in any number of community organizations and reap the same benefits.

Harry speaks for many of the “unchurched,” or “dechurched” in the area. In Prince William County, and America in general, the Church as an institution has become marginalized. The Church no longer sits at the center of society, enjoying a place of

prominence and influence. Like Harry, many believe in God but not in the Church. In Eddie Gibbs' book, *Church Next*, he gives a quote from Mike Regle, the founder of Percept Group. Regele gives the following somber analysis:

At the brink of the twenty-first century, the king who knew not Joseph is the collective culture of which we are a part. The combined impact of the Information Age, postmodern thought, globalization, and racial-ethnic pluralism that has seen the demise of the grand American story also has displaced the historic role the church has played in that story. As a result, we are seeing the marginalization of the institutional church.³¹

A Private Individualistic Approach to Religion

Wade Clark Roof interviewed thousands of people on spiritual beliefs and summarized the result of his effort in his book, *Spiritual Marketplace*. After the initial interviews, he followed up with the same people at different times over an eight-to nine-year period. In his massive study he found that 48 percent of those surveyed agreed that all the religions of the world are equally true and good.³² Religious traditions are now viewed as “symbolic resources” one can pick and choose from with no single tradition having complete control on truth claims. This is the age of relativism, pluralism, and tolerance.³³

³¹ Eddie Gibbs, *Churchnext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 15.

³² Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 84.

³³ Ibid.

As Roof writes, “Individuals begin to assume that they are the masters of their own spiritual fate.”³⁴ In his study he asked about individual versus corporate religious activity and found that the vast majority preferred being alone for personal meditation and self-improvement.³⁵ In relativism the individual is king.

Lewis Drummond, in his book, *Reaching Generation Next*, uses a quote from New Age advocate Shirely MacLaine in an interview she gave with *Good Morning America*. While her words veer to the extreme, one can see the shift from institutional to individual that many have embraced. Describing a long twenty-mile trek she said, “All you can think about is yourself, meaning, reality, etc. . . . Let the soul ‘feel’ you funnel in the divine . . . Religious faith is different from spiritual faith . . . your soul, *not* the churches determine our fate.”³⁶

While MacLaine’s exhortation would sound attractive to the modern ear, the end result leaves the soul hungry for more. One of the results of embracing a private, individualistic approach to religion is the relational separation that results. While many like their autonomy they do not like the loneliness and isolation it creates. If the Church can provide safe places for people in the area to connect, a great door could be opened for evangelism and discipleship.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace*, 84.

³⁶ Lewis A. Drummond, *Reaching Generation Next: Effective Evangelism in Today's Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 27.

Hidden Emptiness Unmet in Materialistic Pursuits

Looking for fulfillment and happiness, many in central Prince William County turn to materialistic pursuits. Prince William is the ninth wealthiest among the largest counties in America, and fifth out of all Virginia counties.³⁷ Federal dollars flow into the county for government contracts. The residents of northern Virginia are driven, working not just to make a living, but also to advance financially.

In 2003 the real estate boom was in full swing. Optimism in northern Virginia was at an all-time high. Residents were banking on continued job growth and ever-increasing property values. In 2008 the real estate bubble burst releasing a flood of foreclosures. Prince William County led all counties in Virginia in foreclosures. Thousands of residents were caught buying more home than they could really afford. In 2011 one in every forty-eight houses in Prince William County received a foreclosure filing, one and half times that of the national average.³⁸ The love of money leads to a host of other problems. As Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:9-10, “Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

³⁷ Prince William County Government, “Prince William Report.”

³⁸ RealtyTrac, "Virginia Foreclosure Activity Down in 2011," www.realtytrac.com/content/foreclosure-market-report/virginia-foreclosure-activity-down-in-2011-7055 (accessed July 13, 2012).

The latest economic recession has shed much light on the values and beliefs of Prince William County residents. Many believe greater material possessions will bring more happiness. The pursuit of material things becomes most important. Life groups can be an effective way to reach those trapped in materialistic living. Through hospitality, relationship, conversation, prayer, and Bible study, a better way of living can be discovered. Connecting groups with service opportunities in the community will help groups members experience the happiness that comes from helping others in need.

Postmodern Religious Skepticism

The final cultural challenge for ministry is a postmodern religious skepticism. To really understand postmodernism it is important to look at what preceded it – modernism. Modernism began with the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason. Overarching religious explanations, faith narratives, sacred traditions, and inspired writings lost their place of authority and influence. Human reason became more important than religious tradition.

The philosopher Rene Descartes was the most influential champion of this worldview. He believed everything had to be subjected to reason. All authorities needed to be challenged in hopes of finding certainty, even if that led to the conclusion that nothing in the world was certain.³⁹

The Enlightenment gave man permission to question everything, and it led to innovative discoveries in almost every scientific field. These advances in science

³⁹ David Smith, *Mission after Christendom* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), 17.

unfortunately created a false sense of confidence in what humankind could accomplish. The ultimate result was an arrogant belief in humankind's ability to usher in a golden age. Progress, prosperity, and happiness could be found through human reasoning.⁴⁰ Faith and religion were demoted, and even became despised as a crutch for the weak. The optimism of modernity came to an end with the horrors of the twentieth century. Modernism did not lead to a utopia but to a century of wars, genocide, and oppression. Modernism did not exalt humankind, but uncovered great brokenness, depravity, sin, and pride.

From the ashes of modernism came postmodernism. Postmodernists now know that reason and science cannot provide all that was promised. They are looking for ultimate answers beyond the physical, material world. Postmoderns are very spiritual. However, their spirituality is marked by pluralism and tolerance. There are no overarching truth claims in their view. Truth is relative. There are many roads.

Postmoderns carry within them a deep-seated skepticism. Modernism claimed with certainty a gospel of progress through scientific advancement and human reason, and did not deliver. The postmodern tendency is to doubt and question – not believe and trust. Truth claims are often seen as power plays, especially religious proclamations. Postmodernists are weary of being manipulated to advance the selfish causes of those in positions of power.

The average resident of central Prince William will listen and even enjoy another's faith story, but will struggle when asked to abandon his or her personal ideological

⁴⁰ Ibid.

preference. This is true even within the confines of the church. Practical sermons are well received, but when basic Christian doctrines are expounded – the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the sinfulness of man, the second coming, and salvation through Jesus alone, a strange tension fills the air. The speaker knows there are skeptics present.

Instead of just hearing what is right and what is wrong, those in Prince William want to see it lived out. They want to see the proof that it works. As David Fitch writes, “They might suspect truth known only in words or propositions, but they respect a truth that can be seen and experienced in life. These postmoderns demand a living truth they can participate in, and this can provide the basis for a new evangelism.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, 49.

CHAPTER 2

THE MINISTRY CONTEXT OF VICTORY'S CROSSING CHURCH

This chapter will focus on the ministry haping moments in the history of VCC. VCC has encountered the mission drift that so many aging organizations experience, creating its plateaued growth while the surrounding area explodes in development. Attempting to do the same old programs better has led to extended pressure on the lay core. However, there is a shared desire for deeper relational engagement, spiritual growth, and evangelistic outreach that if channeled correctly could lead to a much needed ministry breakthrough.

A Short History – How VCC Arrived at Her Plateaued Condition

On Sunday, September 22, 2013, VCC celebrated her tenth year of ministry. To commemorate this occasion, a special service was planned followed by a potluck on the church property where there would be pony rides, games, and activities for all. This historic Sunday was called "Friend's Day." Members were encouraged to invite their friends and family members, especially those who are without a relationship with Jesus Christ and a home church.

The event was promoted two months in advance. Business card-sized invitations were created and distributed to every member. As the “Friend’s Day–Anniversary Celebration” drew closer, permits were obtained from the county to erect a tent on the church property for the event. Volunteers were recruited to set up the tent along with tables, chairs, and sound. Signs were put out along the property, and prayers were offered for God’s grace and power to move on this special Sunday.

On that Sunday the only members who brought friends were the pastor and his wife. Several members and families who attend regularly did not come at all. In the ten year history of VCC, a “Friend’s Day” event has been held each year. This ten-year anniversary “Friend’s Day” was one of the most poorly attended, with just over one hundred at the event. The picnic was somewhat enjoyable. The weather was nice, but the atmosphere felt awkward and somewhat lifeless. This made it a challenge for first time visitors to feel warmly welcomed and excited about returning.

VCC began in September of 2003 as an extension of The Community Church of Ashburn, VA, a large, non-denominational church. At that time, the popular strategy of starting large, with funding and staff in place, was not yet popularized. VCC began with just two families sent out from The Community Church.

After the first public worship service, a group of about thirty gathered for regular Sunday worship. The desire to serve and reach the community was fresh and strong. In the first several months about ten people made new decisions to follow Jesus Christ, and a baptism service was held at a nearby church.

The congregation sensed God's blessing through the miraculous provisions that seemed to arrive just in time. For example, with low funds to rent a school for worship, an agreement was reached with the principal of Nokesville Elementary School to rent the auditorium and classrooms for just twenty-five dollars a week. He also gave VCC permission to build a shed behind the school gym to store equipment. When the church needed audio-visual equipment, a businessman from another church called without being solicited, and offered to pay for all of the church's AV needs. To the church's surprise, after several months of existence, The Community Church committed to pay the pastor's salary for one year from their missions budget. VCC was off to a slow but strong start.

In 2006 VCC had the chance to move out of Nokesville, a small rural town, to rent a storefront location in the nearby city of Manassas, about five miles away. The space was in an older shopping center, formerly a Hollywood Video. The bright red, purple, and yellow colors of the video store were kept, and walls were built to enclose a place for worship. A large sign was put on the building to promote the new location.

The season in the storefront (2006-2011) was a significant time of growth and outreach. A second Sunday service was added, and a midweek service with programs for kids. A summer day camp was begun called "Kids Going Bananas".

The ministry of a young college student who led worship in a dynamic way blessed the church. A whole group of new converts came to the Lord. They were disciplined through Wednesday night services, and began to actively serve the Lord and to invite friends. By the end of 2010, the church was averaging about 175 in attendance.

For the first time, VCC appointed deacons to oversee key areas of ministry. The plan was for this first cohort to serve a two-year term. The end goal was to appoint elders from the deacon team at the term's end.

During the “storefront years,” life groups, community, and discipleship were themes of many Sunday sermons. Life group leaders were selected and trained, but after starting strong, groups always seemed to lose momentum. The popular campaigns produced by Saddleback Church and Rick Warren were used. It was believed the leaders recruited for the campaign would continue to lead at the campaigns conclusion. This never happened. Groups would die a slow death, with the exception of one or two. A thriving life group ministry for discipleship and outreach has always been an unrealized goal at VCC.

In 2010 the church began to pray for a permanent home. An eighteen acre parcel was located just on the outskirts of the growing community of Bristow, right next to a new high school, about four miles from the storefront. The owner agreed to sell the land for 450,000 dollars. A church consultant was hired to help raise the money. Through his help, a team was assembled called, “The Possess the Land Team.” The vision for the land was presented to the core ministry leaders first, and then to the congregation at large. On April 10, 2011, VCC had what was called a “First Fruits Sunday” where members were asked to bring their largest offering ever for the down payment. Enough was donated, and the land was purchased.

In 2012 VCC moved from the old storefront to the brand new high school that had just opened next to the property. VCC at this point was pushing two hundred. There was

talk about adding a third service. VCC was able to hire a full time youth pastor. He and his wife moved up from Tampa, Florida. At that time a talented worship leader was also recruited. He had the ability to communicate, sing, and lead. It looked like VCC was positioned for a breakthrough.

That is when things began to slowly crumble. In the last year VCC lost eight of her top ten givers. Two leading members died of sickness. Several moved away because of job relocations, a common occurrence in the DC area. The others left for larger churches. Some were disgruntled with the way the land campaign was being conducted. Others left because they didn't feel comfortable with the transition from Manassas to the new high school in Bristow.

Because of the financial support that was lost, pressure began to grow. Everyone began to notice the decrease in attendance. This opened the door for unconnected families to leave. As the attendance slowly dwindled along with the finances, the newly hired youth minister from Florida was released. The talented worship leader then decided to leave as well, along with the worship team. VCC went from offering two worship services to one.

Currently, the pastor leads the worship and preaches. There are no life groups for connection and discipleship outside of service and activity groups. Regular attendance hovers around 120.¹

¹ When the church was almost reach two hundred there were two services, and volunteers serving at both services were counted twice.

Leadership: How Decision are Made

VCC is a non-denominational church that has the support, spiritual connection, and covering of other established churches and senior pastors. Currently, the main governing body is an external board of elders comprised of four other senior pastors. The board usually meets two to three times a year in a formal way via conference call. Phone calls and personal meetings are conducted monthly as needed with individual board members to seek counsel and prayer. All major decisions, from hiring to putting the church under financial obligation, are made with the approval of the board.

It is the aspiration of VCC to have an internal governing board of elders. In the recent decline most of the deacons that were appointed moved out of the area while others left the church. A key focus must be identifying and mentoring the next generation of spiritual leaders. There needs to be greater effort made by the pastor on building stronger relationships with potential leaders. In the future, the governing structure will be a pastor / staff-led church with a board of elders to give pastoral accountability and oversight. The external board of pastors will always be in place to offer spiritual guidance to the pastor and church.

In reality, most of the day-to-day decision making falls on the pastor. While input is requested from those impacted by the decision, at the present time there is no creative team of any kind to give input to future plans and vision. A creative leadership team is something VCC has always struggled to assemble. Key people have offered oversight in particular areas for periods of time, maybe a year or more. But a consistent, cohesive,

unified leadership team, overseeing different areas of ministry, has never materialized. This leaves the pastor in the prime decision making role much of the time.

In Carl F. George's book, *How to Break Growth Barriers*, he writes about a transition that must happen in the leadership style of the pastor if the church is to grow.² That important transition is the movement from a "shepherding" to a "rancher" style of ministry leadership. A shepherding pastor generally is: primarily a caregiver, driven by expectations, always available, overly concerned about personal performance, driven by a desire to feel needed, unable to delegate efficiently, and lacking in vision. George believes that about ninety to ninety-five percent of pastors are in this category.

A leader following the rancher style of leadership will: emphasize the big picture, see what needs to be done and take charge, believe in "one another" ministry, view the church in affinity groups, plan out how to achieve objectives, not be codependent, and develop good managerial skills. As pastor of VCC, currently I am in this important transition. There is the conviction that the health of the church depends upon it.

The Demographics of VCC

On an average Sunday VCC will see seventy adults and fifty children at worship. Of the adults in attendance approximately 20 percent are sixty years of age and older. The congregation is mostly comprised of young families. On Sundays you hear the sound of children echoing through the school hallways. Over 40 percent of the Sunday attendance is comprised of children twelve and under. Interestingly enough, the adult

² Carl F. George and Warren Bird, *How to Break Growth Barriers: Capturing Overlooked Opportunities for Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 88-97.

congregation does not completely reflect the demographics of the surrounding areas of Bristow and Gainesville. Less than half of the adults at VCC have a college education, and the majority earns an annual income far below the yearly average for the area around Patriot High School where services are held.³

Variety of Ministries

Over the past ten years God has raised up a number of ministries reaching people of all different age groups. For children, infants to twelve years, there is “Kids Crossing” each Sunday. There are classes for babies, two and three year, four and five year olds, and elementary ages. There is also a junior high group called “Club 57” for children in fifth to seventh grades. Club 57 also meets on Wednesday night for “Foundations,” a time of activities and learning the basic truths of the Christian faith. Each of these classes has a coordinator that recruits and schedules volunteers. These teachers are under the leadership of the Kids Crossing Director, a faithful church volunteer.

Currently, there are no official Bible study life groups that meet. These groups slowly faded in the recent decline. However, there are activity groups where people can connect in relationship. There are two softball teams that practice and play competitively in the summer, a mother’s group that meets for dinner, a group called “Crowns of Glory”

³ This is due to the transition from Manassas to the Bristow, and Patriot High School where VCC currently holds services. While meeting at the storefront in Manassas, growth came largely from that area. Manassas is an older area of Prince William County. Diversity is very high, annual household income is lower than that of Bristow, along with the average educational level. For example, only 14 percent of residents in the City of Manassas have a bachelors degree compared with 40 percent of those in the Bristow area. Virginia Employment Commission, "Virginia Community Profile - Manassas City.," <http://www.manassascity.org/DocumentCenter/View/21686> (accessed October 7, 2013).

for those sixty and older. Also, there is the Set Up Team that meets early every Sunday morning to set up for service.

VCC has been actively involved in missions through Global Equip, founded by Dr. John Thompson of All Nations Fellowship, Tulsa, Oklahoma. Through this organization, the church has supported and participated in the training of pastors in West Africa, many who have never had any seminary education. Twenty-five of the pastors were given personal computers gifted by the VCC family, and a well was dug for a needy church in the interior of Sierra Leone. There are many other future opportunities for VCC to be involved in missions in partnership with Global Equip.

Core Values

In Aubrey Malphurs book *Values-Driven Leadership*, he defines a core value in the following way, “An organization’s core values signal its bottom line. They dictate what it stands for, what truly matters, what is worthwhile and desirous. They determine what is inviolate for it; they define what it believes is God’s heart for its ministry.”⁴ True core values stir up intense feeling and passion. Values guide behavior and give ministry direction. A shared set of common values builds team cohesion and increased effectiveness.

VCC had no shared core values for the first five years of its existence. In August of 2008, the pastor called together those serving in the core to help develop a set of shared values. Using Malphur’s “Values Audit,” each member was given an opportunity

⁴ Aubrey Malphurs, *Values-Driven Leadership: Discovering and Developing Your Core Values for Ministry*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 17.

to share values they believed characterized the church. The most common in the group were chosen. Some of the values were very similar in meaning and were merged under one value. In the end, six core values were agreed upon, and a sermon series called “Our Values” was developed. It was presented to the church at large.

As the values were developed, the team realized some were aspirational values, not actual values. The hope was that in time the values below would be slowly adopted. Since that time progress has been made, but there is still dissonance between values and actual behavior. Below are the stated values of VCC that came out of this process, followed by an assessment to characterize them as actual, preferred, or a mixture of both.

The first value is biblical teaching. This is an actual value. There is a healthy balance of exegetical and topical preaching from the Bible. Great effort is given to address real concerns and modern problems from a biblical perspective. For instance, recently the church did a series called “You Asked for It” created from real questions submitted by the congregation. Topics ranged from the afterlife, human sexuality, and how to bring an unsaved spouse to faith in Jesus.

The second value is prayer. This is a mixture of preferred and actual. VCC did begin a practice of starting each year with a twenty-one day “Daniel Fast.” Many participate and there is a corporate prayer focus each year. Testimonies of answered prayer are shared each Sunday during the fast. Prayer partners are also available at the end of each service. However, there is no open corporate prayer service consistently in the year. Recently, there was an attempt to begin an early morning prayer time on Wednesdays at 5:30 which was poorly attended.

The third value is lost people. This is also a mixed value. It has been a challenge to keep the eternally lost in focus. There is pressure to make the ministry more about the members instead for those without a relationship with Jesus Christ. There is no consistent outreach being done in the community.

The main time for outreach currently is Sunday morning worship. VCC is committed to creating high quality worship experiences that will attract both the unchurched and the mature believer. This attractional approach is not balanced with a missional focus that works to take the message of God's love to the community in meaningful ways.⁵ However, personal evangelism is emphasized on Sundays and during membership classes and other times of training.

The fourth value is discipleship. This is again is a mixed value. There is concern that members serve, attend, and give, but are not growing spiritually. Some are frustrated with the shallowness of their faith.

The fifth value is community. This is another preferred value. There is community and accountability for those who are embedded in the life of the church. The community that exists has become unhealthy. Peter C. Wagner famously called this “koinonitis” – an unhealthy form of fellowship that is inward focused, making it hard for those outside to build new relationships. It tends to be the same people attending with

⁵ Alan J. Roxburgh, M. Scott Boren, and Mark Priddy, *Introducing the Missional Church : What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2009), 20. They define attractional as being the “if you build it they will come” mindset. The focus is solely Sunday morning. The church needs a missional imagination. The church exists for mission. Roxburgh says, “The Spirit is calling the church on a journey outside of itself and its internal focus.”

little evidence of growth. The current emphasis seems to be centripetal and inward focused rather than centrifugal and missional.⁶

The sixth value is excellence. This value is mixed between preferred and actual. No Church can be excellent all the time as it is made up of imperfect people. There needs to be a clarification and a renewed emphasis on the core values of VCC. The process for that is not clear at the present.

Obstacles and Opportunities

VCC can be officially categorized as a plateaued church. Creating momentum and sincere spiritual passion for the future will be a challenge. Having a healthy life groups ministry with enthusiastic, Spirit empowered leadership will be an important step toward church wide revitalization. The Church does have Jesus' promise given in Matthew 16:18, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." In this final section, the obstacles and opportunities for life group development, discipleship, and outreach at VCC will be explored.

Obstacle One – Lack of Leaders

One of the real challenges to a healthy life group ministry formation is the lack of available, trained, and energized leaders. Like many churches, most of the load for ministry is carried by a small number of volunteers. The "Pareto Principle" that states

⁶ Dennis Griffith, "9 Church Diseases,," <http://wdennisgriffith.wordpress.com/2010/01/22/9-church-diseases-2/> (accessed October 8 2013).

twenty percent do eighty percent of the work holds true at VCC.⁷ As a result, the ministry core over the years has become over worked, and unable to take on new ministry responsibilities. Many are serving in two to as many as four different ministries at a time. There is no time or energy to lead a life group. Many attenders observe ministry being shouldered by the few each weekend and make the assumption that their service is not needed.

Obstacle Two – Inward Focus

The Jerusalem church in the first century was characterized by an inward focus. The Jerusalem church tried to keep Christianity within the Jewish culture (Acts 15:1). It struggled to embrace the revival that was happening among the Gentiles. The church in Jerusalem believed that purity came through exclusion and separation. Instead of embracing change they held tightly to tradition. Their cultural traditions were more important than Gospel expansion (Galatians 2:12-13).

On the other side, the church at Antioch believed the gospel superseded culture. It focused on those outside the church, especially the Gentiles (Acts 11:20-21). They were eager to embrace change. Gospel expansion was more important than man-made tradition. In the end, the Jerusalem church lost its center of influence, and the church in Antioch became the focal point of a fresh move of God that reached the world (Acts 13:1-3).

VCC has become comfortable with the familiar. There is a kind of culture that has developed over the years. The culture is the way ministry is done inside the walls of

⁷ John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader within You* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993).

the church each Sunday. Central to the culture is the people doing the ministry. All of it is familiar and well known. There is a sense of predictability that makes one feel safe. The familiar culture, well known traditions, and existing friendships have become most important, trumping even the mission every Church has to take the gospel where it is not known, and to raise up new disciples. In short, fellowship has trumped mission.

The challenge is to help future life groups see their times together as opportunities for outreach. There is a real hunger for community, authentic relationship, and genuine connection in Prince William County. Many who are too afraid, or too preoccupied to visit a church on Sunday will be drawn to the community found in a life group.

Obstacle Three – A Common Felt Need for Greater Relational Connection and Outreach

David Crammer has attended VCC now for about a year. He took the membership class along with his daughter Emma. They began teaching in the children's ministry faithfully each month, and giving on a weekly basis. Recently, he scheduled a lunch with the pastor. During that time David expressed how he enjoys the church, and the messages, but it seems that after service people just leave. He understands that because of our mobility, after service there is a lot of work to be done quickly. He wanted the pastor to know a sense of shared connection was missing for him. His suggestion was to have more social functions for the church, times when no "work" is required.

Instead of ignoring the lack connection and pretending it does not exist, it needs to be exposed. There is a common felt need for greater connection. Dave had the

courage to express it. This felt need should be addressed in sermons. When genuine spiritual growth happens in the context of community it should be shared for all to hear.

Deep inside the members of VCC there is also a kind of inner pain that aches for something more than just Sunday worship. Many long time members are asking themselves, “What is being done to reach our community outside of Sundays?” If a connection between evangelism and life groups can clearly be made it could lead to a great breakthrough for these faithful Christians who are longing for something more.

Opportunity – Strategic Location of Church Property

Though located in northern Virginia, central Prince William County is still southern and traditional in thinking, especially when it comes to religion. Churches that meet in schools are viewed with skepticism. There is also the question of whether or not the church will be open in the near future. A church building communicates stability, permanence, and trust in this area.

The hope is to begin construction on a new church home in the next three years. The location for the future church could not be improved upon. Four schools are just minutes away. The exposure will be great.

When churches open their buildings in this area there is always a surge in numbers. This presents a blessing and a challenge. VCC has to be ready, with a life group ministry in place and fully functioning before those doors open. With no effective way to assimilate and disciple new visitors and converts the opportunity for a great ministry impact will be missed.

Opportunity – Solid Biblical Foundation

One great advantage VCC has is the belief that the Bible is the inspired word of God, providing for all believers a guidebook for living and ministry. VCC has never been a church confused about its beliefs. VCC has never veered into theological liberalism. There is a shared core belief that humanity is eternally lost in sin without a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is this belief that will cause the church to embrace change if it means greater faithfulness to the biblical mandate to reach the world with the gospel.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic of discipleship and outreach through small groups is not new. In fact, so much has been written that the material is too great for one to consume. For the purpose of this project, five scholarly books were selected for review. The thesis, applicability to VCC, and shortcomings of each book will be discussed.

***Life Together – A Discussion of Christian Fellowship* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote *Life Together* (1938) while teaching in a remote, underground seminary for pastors in the confessing Church during the height of Hitler's popularity and power.¹ While many nominal Christians in the German Church gave their wholehearted support for Hitler and his destructive plans, Bonhoeffer courageously stood his ground. He had a radical vision of what Church community should look like. His book still stands today as a model and inspiration to all believers striving for sincere Christian fellowship.

The main thesis of *Life Together* is that vibrant, joyful, life-changing Christian community is a possibility, a privilege, a divine gift, and a basic responsibility for all

¹Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans., John W. Doberstein from 5th ed. (London: SCM Press, 1972; reprint, 1954 ed.).

believers because of Jesus Christ. God brought his people out of darkness through Christ not to live in isolation, but in transparent community. How unfortunate that many Christians overlook this heavenly blessing. Bonhoeffer writes, “It is easily forgotten that the fellowship of Christian brethren is a gift of grace, a gift of the Kingdom of God that any day may be taken from us, that the time that still separates us from utter loneliness may be brief indeed.”²

Bonhoeffer also emphasizes that Christian community must be a divine reality not an ideal or dream. Community is not in our imagination but something truly tangible. Community is something that is not just for a select spiritual few. It is for all. The creation of this heavenly fellowship is not mystical, or hard to understand. There are concrete disciplines and practices that establish community in the everyday lives of committed Christians. It is in the participation of community that we grow spiritually, know true joy, bare heavy sorrows, and participate in the life of Christ. Connection with another believer means connection with Christ. Bonhoeffer writes, “The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother’s is sure.”³

In chapters two through five he drills down and shares some of the specifics of how community is cultivated. Central to Christian community is the act of worship. Central to worship are the Scriptures. The Scriptures are to be read at length and to be sung. There are prayers for corporate needs, and time for fellowship and celebration

² Ibid., 20.

³ Ibid., 23.

around the Lord's table. In each of these acts, the community together encounters the presence of the risen Lord.

True fellowship in the presence of others flows from time alone. Bonhoeffer writes, "Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. He will only do harm to himself and to the community." To refuse to be alone with God means that something is toxic in the heart of the believer that will ultimately infect the community. Time alone with God happens in meditation, prayer, and intercession. What the believer does in isolation matters. He writes, "There is no sin in thought, word, or deed, no matter how personal or secret, that does not inflict injury upon the whole fellowship. An element of sickness gets into the body."⁴ Filled with the grace of the risen Lord in isolation, the Christian is equipped for community.

The killer of all Christian community is pride. There should be no thought of being the greatest. Community is developed through holding our tongue, refusing to gossip, through personal meekness, listening, helping, bearing one another's burdens, and speaking God's Word in a timely, encouraging way.

One of the greatest ways to develop fellowship is through confession. Without confession all believers play the hypocrite. Hypocrisy builds walls. Confession builds unity. Only through confession is there freedom over sin. Bonhoeffer writes, "The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation."⁵

⁴ Ibid., 89.

⁵ Ibid, 112.

Life Together offers many helpful insights to healthy life group development in the Church. Community can become an ideal, a preferred value that no one ever personally experiences. It must be tangible. The specific practices Bonhoeffer mentions would be helpful and life giving to any Christian group seeking to grow closer to Christ and one another.

However, the book does not take those outside the family of Christ into consideration. The sole focus is building community among believers. Community itself can become ingrown and unhealthy. The insightful teaching found here must be married with a love for those outside the Church. The call of the risen Lord for all believers is to go and make disciples.

***The Celebration of Discipline – The Path to Spiritual Growth* by Richard Foster**

This devotional classic was written with the goal to help frustrated, defeated, joyless believers find new depth and vitality in their relationship with Jesus Christ. The book was born out of Foster's own struggle through a spiritually dry time while serving as a pastor in a small Mennonite congregation. Fresh out of seminary, in his first three months of pastoral ministry, he confidently preached all he had with no results. He writes of this time, "My problem was that what I did say had no power to help people. I had no substance, no depth. The people were starving for a word from God, and I had nothing to give them. Nothing."⁶ *Celebration of Discipline* comes out of his personal search for the deeper things of God.

⁶ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), xiii.

The main thesis of the book can be summed up in Foster's own words in the first chapter, "The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us."⁷ The bedrock of the gospel is that salvation cannot be obtained through human works. Salvation is a gift received through faith alone. The natural inclination is to see everything as coming from God, leaving the believer with no part to play. While salvation is through God alone, personal transformation requires individual participation. For spiritual maturity and vitality to happen, there are things that must be done. The disciplines make space for God to do his transforming, deepening work in the human heart.

In time the disciplines lead to true personal joy as real life transformation takes place. The spiritual progress doesn't create pride, but humble happiness and gratitude to God. That is why the disciplines are to be celebrated. However, it must be remembered the disciplines alone are not the power producing change. They only place us before God where he and he alone can perform the transformation. Foster writes, "We must always remember that the path does not produce the change; it only places us where the change can occur."⁸

In the book he covers twelve historic, time-tested disciplines, dividing them into three sections – internal, outward, and corporate disciplines. The internal disciplines are meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. They are internal because they are done in isolation. The outward disciplines are simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. Outward disciplines are practiced in public, and impact others in the course of everyday

⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸ Ibid., 8.

life. The corporate disciplines are confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. These are disciplines practiced in community and fellowship.

Each chapter closes with very practical suggestions for the exercise of the discipline. For instance, on the chapter on simplicity, Foster advises believers to buy things for their usefulness rather than their status, to develop the habit of giving things away, and to look with skepticism at the “buy now, pay later” schemes seen everywhere in advertising today.⁹ This helps the reader get a mental vision for how the disciplines can lead to greater freedom and joy.

Celebration of Discipline was originally written back in 1978, but the very first sentence is still completely relevant for today. Forster writes, “Superficiality is the curse of our age.”¹⁰ Where are the people of spiritual substance and depth? In today’s world shallow, temporal things like clothes, phones, houses, and physical beauty are all the rage. There is little appetite for the eternal treasure of a hidden spiritual life in God. Searching for happiness in shallow things leaves the soul starved. Many in today’s world have the aching sense that something deep and vitally important is missing, but they are too busy to search for answers.

The paragraph above describes many people in central Prince William County where VCC is located. This book offers those starved for deeper things a ray of hope. It points the way toward transformation. The disciplines are not a solo venture, nor are they meant to impress. They are designed to be practiced in the context of Christian community and fellowship. Life groups that build their community around the principles

⁹ Ibid., 90-93.

¹⁰ Ibid., 1.

found in this book will experience greater individual transformation. As Foster writes, “The purpose of the Disciplines is liberation from the stifling slavery to self interest and fear. When the inner spirit is liberated from all that weighs it down, it can hardly be described as dull drudgery. Singing, dancing, even shouting characterize the Disciplines of the spiritual life.”¹¹

The shortcoming of this book is that it does not layout any practical map for how the twelve disciplines can be integrated into the context of small group life. This would have been a nice addition in an Appendix. It also focuses heavily on the individual in isolation. It would have been helpful to see the disciplines of prayer, fasting, study, and service for instance described and encouraged as group disciplines.

***Divine Conspiracy* by Dallas Willard**

Ideas are the most powerful influencers of people once they gain momentum and wide acceptance. The greatest idea to have taken root in the modern mind is the belief that there is no standard system of moral teaching. There is no way to measure what is truly right and wrong. To say that there is would be to impose a person’s view on others and thereby rob them of their individuality. Instead of imposing an ideology, young people today are encouraged to think through moral quandaries and come up with their own conclusions. With no standards, mankind is adrift on a stormy sea of confusion, not knowing which way to steer the ship. Deep inside the human psyche there is the sense that all is not as it should be.

Willard wrote *The Divine Conspiracy* to help Christians know how to live differently in such a world, shining an attractive light to a new and better life. His main

¹¹ Ibid., 2.

thesis is that corruption, evil, injustice, and faulty ideologies at work in the world can be overcome as followers of Christ are renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit. This inward rebirth makes it possible for them to live lives in the Kingdom of God, establishing God's Kingdom in a broken world. He writes, "We are thinking here of the places we spend our lives: of homes, playgrounds, city streets, workplaces, school, and so forth. These are the places we have in mind, and they are where we are asking for the kingdom, God's rule, to come, to be in effect."¹²

Willard is convinced that the Kingdom of God is missing in the overall preaching and teaching of the Church. This is unfortunate because this concept was a central part of the message of Jesus. Instead of proclaiming a balanced message of Kingdom life, the Church has swung to one of two extremes. On the one side is liberalism, which advocates social action and justice but rejects a belief in historic doctrine and the inspiration of Scripture. On the other side is the evangelical Church that stresses knowing the right doctrines intellectually, but often ends up leaving out the importance of daily living and personal holiness. He writes, "Associated with this agreement that the issue in salvation is only 'heaven or hell' is a further agreement that being saved is a forensic or legal condition rather than a vital reality or character."¹³ Willard's book hopes to draw those in the two extremes back into the life of the Kingdom of God that Jesus taught and modeled.

¹² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*, 1st ed. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 260.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 47.

The Kingdom of God starts in the human heart. Once a person submits their life to Jesus Christ, the rule, or the “governance” of God begins working inside. There is a real internal transformation that begins to take place. However, it doesn’t stop with the individual. When God created humanity his design was for mankind to rule and reign with him. Even today each person has a kind of kingdom, an area over which they exert influence and authority. As God’s reign is experienced internally, his kingdom begins to reign externally, in each personal sphere of influence. The believer begins to partner with God in his work in the world. This partnership can be seen in Willard’s definition of prayer: “Accordingly, I believe the most adequate description of prayer is simply talking to God about what we are doing together.”¹⁴ The more God’s rule is given full reign, the greater dominion and authority is given in the life of the believer.

Willard wants to help the reader see what this life in the Kingdom of God is supposed to look like. It cannot just be head knowledge. To learn really means to change. He believes the Kingdom life of the believer is described in the Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. In that message, Jesus gave humanity a clear pathway to healthy relationships and living.

When first reading the Sermon on the Mount, it may seem that Jesus is instituting a new set of rules more difficult than the Mosaic Law. Establishing a new legal code was not his intent. The goal is to go deeper than merely proscribing laws in hopes of transforming a person’s heart. It is not just about murder, but also about harboring anger. More than abstaining from adultery, God desires a heart free from lust and self-centered desires. It is more than not taking God’s name in vain. God wants to transform the heart

¹⁴ Ibid., 243.

so that words are never used to manipulate and pressure others. In the end, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount paints a vivid picture of the internal transformation that can happen through God's reign.

Willard believes this Kingdom kind of life is not being held up as an option to the modern Christian. Christians are living defeated lives, lives that are not pointing toward a viable, victorious alternative in a world lost in confusion and sin. All of this can be summed up in a failure to make true disciples. Willard writes, "Nondiscipleship is the elephant in the Church. It is not the much discussed moral failures, financial abuses, or the amazing general similarity between Christians and non-Christians."¹⁵

The Divine Conspiracy is packed with helpful advice for the formation of a healthy system of life groups. First, the priority has to be helping Christians see the beauty, holiness, joy, and love of the one, triune God. Believers need a vision of the greatness of God's person and plan. Second, the Church needs to return to the teaching of Jesus found in the Sermon on the Mount, as well as his other teaching. Willard believes there is no greater resource. Third, the Church must help believers realize they were designed to rule and reign with God to expand his rule in a broken world.

A main component of Willard's strategy for developing disciples is instruction. This can be seen in his emphasis on "enthraling the mind." It seems to weigh heavily upon a central person who would serve as a kind of "spiritual director." It would be helpful to discuss how this might happen in a group setting with a facilitator instead of a lecturer-centered format.

¹⁵ Ibid., 301.

***Missional Church* by Darrell Guder**

The book, *Missional Church*, was inspired by the writings of Bishop Lesslie Newbigin upon his return to England after a long period on the mission field in India. He was alarmed by how secular, and post-Christian his home country had become during his time away. The Church in England, that once enjoyed a privileged place in society, was now in decline. The secularization that Newbigin saw growing in Europe has now engulfed much of North America. This book was an attempt by leading theologians to analyze the current culture and the state of the Church, to see what might be done to reverse its widespread spiritual decline and marginalization.

The thesis of *Missional Church* is that the Church of today and the future must be a missionary Church in its own cultural context if it is to be faithful and obedient to the call of God. No longer can mission be something the Church does as an activity on the side. Mission must be what the Church is. For example, in chapter one they conclude, “We have come to see that mission is not merely an activity of the Church . . . Mission means ‘sending,’ and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God’s action in human history.”¹⁶ God has always been a “sending” God.

The book makes the case that the Church has lost its primary place of influence in the culture. The era of Christendom, that formerly began when Emperor Constantine made Christianity the religion of Rome in the fourth century, is no more. The Church no longer is the dominant influencer of culture. There is no place at the center of power for the Church, only on the outskirts of societal influence.

¹⁶ Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America (The Gospel and Our Culture Series)* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publications, 1998), 4.

The book compares the Church's current place to that of the Jewish exiles who were living in Babylon. The popularity and influence that Judaism enjoyed in Jerusalem around Solomon's temple were no more. The temple was destroyed and the best and brightest were living in a foreign culture, surrounded by a people who knew little and cared nothing for the God of the Jews. In exile they had almost no influence. Their paradigm had to change. No longer could they see themselves as privileged and preferred, but as foreigners living in exile. The Church today is in this kind of exile.

The Jewish exiles made the important life adjustments while captivity. However, the Church of today still lives as if Christendom never passed. It has continued as if nothing ever changed. Instead of adopting and changing methods, the Church has reinforced its efforts to protect tradition and practices that no longer connect with the current culture. Instead of being a sent Church on mission, the Church has become protective, focused on maintaining traditions that no longer mean anything.

Instead of changing, many have adapted corporate business strategies to keep the doors open. The approach is better organization, structure, communication, motivation, and recruitment. The end goal is a better engine that will produce a better spiritual product for the consumer. Mission is done as an addendum to ministry, but not as the main thrust. It is like fighting hopelessly to keep a sinking ship afloat instead of doing what it takes to build a better vessel that will sail faithfully to the correct destination.

Missional Church hopes to offer needed counsel to the Church in exile struggling to be faithful to the mandate of a missionary God. The book suggests there needs to be fundamental change in the way Church is viewed. It is not a place where things are done. Craig Van Gelder asserts, "Popular grammar captures it well: you 'go to church' much

the same way you might go to a store. You ‘attend’ a church, the way you attend a school or theater. You ‘belong to a church’ as you would a service club with its programs and activities.”¹⁷ The Church is not a place to be frequented but a people to be sent out with one purpose. While the Church is not the Kingdom of God, it is called to be a reflection of the reign of God in a broken world. The authors of *Missional Church* see the Church extending the kingdom of God mostly in terms of social justice, helping the poor, the homeless, the outcasts, and addressing political issues that create oppression.

Guder in chapters eight and nine suggests that the missional Church will look much different in structure than what is known today. Leadership will be less pastoral driven. Churches may be smaller community groups meeting in homes, called together to address a particular need. Worship and teaching will shift from internal needs only, to equipping and celebrating mission.

Missional Church gave great insight as it described the current culture, especially the isolation that comes from the rugged individualism found in a postmodern worldview. Postmodernism looks with skepticism on any community or institution. The opinions and beliefs of the individual are most important. This conviction leads to detachment and isolation. As Van Gelder points out,

The function of community within the social order is changing. The context of modernity, with its philosophy of individualism and personal freedom, assumed that persons shared some sense of communal identity. This condition no longer exists for most people as a primary framework of understanding life. The structures that previously shaped such community have eroded. With this erosion, persons find themselves very alone.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid., 80.

¹⁸ Ibid., 43.

Postmodernism comes with a price – isolation. Many people are turning to find community in the digital world, but this is a false comfort. Many are desperately lonely and are looking longingly for meaningful places to connect. This is a perfect environment for the foundation of a vibrant life group ministry.

The section on hospitality was also helpful, and may give a clue to meet the current missional challenge. One way the Church can reflect the reign of God is to be hospitable to the stranger. This involves acceptance, comfort, and aid.

Missional Church, while a great help, gives a one-sided solution for the marginalized church – social justice. The answer to the churches problems is to become more socially and politically involved in the issues of the day. Mission gets reduced to social justice. The biblical understanding of the reign of God and mission means so much more. It would have been nice to hear more about the internal transformation that comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrative Approach by Gareth Icenogle

Icenogle's book, *Biblical Foundation for Small Group Ministry*, traces the theme of community and group life all through the Bible, starting with the Old Testament, through the life and ministry of Jesus, and finally in the age of the church. His main thesis is that because God exists in community – a unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, men and women, made in his image, are to also dwell in small group connectedness. In that small group, an imperfect reflection of the divine community, there is support, spiritual growth, grace, ministry, and mission.

Fellowship was not something that suddenly appeared with the birth of the Church. It goes back to creation. The creation act was really about community – a community between the Godhead and man and woman, what Icenogle calls the “primeval community.” There in Geneses is the first biblical example of a small group of three.

Unfortunately, sin destroyed the intimacy of that first small group. The result was not only alienation between mankind and God, but between people. As Adam and Eve hid from God, people began to hide from one another. Instead of finding solace and support in the care of another, fear and insecurity entered the human way of relating. Either isolation and loneliness, or manipulation and abuse were the result. Alienated from God, humankind tried to create their own kind of pseudo-community through projects, buildings, governments, but never succeeded. Icenogle mentions the Tower of Babel as an example. He writes, “The countercovenant movement of humanity builds structures, bricks, buildings, functions, hierarchies, pyramids, tyrannies or anarchies, but cannot build community.”¹⁹

Icenogle recognizes that small groups must have some kind of leadership, but it must be different from the world’s concept of leading. It is easy for leaders to allow themselves to become the central authoritarian in the group. The dark side of fallen nature is that people crave and even enjoy this kind of unhealthy attention that ends up stifling group health and the raising up of new leaders. Icenogle cites Moses as an example of a leader who copied the unhealthy leadership styles of Egypt, centered on Pharaoh as the supreme ruler. It was his father-in-law Jethro that pointed him to a less

¹⁹Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrative Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 33.

centralized way of leading, incorporating the varied gifts within the community. For healthy small groups to exist, there must be healthy leaders who refuse to dominate, allowing ample opportunity for the other voices in the group to be heard. Icenogle writes, “The responsibility of primary leadership then is to identify, appoint and train other leaders for the community, as well as to establish disciplined structures in which such localized leadership can act.”²⁰

The small group way of life is best exemplified in the ministry of Jesus Christ. He gathered a diverse group of twelve from all different walks of life. Because of their differences, there were disagreements, discord, and tension, but they stayed together with Jesus as center of the group. His presence was what brought them all together. In their group, with Jesus present, there were times of honest sharing and even confrontation. These are the qualities of a healthy group. Allowing for conflict and confrontation as the group matures deepens the quality of the experiences and the spiritual growth. Icenogle notes, “Their model of life together was anything but a clear signal of harmonious and trusting human community. Rather, they modeled real and chaotic human relationships and attitudes.”²¹

This ideal small group did not exist for itself. As they found life in the group around the presence of Jesus, they were released for mission to the community. As they ministered they went not in ones but in teams of two. Healthy life groups choose to focus on some area of ministry that has an impact on those outside their group. While they care for one another, there is an external focus.

²⁰ Ibid., 96.

²¹ Ibid., 145.

As a small group network or ministry matures and grows, the love and devotion they have for Jesus and one another can become a critique of the unhealthy, institutional forms of governance around them. By their very presence, corrupt forms of leadership can be called into question and a new paradigm for relating at work, in the Church, or in a community can be born. Icenogle writes of the first century network of small groups, “The loving life together on the inside of the small Christian groups impacted the less human and disjointed life of the culture on the outside.”²² This is what is happening today in China, as the oppressive Communist government is being exposed and called to account through the loving, unified relationships found in the underground Church

Jesus Christ came to re-establish fellowship between God and humankind. He also came to make genuine connection, face-face encounters, and familial life possible again between individuals, through the redeeming work of the cross and resurrection. The Church now is now to come together as a genuine fellowship of people willing to know others and be known. This divine community, only made possible with Jesus as the focus, and through the presence of the Spirit, offers up an attractive alternative and stinging rebuke in this age of superficiality.

This book is filled with helpful instruction for small groups. One helpful small group practice was to use the gospels as a source of teaching and instruction for small group leaders and for members. Most of Jesus’ interaction in the gospels occurs in a small group setting. Observing the exchange, the problem, the tone, the resolution, and then generating a dialogue around these ideas, is a great way to learn.

²² Ibid., 335.

The book was limited however in that it really never connected how the small group should relate to the larger church family. It focused mostly on helpful instruction for a group of twelve or less. The final chapter addressed this issue to some degree, but it would have been good to hear more detail on structure, requirements for small group leadership, leadership training, and how various groups should connect with the church at large.

CHAPTER 4

PERSONAL ECCLESIOLOGY

This chapter will clearly state the author's personal theology of the Church, which comes out of his non-denominational, Pentecostal experience and tradition. Several key biblical passages defining the nature and purpose of the Church will be examined. After expressing the author's central convictions concerning the nature of the Church, the strengths and weaknesses of the Pentecostal tradition will be discussed in light of this ecclesiological perspective. Finally, a look at how the author's personal ecclesiology intersects and informs the focus of this paper – to raise up a healthy, holistic system of life groups at VCC, will be discussed.

A Personal Theology of the Church

Everyone has his or her own personal ecclesiology, shaped largely by their experience, upbringing, and convictions. Clarity on these core beliefs will ground this project on a strong foundation. Below are key biblical passages that shape this author's personal ecclesiology.

God's Great Instrument for Accomplishing His Purposes

The Church is the main instrument God uses to accomplish his purposes in the world. God is more than able to achieve what he desires with no human involvement, but has sovereignly chosen to do his work not just through individuals, but through groups of people. This truth is found all through Scripture, from God working through the families of Noah and Abraham, to the community of Israel, with Jesus calling his disciples, and climatically in the creation of the Church on the Day of Pentecost. God has always worked through a chosen group of people called together for his purpose.

The primary importance of the Church can be found in 1 Peter 2:9 which says, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Peter uses language that once described one race, the Jewish people – chosen race, royal priesthood, holy nation, and special possession.¹ The same titles are found in Exodus 19:5-6, “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my *treasured possession* among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a *kingdom of priests* and a *holy nation*. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel (italics added).”

The Old Testament tells the historical account of God's relationship with this chosen people. God chose Israel not because of their numbers, or power. He chose them out of his love and for a purpose (Deuteronomy 7:7). They were to be a channel of

¹ Peter Davids makes the observation that these titles are “woven together” from Exodus 19:5-6 and from Isaiah 43:20-21, which says, “The wild beasts will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my *chosen people*, the people whom I formed for myself that they *might declare my praise*.” He believes this shows that the writer meditated over a long period of time on these verses and how to use them together to describe the church. Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 91.

blessing to the world (Genesis 12:1-3). In the same way Peter says God has chosen the Church to be his own special people of purpose and promise.

There are four important observations in this passage. First, the Church, comprised of many nationalities, is as important to God as Israel was in the Old Testament. The Church is his special possession. All Christians are now the chosen race.² As he defended, provided, and cared for Israel, he will also defend, provide, and care for his Church.

Second, the Church is chosen by God to serve as royal priests. As Aaron and his descendants served God, facilitating worship, all those in the Church are now priests, with a holy call to offer sacrifices of spiritual worship. This priesthood of believers surpasses Aaron's priesthood in importance. The Aaronic priesthood was a ritual priesthood passed down through the family line. Kings could not serve as priests, only Levites. The Church is not given a ritual priesthood but a royal priesthood.³ There is the sense that this priesthood is royal in nature, as believers are now not just priests in service, but children of God, and joint heirs with Jesus, the King of kings, with constant access to his royal presence.

Third, the call to belong to God's Church is a call to live differently. The Church is to be a "holy nation". The word "holy" here literally means "dedicated to God, sacred,

² Wayne Grudem writes, "The church incorporates into itself all the true people of God, and almost all of the titles used of God's people in the Old Testament are in one place or another applied to the church in the New Testament." Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), 862.

³ John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of Peter: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005), 97.

reserved for God and his service.”⁴ As Israel was called out of slavery to live differently, the Church is called out of darkness to be a light. The Greek word for “church” is *ekklesia*, and is derived from two words, *ek*, “out,” and *kaleo*, “call.”⁵ The Church is made up of the “called out” people of God, called out to be lights in darkness, set apart for his service.

Fourth, the Church has one critical purpose – to proclaim the greatness of Jesus. The word used here for “proclaim” is *exangello*. It means “proclaim or report” and is only used here in all the New Testament.⁶ The Church is to proclaim abroad all that God has done in creation, and in redemption, through Jesus’ death and resurrection.⁷ As Israel was once God’s chosen people, blessed to be a blessing (Genesis 12:1-3), the Church is now God’s main instrument to accomplish his purposes in the world. The Church is called to be God’s special possession, his royal priests offering true worship, his set apart people, and his vessel for proclaiming his greatness.

Every Member Together in Ministry

The Church is healthy when every member is a minister. In Ephesians 4:16 Paul writes, “From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds

⁴ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 9.

⁵ J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Church, Kingdom, and Last Things*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1988), 17.

⁶ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 271.

⁷ Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 93.

itself up in love.” Here, the Church is pictured as a body with Christ as the head (Ephesians 4:15).

While Jesus is the head, the foundation, author, and builder of the Church, there is another essential quality keeping the body together and in good health. It is the symbiotic relationship of every member. The words “held together” come from the word *sybibazo* and is translated in Colossians 2:2 as “knit”. Each member of the Church is knit to the others in symbiotic relationship. As the physical body is dependent on the contribution of all its members to one another, so is the Church.

Good results occur when each part is working properly. The word translated “properly” in the Greek is *en metron* and literally means “in measure”. The word *metron* was also used to describe an instrument for measuring.⁸ Elsewhere in Scripture it is translated as “measure” or “measuring rod”. For instance, Matthew 7:2 says, “For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure (*metron*) you use it will be measured to you.” In 2 Corinthians 10:13 *metron* is rendered as “area of influence.” It says, “But we will not boast beyond limits, but will boast only with regard to the area of influence (*metron*) God assigned to us, to reach even to you.” Each member has a measure, a place, a divine design, an area of influence in the Church. When each member is working up to their measure the Church grows and is filled with love.

The ministry individual believers have for one another is not just in service, but also in encouragement. In Hebrews 10:24-25 it says, “And let us consider how to stir up

⁸ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 515.

one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

The word for “stir up” in the Greek is *paroxysmos*. It is used only one other time in the New Testament, in Acts 15:39. There it is rendered “disagreement,” describing the argument that led to the break up Paul and Barnabas over John Mark. This word can also mean, “provoking, irritation, sharp disagreement, attack of fever.”⁹ Here it is used in a positive sense. F.F. Bruce in his commentary on Hebrews writes, “But here love is provoked in the sense of being stimulated in the lives of Christians by the considerateness and example of other members of their fellowship.”¹⁰

In Hebrews 10:25 it goes on to say that love is stirred up through the habit of meeting together. Growth happens in the context of community in the family of God.¹¹ In a world that is becoming increasingly disconnected, the Church is called to be different.

Called to Make Disciples

The great task of the Church is to make disciples. Jesus in his last instructions to his disciples in Matthew 28:19-20 said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy

⁹ Ibid., 629.

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 257.

¹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived and the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers....So the Christian, to, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes.” Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 17.

Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” These final words of Jesus are so familiar to most they no longer mean anything. A closer look is needed.

In this final mandate Jesus used four verbs – go, make disciples, baptize, and teach. Of these verbs only one is in the Greek imperative command form – “make disciples.” The Greek word is *matheteusate* and it is in the aorist imperative active mood. Verbs in aorist imperative call for specific, definite, decisive choice.¹² It appears that Matthew wanted to give special emphasis – “Going is important, as well as teaching and baptizing, but in all the activity do not forget discipling. Making disciples is the chief work.” Michael J. Wilkins describes Jesus’ understanding of a disciple in the following.

To become a disciple was a common phenomenon in the ancient world, but throughout his ministry Jesus developed a unique form of discipleship for those who followed him. He broke through a variety of barriers – gender, ethnic, religious, social, economic, and so on – by calling all peoples into a personal discipleship relationship with himself. Being a disciple of Jesus was primarily not an academic endeavor like the Pharisees...A disciple of Jesus comes to him and him alone for eternal life and will always be only a disciple of Jesus. The expression is virtually synonymous with the title “Christian.”¹³

The Greek word for “nations” is the word “*ethne*”. It is used fifty-three times in the New Testament and is most commonly translated as “Gentiles” (Ephesians 2:11, 1 Thessalonians 4:5, 2 Timothy 4:17). Outside of the Bible it was used to describe

¹² PerceptAustin, "Greek Quick Reference Guide," http://www.preceptaustin.org/new_page_40.htm (accessed October 9, 2013).

¹³ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*, The Niv Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 952.

foreigners.¹⁴ Jesus' command was to disciple all peoples, including Gentile foreigners – those from a different culture, far from Israel's understanding of God.

To offer encouragement Jesus said, "I'm with you always, until the end of the age." The word "always" in the Greek is "*pasas tas hemeras*", or literally "all the days." Jesus promised to be with the Church every single day until the end of the age, giving constant strength for this vital mission.

Empowered by The Holy Spirit

The Church can only accomplish the mission through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised this power. Before his ascension he said in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Their witness did spread from their home city of Jerusalem, to the surrounding area of Judea, cross-culturally to Samaria, and ultimately to every corner of the globe. The mandate of Acts 1:8 becomes a kind of "table of contents" for the book. Chapters one through seven describe events in Jerusalem, chapter eight deals with the evangelism in Samaria, and chapter nine on deals with Paul's missionary ministry to the nations.¹⁵

Acts 1:8 was fulfilled in a remarkable way, in a very short period of time because the disciples were empowered by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said again in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you..." The word "power" in the

¹⁴ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 218.

¹⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church and the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 4.

Greek is *dunamis* and can mean “power, might, strength, force, ability, capability.”¹⁶ The same word is used in Luke 1:35 when the angel answered Mary’s question of how she could conceive without knowing a man. The angel said, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the *power (dunamis)* of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God.” (Luke 1:35) Also, in Luke 6:19 it says, “And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power (*dunamis*) came out from him and healed them all.” It was this same *dunamis* that filled the disciples. When the Holy Spirit is finally poured out, he is pictured as wind and fire, two elemental forces in nature that represent tremendous power, force, energy, and ability.

It was the filling of the Holy Spirit that transformed the ordinary, limited, frightened, overwhelmed band of Jesus followers into a mighty army. The Spirit came to fill the Church with the power it desperately needed to fulfill the missionary mandate.

John Stott in his book, *The Message of Acts*, says,

Without the Holy Spirit, Christian discipleship would be inconceivable, even impossible. There can be no life without the life-giver, no understanding without the Spirit of truth, no fellowship without the unity of the Spirit, no Christlikeness of character apart from his fruit, and no effective witness without his power. As a body without breath is a corpse, so the Church without the Spirit is dead.¹⁷

This short sampling reveals that the Church is God’s main instrument for accomplishing his purposes in the world. As he loved and cared for Israel, he will lovingly build the Church. The Church is not about isolation and individualism, but about connectedness, commitment, and building one another up in love. Mutual

¹⁶ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 207.

¹⁷ Stott, *The Message of Acts*, 60.

upbuilding and Spirit empowerment are essential for the important mission of making disciples of those far from God.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Charismatic Tradition

Not only is a person's ecclesiology shaped by Scripture, but also by personal experience. The writer of this paper is a third generation pastor with a rich ministry heritage steeped in Pentecostalism. Attention will now be given to the strengths and weaknesses of the Pentecostal tradition, and how this author's personal experience in this tradition has shaped his understanding of the Church and her mission.

First, it will be helpful to clearly define what "Pentecostal" means. Wayne Grudem, in his systematic theology, rightly states that Pentecostals trace their beginning back to the revival that began in the early 1900's in America.¹⁸ The movement started in December of 1900, in the small Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas.¹⁹ Charles Fox Parham was teaching, and he gave his class the assignment to search for any biblical evidence for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The students took the assignment seriously. After their exhaustive study they concluded the evidence was in the book of Acts, and that speaking in tongues was the sign of Spirit baptism. Parham then called for an all night prayer meeting to seek such an experience. At that service, on New Year's Eve, December 31, 1900, Agnes Ozman asked Parham to lay hands on her to receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit.²⁰ She then spoke in tongues, beginning the Pentecostal

¹⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 763.

¹⁹ Anthony J. Cervero, "Spiritual Fusion: A Pathway for Spiritual Transformation through Small Groups in a Pentecostal Church" (DMin diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2007), 30.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 32-33.

awakening that later gave birth to many other revivals, most notably the charismatic renewal.²¹

Unrealistic Expectations

One weakness of the Pentecostal tradition is the unrealistic expectations that can develop for the average local church. There are some who believe every worship service is to be charged with supernatural, early Church power as members personally experience the Holy Spirit, operate in gifts, and respond accordingly with great emotional fervor. In his book, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, Steven Jack Land describes what real Pentecostal worship looks like.

The whole body responded and each person presented his or her body in receptivity and yieldedness to the Lord. Hands would be raised in praise and longing for his coming as the clouds of heavenly glory descended upon them. Hands would reach out to touch Jesus and by his Spirit receive healing and help. Hands would clap for joy at the mighty and wonderful deeds and presence of God. Hands would clasp and clench as believers revered and 'held on' to God for a blessing...Bodies would sway in the heavenly breezes blowing from the throne of God. Hands would be laid upon those seeking healing, needing encouragement, or being set forth by the body for some particular ministry.²²

Unfortunately, the average Church often fails to meet this standard consistently if ever. Instead of committing faithfully and praying diligently for their church to experience more of God, some will leave disenchanted, drifting from church to church, revival to

²¹ The Charismatic renewal in the 60's and 70's was born from Pentecostalism but had more flexibility. Charismatics also believed in the gifts of the Spirit, but allowed for differing views on speaking in tongues as the sign of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Without starting their own denomination, charismatics have spurred renewal within all denominations and the Catholic Church. The writer of this paper now considers himself a charismatic Christian. Grudem, 763.

²² Steven Jack Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 1993), 108.

revival, with no sense of connectedness. Bonhoeffer wrote this about the danger of unrealistic expectations:

He who loves his dream of community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter...If we do not give thanks daily for the Christian fellowship in which we have been placed, even when there is no great experience, no discoverable riches, but much weakness, small faith, and difficulty; if on the contrary, we keep complaining that everything is paltry and petty, then we hinder God from letting our fellowship grow.²³

Over Emphasizing the Crisis Moment

Another obstacle to discipleship is the strong emphasis Pentecostals place on what Land calls the “crisis moment.” This is the moment when spiritual blessings finally pour forth in great power and force, radically changing the life of the believer. The “crisis moment” can become the most important pursuit of the Christian. Concerning the “crisis moment,” Land writes the following:

There is a parallel between the view of the end as a crisis ushering in a new heaven and earth and a view of the Christian life as a series of crises. New birth, sanctification, Spirit filling, healings, prophecies, calls to ministry, all are definite crises or interventions of God; all are present manifestations of the life of the coming kingdom.²⁴

Creating these moments can become the central pursuit of regular worship. These are the times when spiritual gifts are poured out – tongues, healing, prophecy, etc. The crisis moment is proof of God’s approval and presence. The crisis moment becomes the instant solution that propels a believer and a church into a new realm of spiritual maturity. There are crises moments recorded in Scripture. One example would be Saul’s conversion (Acts 9). The great example is Pentecost (Acts 2).

²³ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 27.

²⁴ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 71.

Pentecostals see the dramatic events in Acts as giving precedent for what must happen today. The events of Acts become the pattern for the Church for all time. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart in their book *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, offer a more balanced view. The dramatic events in Acts are written in narrative form with the intent of showing the growth of the Church, and advance of the gospel by the power of the Holy Spirit. The nature of narratives is not to offer a once and for all model. They state what happened not what must happen.²⁵

God could do an instant maturing work, but chooses instead to grow the believer over time. For example, Moses waited in the wilderness forty years before he was called for service. Jesus spent three years teaching his disciples after he himself had spent thirty years in personal development. Though saved and filled with the Holy Spirit, Paul was sent first to Arabia, and then to his hometown of Tarsus where he remained for many years in obscurity (Acts 9:30, Galatians 2:1).

Seeking the crisis moment is summed up in the old revival phrase, “Get under the spout where the glory’s coming out.” Spiritual growth and power are developed through the Spirit’s infilling, through fervently seeking the Lord for grace, but also in the context of community, accountability, and commitment to the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, service, confession, and meditation over a long period of time.

A Lack of Balance in Worship

In Veli-Matti Karkkainen’s book *An Introduction Ecclesiology*, he describes three basic ecclesiological models. First is the traditional “lecture room” format of Protestants,

²⁵ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 105-107.

with the focus on the pulpit and preaching. Second is the “theater setting” of Catholicism, where the emphasis is on drama and liturgy. Third is the “fellowship” environment of Pentecostals. While not excluding preaching, the most important element in Pentecostal worship is sharing together in fellowship and in the Spirit’s presence. While God communicates through the written and spoken Word, the most important work is done through the Spirit.²⁶

For the Pentecostal, there is an emphasis on knowing God directly through experience. The Hebrew word *yada* has the idea of personal, intimate, union, and experience. In the Old Testament *yada* was used to describe not only head knowledge, but sexual intimacy (Genesis 4:1). The personal worship experience is the Pentecostal channel for intimacy with God.²⁷

A healthy balance is needed. Experience and fellowship must be supported with truth and instruction. In fact, the more truth a person understands the deeper their worship experience will be. More truth can mean more intimacy and passion. As Jesus said in John 4:24, “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

How This Ecclesiology Impacts the Focus of This Paper

In Anthony Cervero’s dissertation entitled, *Spiritual Fusion: A Pathway for Spiritual Transformation*, he openly recognizes the need for a more balanced approach to discipleship in Pentecostal and charismatic churches today. The “spiritual fusion” he

²⁶ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 75.

²⁷ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 68.

describes is a fusion of spiritual formation and spiritual experience. In the scientific world, fusion is a combining of two different nuclei into one heavier element.²⁸ This kind of fusion releases great energy and power. Fusion is what powers the sun and stars. Cervero believes the fusion of spiritual formation and spiritual experience will also release great transformation.²⁹

This kind of fusion can be seen in Acts 2. There was a great outpouring of the Spirit – a crisis moment that changed everything. However, Luke fuses the experience with spiritual formation.³⁰ Acts 2:42 says, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” They were filling their lives with the disciplines needed to bring deep change. The explosive result is found in Acts 2:43; 47, “And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles... praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

The fusion of spiritual experience and spiritual formation in the early Church also included the essential element of community. Though their hearts and minds were filled with the power of the Holy Spirit, they knew they still needed community. They committed themselves to regular fellowship and the breaking of bread. The result was greater personal and corporate growth. As a result Acts 2:43 says, “And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.”

²⁸ Cervero, *Spiritual Fusion*, 4.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 13.

Conclusion

One of the great attributes of the Pentecostal tradition is its passion to experience more of God. There is a sincere desire to feel the power and presence of God in a supernatural way. Such a pursuit will move a person to humbly submit their life to the Lord. It is in this yielded state that God often pours out his Spirit.

In Richard Riss's book, *A Survey of 20th Century Revival Movements in North America*, he writes about the Latter Rain Movements in the 1940s and 1950s. One of the great revivals during this time was in Detroit, Michigan at the Bethesda Missionary Temple pastored by Myrtle D. Beall. In Mrs. Beall's church there was a fresh experience of singing the free song of Lord. Times of prayer were characterized by yieldedness, brokenness, and peace. Riss quotes Sixto Lopez, one who personally attended the revival:

Most of us find difficulty in yielding to the Lord, but in this atmosphere I felt a complete yieldedness. I opened my heart to the Lord, and felt as through I was giving myself as an offering to Him. Every Scripture and every message took on a new meaning to me. The most outstanding thing I felt in those meetings was a desire to pray –just stay before the Lord...Many of the people there have lost their appetite for food and go days without food. I had a big appetite for food but came to the place that I did not care to eat.³¹

God desires to bring true revival to the Church today. In the pursuit of balance, may the Church not swing to the other extreme of a cold intellectualism. Believers need the supernatural power that only the Holy Spirit can give. Postmoderns today are open and even hungry for this kind of genuine, spiritual experience. May the Church continue to seek the experience through worship and also through understanding and instruction in the Bible. It is hoped that this will lead to greater fellowship and missional engagement.

³¹ Richard M. Riss, *A Survey of 20th-Century Revival Movements in North America* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 118-119.

CHAPTER 5

A THEOLOGY FOR DISCIPLE-MAKING THROUGH LIFE GROUPS

The goal of this chapter is to establish a theological foundation to support the ministry goal of this paper – the development of a self-multiplying network of disciple-making life groups that focus on three areas – personal spiritual growth (reaching in), fellowship (reaching across), and welcoming the stranger (reaching out). The theological foundation will be primarily based on the Gospel of Mark, with specific focus given to Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler, and the subsequent teaching given to his disciples found in Mark 10:17-31. Finally, George Hunter's book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, will be used as a historic example to show the power of evangelism and discipleship through small groups that practice hospitality.

Discipleship in Mark's Gospel

Background information regarding Mark's account of the rich young ruler found in Mark 10:17-31 will help the reader to understand why Mark's gospel was chosen for a study on discipleship. Nowhere in the gospel is Mark mentioned as the author. This may be because the author saw himself as a compiler of accounts, not a writer of original

material.¹ To support Mark's authorship there are titles, which date from the end of the first century. Also, the records of early church fathers, like Papias and Eusebius, mention Mark's authorship, attesting that he accurately wrote first hand accounts of Peter the apostle.²

Tradition holds this to be the same John Mark that accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. The date of composition was somewhere between 50 and 70 AD, possibly during Peter's imprisonment in Rome, but before the destruction of the temple in 70 AD. This was a time of uncertainty, persecution, and hardship for the growing Christian movement, especially in Rome with Nero as emperor.³

Mark does not give a sequential, biographical account of Jesus' life. Instead, he jumps from scene to scene without concern for chronology. The accounts are compiled not just to share history, but to communicate important theological truths to encourage followers of Jesus.⁴

Mark's main goal was to share the gospel by sharing stories of Jesus' life and ministry (Mark 1:1), but he also wanted to help his readers understand the true nature of discipleship. Ernest Best in his book, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, writes, "His primary objective was pastoral: to build up his readers as Christians

¹ Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 514.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ernest Best, *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*, ed. Ernst Bammel, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series*, vol. 4 (Sheffield, England: The University of Sheffield, 1981), 10.

and show them what true discipleship is.”⁵ The main group that interacts with Jesus throughout Mark is the disciples, and much can be learned from their interaction with Jesus. All of this material would have been very helpful to early Christians facing hardship for their devotion to Jesus.

The heart of Mark’s teaching on discipleship can be found in 8:27-10:45.⁶ It is here that Jesus’ encounter with the rich young ruler is found. Just as Jesus had called Andrew, Peter, James, John, and Levi (Mark 2:16-20; Mark 2:13-14), he was calling the rich man to be his disciple.

Mark’s Meaning of Discipleship

Finding Mark’s meaning of a disciple becomes clearer when looking at the other two main groups Jesus interacted with in his gospel – the crowd and the Pharisees. Jesus had compassion (Mark 6:34) for the crowds and spent his ministry calling them to follow him. Despite his efforts, their response was marked by inconsistency, emotionalism, and fickleness. They followed Jesus but never became devoted.⁷ They would shout “Hosanna!” (Mark 11:9), but also called for his crucifixion (Mark 15:13). The interaction of the Pharisees, the second major group, with Jesus was marked by criticism and questioning (Mark 2:7; 2:16; 2:18; 2:24 3:2). On the outside they looked devout but their hearts were far from God. The Pharisees brought Jesus grief and anger (Mark 3:5; Mark 7:6-9).

⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁶ Richard Peace, "Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve," (Grand Rapids, MI.: WB Eerdmans, 1999).

⁷ Green, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 177.

The disciples were a different group. While far from perfect, they were the followers of Jesus. The word “disciple” in the Greek is *mathetes*, and it means “pupil, apprentice, disciple, adherent.”⁸

The Rich Young Ruler

The residents of the Washington, DC area look a lot like the rich young ruler. It is an area where many young men and women come to find greater success, power, and wealth. The same distractions that held this young leader back from following Jesus would apply to those that VCC hopes to reach. Attention will now be directed to the lessons on discipleship and community that can be gleaned from this account.

The Common Command to Follow

The character in Mark 10:17 is commonly known as the rich young ruler. Nowhere in Mark’s account does the reader find that he is either young or a ruler, only that he has great possessions (Mark 10:22). His occupation as “ruler” comes from Luke’s account (Luke 18:18-30), and his youthful age comes from Matthew (Matthew 19:16-29). Vincent Taylor calls the familiar title a “composite description.”⁹

Mark opens the encounter with the words, “And as he was setting out on his journey...” (ESV). The ASV reads, “And as he was going forth into the way...” The Greek word for “way” is *hodos*, and it is used several times in Mark’s teaching on discipleship in Mark 8 through 10 (8:27; 9:33f; 10:17; 46; 52). The word *hodos* is used to describe Jesus’ final journey to Jerusalem. His disciples are following him in this

⁸ Arndt, *A Greek-English Dictionary*, 465.

⁹ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes*, Second Edition ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 425.

“way.” While on this journey, Jesus calls the rich young ruler (Mark 10:17-22) and blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-51) to follow him. While the young ruler declined, Bartimaeus accepted the call. Mark 10:52b says, “And immediately he recovered his sight and followed him on the way (*en te hodo*).”

Ernest Best makes the observation that Mark’s continued use of *hodos* is intentional. He is helping the reader picture what discipleship is really about.¹⁰ The Christian life is a way, a journey, a movement, and a commitment to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, living in relationship with him. This description is found in both Old and New Testaments. The movement of Jesus’ followers was originally referred to as “the Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 24:14, 22). When Paul talks about living as a Christian he describes it as “walking” (Ephesians 4:1, Colossians 1:10). This metaphor finds its roots in the journey of the children of Israel from the wilderness to the land of promise.¹¹

While walking in the way with his disciples, Jesus meets a wealthy, young man in a place of authority. The detail given in verse 17 is very descriptive. The young man runs, and kneels (*prosdramon*). This kind of reverential approach was normally given to beloved teachers of the Law.¹² He addresses Jesus as the “Good Teacher.” While in the Old Testament and in Judaism only God is described as “good,” the man is not lifting

¹⁰ Best, *Following Jesus*, 16.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: WB Eerdmans 1974), 364.

Jesus up to the place of God. Rather, he uses *agathos* as a title of honor.¹³ The reader sees his sincerity and eagerness. His mannerisms and words show deep respect.

His question is also heartfelt, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” In Matthew’s account the question is, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16) Though he is wealthy, young, and prominent, something is missing. He wants to know how he can fix the issue. William Lane says the question denotes a “piety of achievement,” a search for assurance based on personal works. Just before this encounter, in Mark 10:15, Jesus taught that works could not earn someone the Kingdom of God. It had to be received in childlike faith.¹⁴ Mark 10:15 says, “Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

Jesus is not concerned with religious appearance, outward performance, or personal piety. His mission was to call others to follow him in the way, his way. Though the rich young ruler was sincere, fervent, and reverential, his focus is on his ability to achieve, not on his need for the grace of God. Jesus wants more than legalism and outward conformity. He wants this gifted leader to follow and live in relationship with him.

The Primacy of Relationships

Jesus response to all the young man’s sincere affectation is surprising. In a rather cold way he questions why the man would call him “good” when only God is good. There is now sudden tension in this encounter. Jesus’ response does not mean that he

¹³ C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge Universtiy Press, 1959), 326.

¹⁴ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 365.

was aware of personal sin in his life. He wanted to deal directly with this man's faulty understanding of goodness as a result of human accomplishment.¹⁵ Jesus hopes to direct the man's attention away from himself and toward God's goodness. He does this by quickly pointing to God as the source of all goodness, and by turning the man's attention to the Law, God's perfect standard.¹⁶

In the brief glimpse of this man, he seems to be very self-focused. In this encounter he speaks just two sentences, but refers to himself three times – “What must *I* do to inherit eternal life?” (v.17) and “Teacher, all these *I* have kept from *my* youth.” (v 20). His whole concern appears to be for himself.

It is interesting that Jesus does not list all Ten Commandments. He instead focuses on what is known as “Second Table,” which are the last six commandments dealing with human relationships.¹⁷ Though the sampling of commandments was meant to represent the entire Decalogue, it seems that Jesus is making a special point by quoting only those that deal with loving others.¹⁸

Also noteworthy is the substitution of the word “defraud” for “covet” in Mark 10:19. The word “defraud” comes from *apostereo*, and it means, “to steal, rob.”¹⁹ It has the idea of withholding or depriving something from someone that is rightfully theirs. In 1 Corinthians 7:5 *apostereo* is used of a husband or wife withholding conjugal rights.

¹⁵ Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 327.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 328.

¹⁷ D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark*, Pelican Gospel Commentaries (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), 274.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 99.

In Matthew's account there is an interesting comparison. In listing the commandments, Jesus excludes the tenth commandment not to covet. He also ends the short list differently. In Matthew 19:19 Jesus says, "Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Matthew ends the list with an emphasis on loving neighbors.²⁰

William Lane makes the following observation about the commandments Jesus mentioned: "They clearly and incisively focus upon relationships with others as the discernible measure of a man's reverence for God and obedience to his mandates."²¹ Jesus seems to be pointing to a problem in this man's ability to love and relate well with others. VC Taylor mentions that the word *apostereo* was used to describe holding back the wages of a worker, or refusing to return goods or money that was deposited.²² Possibly he had taken advantage of his employees, and or customers in his business dealings. Mark's list ends by placing the fourth commandment to honor mother and father at the end. Another possibility is that he failed to properly honor his parents. It is safe to conclude that in Jesus' call to follow him, he was also calling the rich young ruler to embrace a high value of human relationships and community.

Loving the Lost

The rich young ruler was lost. He had no idea of his condition before God. In Mark 10:20 he responds, "Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth." In explanation

²⁰ In David Garland's commentary on Mark he writes, "Many believed in the ancient world that riches could only be attained by defrauding others of their fair share." David E. Garland, *Mark: The Niv Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*, Niv Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 395.

²¹ Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 366.

²² Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 428.

of these words, David Garland writes, “Either the man is disappointed to learn nothing new from Jesus, or pleased that his hunch about his good prospects in the age to come has been confirmed by a religious specialist.”²³ It looks like he was delusional in his assessment of his own righteousness, and blind to his personal need for grace. A mixture of good works and wealth blinded him from his inner condition, and created a false sense of divine approval. That is why Jesus would say in Mark 10:23, “How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!”

Mark highlights how Jesus cared for this lost man. In Mark 10:21 it says, “And Jesus, looking at him, loved him.” Jesus does not humiliate or publicly condemn him. Jesus looked at him and loved him. The word used for “looking at” is *emblepo* and it means more than taking a casual glimpse. It means “to fix one’s gaze upon”.²⁴ One gets this idea from Acts 1:11 where it says, “Why do you stand looking into (*emblepontes*) heaven?” More than looking at a person, *emblepo* can have the spiritual implication of looking into a person.²⁵ Jesus looked into the lost man, and saw him for all that he was.

He took the time to notice him, and he loved him. The word for “love” is *egapesen*. This is not a self-serving love, but a self-giving love. It looks past faults and failures, and seeks to help another in a sacrificial way.²⁶ Some modern commentators

²³ Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 396.

²⁴ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 254.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*, 329.

translate *egapesen auton* to show an outward gesture, a friendly touch, like putting an arm around him.²⁷ Jesus wanted to lovingly help him into the Kingdom of God.

In Mark's Gospel we see Jesus loving the lost. In Mark 2:15 he eats with tax collectors and sinners, and the verse says, "for there were many who followed him." Most of Jesus' teaching was done through parables (Mark 4:34), or stories and riddles that centered around everyday events. Jesus taught this way to build a bridge to transfer, and to call those in the crowd to become disciples.²⁸ When Jesus saw the crowds were hungry and tired, in Mark 8:2 it says he had compassion for them. Jesus showed a spirit of love and hospitality by preparing a meal for them. In his encounter with the rich young ruler there is a kind of hospitality, as Jesus openly welcomed and interacted with one far from God.

Speaking Truth in Love

Mark says that after Jesus loved the rich young ruler, he showed the depth and strength of this love. Jesus loves this man too much to conceal the truth, and lovingly points to the one great obstacle holding him back from his quest for eternal life – his possessions.

Jesus asked him to do what sounds harsh to the modern reader – "Sell all you have and give it to the poor." Concerning this command Lane writes, "The specific form of the sacrifice Jesus demanded of this man is not to be regarded as a general prescription

²⁷ Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark*, 275.

²⁸ Green, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 596.

to be applied to all men...”²⁹ Jesus is speaking to a particular situation. Why would Jesus ask him to do this? Wealth in Judaism was viewed as mark of divine favor.³⁰ Jesus knows to receive the Kingdom of God and eternal life, one must trust fully in God alone, not in anything they possess. Giving everything away would “dramatize” for him his helplessness. He must become like a child to receive the Kingdom (Mark 10:15).³¹ Eternal life comes through humble, helpless, child-like faith in Jesus, and in following him in daily devotion.

Jesus’ loving confrontation was difficult to hear. Here the tension in the conversation rises to the highest point. The road to eternal life is clear and calls for a personal response. The rich young ruler is the only person in Mark’s gospel who refuses a personal call from Jesus to follow him. When Jesus called people to follow him it was compelling, forceful, seemingly irresistible. Here the man resists because he had “great possessions” (Mark 10:22).

When he leaves Jesus and his disciples he is “disheartened” and “sorrowful.” The word for “disheartened” is *stugnazo* and it means, “to be shocked, appalled, or to be gloomy and dark.”³² Jesus’ confrontation could have been a message of joy and hope, the answer to his quest. However, it had the reverse effect. The word for “sorrowful” is *lupeo* and it can mean, “grieve or pain”.³³

²⁹ Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 367.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 771.

³³ Ibid., 481.

Jesus called the rich young ruler into relationship with him. He wanted the rich man to follow him in the way. Honest dialogue created a pathway to eternal life. One of the starting points for healthy relationship is honest communication, even when it creates discomfort, grief, and pain.

Growth Through Interaction

One of Mark's main purposes for writing is to offer instruction on discipleship by retelling Jesus' experiences with his disciples. One of the ways Jesus equipped the twelve was through questions, feedback, and processing the different events they experienced as a small group. Gunter Krallmann in his book, *Mentoring for Mission*, writes, "The Master devised a coaching programme which was informal and oral at the same time. He turned the entirety of everyday life experiences into one big classroom for the Twelve and wove the threads of his instruction most naturally into the overall pattern of ordinary events."³⁴

After the rich young ruler left saddened, Jesus seized this open moment for dialogue and instruction. Mark 10:23 says, "And Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, 'How difficult it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!'" Jesus uses this moment to reshape the disciple's understanding of the kingdom of God. Their understanding of the kingdom was physical, literal, nationalistic, and centered on a Davidic Messiah who would reestablish Israel's former glory. The Kingdom of God was something that made every Jew in Israel excited.³⁵ It was James

³⁴ Günter Krallmann, *Mentoring for Mission: A Handbook on Leadership Principles Exemplified by Jesus Christ* (Hong Kong: Jensco Ltd., 1994), 124.

³⁵ Green, *A Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 429.

and John who asked for the most prominent posts in Jesus' kingdom to come. In their minds the kingdom would bring success, fame, opportunity, power, and wealth. Jesus wanted them to see that the Kingdom of God had already come with his arrival. The reign of God, though ultimately eschatological, could be personally experienced in the present, bringing peace, happiness, and freedom.³⁶

The dialogue appears to have had moments of reflection. Mark 10:24 says, "the disciples were amazed at his words." They were unable to respond. Jesus then repeats his statement concerning the difficulty of the rich entering the kingdom, and strengthens it with a humorous hyperbole. Camels will go through needle's eyes before the wealthy enter the kingdom of God (Mark 10:25). This time they are "exceedingly astonished," and they need clarification. They ask, "Then who can be saved?" Jesus reassures them. What is impossible with man is possible with God (Mark 10:26). The disciples still cannot grasp his teaching. Like the rich young ruler, Peter seems to have over estimated his own personal devotion and sacrifice (Mark 10:28). However, Jesus patiently continues in relationship, in dialogue, and in interaction, making sure to process and exploit teachable moments.

A New Family

Jesus met the rich young ruler as he was on his journey to Jerusalem. Jesus was accompanied by his disciples. Jesus and his disciples are in community, while the young ruler appears to be alone. When Jesus calls the rich young ruler to follow him, it was more than a call to complete devotion. It was a call to follow him and to join his community. It was a call to join the journey with others walking in the way.

³⁶ Ibid.

After Peter proudly compares the disciples' success in forsaking all with the rich young ruler's failure to fully surrender, Jesus says in Mark 10:29-30, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands."

Leaving all to follow Jesus was costly. Jesus himself experienced the rejection of his siblings. They tried on one occasion to seize him, saying that he was out of his mind (Mark 3:21). The relational suffering caused because of a commitment to Jesus will be rewarded in this life one hundred fold. They will be given a new family. Ernest Best writes,

What is the recompense of the Christian in this age? When he is converted ties of kinship, home and occupation may be severed but these ties will be replaced a hundredfold by new ties with fellow-Christians; he will find that he has many brothers, sisters, mothers; there will be many 'homes' in which he will be received as a member.³⁷

Family members care for one another. They open their homes to family members in a spirit of hospitality and grace. They dialogue about serious matters of faith and questions of life. They lovingly and courageously confront other family members to help them experience the Kingdom of God in a greater way. They also graciously welcome outsiders, taking notice of them with love. They rejoice with members who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. This is a family that will last forever.

³⁷ Best, *Following Jesus*, 114.

The Power of Hospitality

In George Hunter's book, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, he studies how God used Saint Patrick to reach the barbarian hordes living on the forgotten fringes of the Roman Empire.³⁸ The Roman Church considered the barbarians unreachable because they were uncultured, uncivilized, illiterate, emotional, and unpredictable. The leaders of the Roman Church believed one had to be first civilized as a prerequisite for conversion, and then to learn Latin so they could worship properly. It was not only a matter of spreading Christianity, but of spreading the Roman culture and way of life. The barbarians were labeled as hopeless prospects, and were largely forgotten until the time of Patrick.

Saint Patrick found a way to reach the barbarian hordes. First, and most importantly, he understood their beliefs and their way of life. Before becoming a priest, he had lived among the barbarians, working in their fields as a captured slave. While working, living, and learning their language, he developed a love for them.

Second, Patrick and his team practiced the grace of hospitality. He would first ask permission to set up their camp beside a barbarian tribe. Once their camp was established, they would engage the barbarians in conversation, looking for people who were receptive. Prayers were offered for those in need. They would also openly use stories, poems, and song to arouse their curiosity.

Interested visitors were warmly welcomed into their camp. Once inside the walls of the mission, a visitor would have taken notice of the guest house where there was food, shelter, clothing, and above all, conversation. Soon a church was established, and Patrick

³⁸ George G. Hunter, III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again* (Nashville: Abingdom Press, 2000), 17-30.

and his team would move to the next tribe. In his ministry in Ireland, Patrick would ordain 1,000 priests, and thirty to forty of Ireland's 150 barbarian tribes were, for the most, part evangelized.³⁹

At the end of his book, Hunter makes the observation that today there is a new kind of Barbarian. In many ways they have taken over the Western world. He writes,

Many of them are "secular"; that is, they have never been substantially influenced by Christian religion; they have no Christian memory and no church to "return" to. Many have never acquired a "church etiquette" (they would not know when to stand, or where to find Second Corinthians, or what to say to the pastor after the service), and they are not "civilized" or "refined" enough to fit and feel comfortable in the church down the street. Often, they are thought to lack "class." They may have unshined shoes or body odor or grease under their fingernails, in conversation, they might split an infinitive or utter an expletive. Many New Barbarians are addicted, and their lives are at least sometimes out of control around some substance, such as alcohol or cocaine, or some process, such as sex or gambling. Many Western cities appear, at least at times, to be taken over by the New Barbarians.⁴⁰

Hospitality could be the Church's greatest tool for reaching a postmodern world. About the power of hospitality, Fitch writes, "Postmodern evangelism incubates in the climates of hospitality, in the places of conversation, posing questions and listening to strangers in our midst."⁴¹ In Patrick's day many in the Church said the Barbarians were a hopeless cause, and they were forgotten about. Let the Church today not say the same thing about the "New Barbarians". What is impossible for man is possible with God. All God needs is an open heart, and an open door.

³⁹ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 96.

⁴¹ Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, 60.

Conclusion

Here is a theological foundation for discipleship through small groups in a local church based on Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler in Mark 10. The potential for evangelism through life groups that practice hospitality was seen in the historic example of St. Patrick's mission to the Celtic Barbarians. The next chapter will outline the design of a healthy discipleship program for the life groups of VCC.

PART THREE
STRATEGY

CHAPTER 6

MINISTRY PLAN FOR HEALTHY LIFE GROUPS AT VCC

In this chapter, a ministry plan will be presented for the implementation of a life group ministry at VCC. The theological implications uncovered in the previous section will be summarized as they relate to the fulfillment of this ministry. The specific goals that will lead to the creation of a healthy network of self-multiplying life groups will be covered. The goals will be realized through a teaching series in the Gospel of Mark, in conjunction with a pilot group consisting of potential leaders, and the continued coaching of new group leaders.

Theological Implications for Disciplemaking through Life Groups

Many in the Washington, DC area are like the rich young ruler in Mark 10. They are leading young families, seeking career success, and greater influence. Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler will be a model for VCC's goal of discipleship and outreach through life groups.

The Need for Truthful Dialogue

John 1:17 says, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Jesus was committed to speaking truth. He knew the truth would

set people free (John 8:32). In Mark 10 Jesus consistently spoke the truth to the rich young ruler. Jesus first said, “No one is good but God alone.” He then quoted the Second Table, pointing to the importance of human relationships. Then Jesus was courageous enough to bring great tension into their conversation. Jesus asked him to give up the two most important things in his life, his possessions and self-reliance, and to follow only him.

Jesus offered him the eternal life he was seeking by speaking the truth in love. Discipleship depends on truthful dialogue. The rich young ruler worshipped the gods of materialism and his own self-righteousness and only the truth spoken in love was strong enough to set him free.

Truthful dialogue takes courage. It takes time. It will create tension. It will require sacrifice. Unfortunately, many Christians are not willing to pay that price. Larry Osborne writes, “As a result, transparency is hardly the hallmark of most churches. So much so that for most people, the stereotype of a church is a place with lots of plastic smiles.”¹

It looks like the rich young ruler had a strong religious upbringing. He told Jesus he had kept all the commandments since his youth. However, he is very different from Jesus in this account. Jesus is the one who is transparent and honest while the rich young ruler is more focused on outward performance. All of the outward conformity and religious observance covered up the emptiness in his heart. Jesus’ truthful words pointed him to a more healthy way of living.

¹ Larry W. Osborne, *Sticky Church*, The Leadership Network Innovation Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 54.

To disciple those at VCC, it will require truthful dialogue in the context of small groups, preferably in groups of two or three where there is an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality. Being truthful reveals the hidden gods that are being served. Sin and self-righteousness are exposed, bringing the listener to a place of dependence on God's grace alone. It also strengthens relational bonds.² It is the pathway to greater friendship and community; the very thing those far from fellowship with God are searching for.

Truthful dialogue requires two things – loving confrontation, and humble confession. The rich young ruler heard the truth and walked away, refusing to confess his sins. Being truthful in confrontation and confession with one another opens the heart to the power of God. James 5:16 says, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” Bonhoeffer writes,

A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person. As long as I am by myself in the confession of my sins everything remains in the dark, but in the presence of a brother the sin has to be brought into the light.”³

Movement from Crowd to Disciple

In Mark's gospel the crowds followed Jesus, but not in a committed way. They were not willing to surrender their lives to the cause. They were on the outskirts looking

² Rick Warren writes, “Real fellowship, whether in a marriage, a friendship, or your church, depends on frankness. In fact, the tunnel of conflict is the passageway to intimacy in relationship.” Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 147.

³ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 117.

in. They were curious but unattached. They loved Jesus' teaching and wanted his miracles, but they were not true believers. They were emotional and unpredictable.⁴

Jesus loved the crowds and spent his ministry trying to reach them. "They were the people of Israel of Jesus' day who were the object of Jesus' evangelistic ministry."⁵ The rich young ruler was also an admirer of Jesus. He came in Mark 10 with enthusiasm, running, kneeling, and calling Jesus good teacher. Jesus calls him from the crowd to follow him and to be his disciple – a pupil, a learner, an adherent. The Church today is filled with those who are in "the crowd." They are there as admirers of Jesus and the activities of the Church, but they are not yet fully, committed believers.

In 2011 the Barna Research Group completed a survey of American Christians to see if their faith was really transforming their lives. The survey, which took place between 2005 and 2010, revealed that most professing believers are not growing. Only 18 percent of Christians in the survey claimed to be totally committed to their spiritual development. Just 21 percent believed that spiritual growth must happen in connection with a community of faith. Only 35 percent said they had confessed their sins to another believer.⁶ Many of the Christians surveyed said they were very active in their churches, and yet there was not the spiritual return on their investment of time. Barna concludes,

⁴ Green, *A Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, 177.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ George Barna, "How the Last Decade Changed American Life," Barna Group, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/624-how-the-last-decade-changed-american-life#.UkQgT2R4ZyG> (accessed September 13, 2013).

“American Christians, in particular, have become known for doing good works and religious exercises rather than simply being friends and imitators of Christ.”⁷

Much emphasis in the Church today is placed on attracting people to the weekend event. Larger attendance numbers are seen as evidence of great success. The metrics need to change. The Church is filled with rich young rulers, people who are religiously active, but are not following Jesus in relationship.

Growing Rich Young Rulers into Disciples Through Groups

When the rich young ruler comes to Jesus he is alone. When Jesus said, “Follow me” it was a call to discipleship and community. It was a chance to join Jesus and his band of followers. It was an opportunity to join a new family, a family of many homes, fathers, mothers, and siblings, and to grow in community.

Jesus began his three-year ministry by calling together a small group of twelve. Mark 3:14 says, “And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach.” Jesus called the twelve to go out and preach, but first he called them to “be with him.” He chose this group first to be in relationship with him. For Jesus, discipleship could only take place in the context of relationship. Jesus was highly relational.

Jesus had a deep love for these particular men. This can be seen in the way he addressed them. The word “disciple” is used 225 in the Gospel to describe Jesus’ followers, but it was a word Jesus only used twice when speaking to them in conversation (John 13:35, 15:8). Instead, he called them “my brothers” (Matthew 12:49, 28:10, John 20:17), “my children” (John 13:33), “friends” (John 15:15, 21:5), and “my friends” (Luke

⁷ Ibid.

12:4, John 15:14).⁸ Looking at the way Jesus addressed his disciples and how he related to them, Gunter Krallman writes, “Yet, Jesus did not go about establishing an academy, he went about establishing a fellowship; he first majored on making friends and only later on sending out apostles.”⁹

After the rich young ruler walked away, Jesus turned to his small group to dialogue about the experience so all could grow. The Church is to be a place of small group interaction, where meaningful friendships are formed. The unchurched in our day are hungry for friendship, and a thriving discipleship ministry in the Church could be the very thing to reach them. Mike Breen, in his book *The Passionate Church*, makes this observation, “Drive around some Sunday morning and you will find them, gathered in groups of two to ten, sitting around a table at a bookstore or coffeehouse. They are talking – and listening – to one another. They are experiencing community and seeking intimacy.”¹⁰

Evangelism Through Hospitality

In 410 AD the Roman Empire fell after a military invasion. It collapsed for many reasons, mainly crumbling from within, but one cause was the invading Barbarian hordes. When the empire fell, a new era in history began known as the Dark Ages. It was a time

⁸ Krallmann, *Mentoring for Mission*, 55.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Mike Breen, Walther P. Kallestad, and Mike Breen, *The Passionate Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: NexGen; Cook Communications Ministries, 2005).

when Barbarians wandered through Europe destroying art, buildings, libraries and the culture of Roman civilization.¹¹

In a similar way, the era of Christendom, when the Church enjoyed influence, acceptance, and privilege in the North American culture, has passed.¹² Many of the old symbols of Christendom have been removed and destroyed. Look at the public school system for example. Children no longer pray, intelligent design or creationism is not mentioned as a viable option, and the Ten Commandments no longer hang in classrooms. The old age of the Church lies in ruins, and a new age has begun. Today is a “spiritual dark age,” and roaming the landscape is a new kind of barbarian. The new barbarian is not interested in Church in the traditional sense, has little knowledge of the Bible, does not know the songs of the Church, and has no desire to visit a church. Like the barbarians of old, they are controlled by their passions, ever consuming, but never satisfied.

The Celtic Christians used the power of hospitality to build relational bridges to reach the lost, and it is one of the keys to effective outreach today. The roots of hospitality in the Bible go back to the Old Testament. God told the Israelites to welcome the strangers and foreigners in their land remembering that they once were strangers in Egypt. Leviticus 19:33-34 says, “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.” The Israelites were once strangers, but God showed

¹¹ Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*, 39.

¹² McNeal, *The Present Future*, 3.

hospitality to them, welcoming them when no one would. Remembering God's generosity would help them to lovingly welcome the strangers in their land.

In like manner, the Church is filled with those who were once strangers. Ephesians 2:13 says, "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Remembering this will generate gratitude, and energy to welcome others who are far away. Lesslie Newbigin writes, "In Christian worship we acknowledge that if we had received justice instead of charity we would be on our way to perdition. A Christian congregation is thus a body of people with gratitude to spare, and gratitude that can spill over into care for the neighbor."¹³

Unfortunately, neighborhoods are becoming increasingly disconnected. In a recent article in the Washington Post called *How Well Do You Know Your Neighbor*¹⁴, the author reflects on a tragic event in Cleveland, Ohio that caught national attention in May of 2013. Three women were finally rescued after ten years of captivity, rape, and abuse. He writes, "Other neighbors are stating that they saw unusual, troubling things at the Castro house over the years — porch lights left on, a child at an attic window, even a woman crawling naked in the back yard. They say they called police, but police say they have no records of the calls." The author then asks, "What if the neighbors had paid more attention to one another? Could the tragedy have been averted?" While the fault does not fall on the neighbors, it underlies a growing problem in America. Americans are

¹³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans; WCC Publications, 1989), 228.

¹⁴ Peter Lovenheim, "How Well Do You Know Your Neighbor," *The Washington Post*, May, 10 2013.

growing more distant, and can be too busy to inquire about the well being of another living next door.

The unchurched today are searching for relationship with God and with others. Even with cell phones and social media, the need for human connection is stronger than ever. In a recent study, the Barna Research Group found that 20 percent of Americans identify themselves as lonely.¹⁵ Many desire a place to connect with a few good friends.

Hospitality was an important practice in the first century Church. Romans 12:13 says, “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.” Also, 1 Peter 4:9 says, “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” It is time to rediscover this timeless act of love.

The home can be the greatest tool for evangelism.¹⁶ The home is the center of life. When strangers are invited into the home they get a personal look at how the Christian lives. Hospitality also says, “I would like to share my life with you.” Fitch writes, “The time-honored practice of hospitality is so exceedingly rare today that just doing it at all speaks volumes about what it means to be a Christian in a world of strangers.”¹⁷ Today, the follower of Christ should consistently invite neighbors into their home.

¹⁵ Barna, “How the Last Decade Changed American Life.”

¹⁶ Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, 60.

¹⁷ Ibid.

Strategy Goals for Life Groups

To help VCC be faithful to the biblical mandate to raise up disciples, clear goals need to be established. In the following section seven goals will be stated. This will be followed by a detailed plan for action.

To Develop a Compassion for the Lost

Jesus' disciples once returned from a hectic time of ministry, and they were exhausted. Jesus knew they needed to get away and rest. He led them to a deserted place, but the crowds followed them. Their retreat time was cut short. Instead of feeling frustration, indifference, or anger, Jesus had compassion. Mark 6:34 says, "When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things."

The word here for compassion is *splagchnizomai*, and it comes from the root *splagchnon*, which means, "inward parts, entrails."¹⁸ Compassion is something that is felt deep inside, in the gut, and cannot be ignored. Niel Cole in his book *Cultivating a Life for God*, writes, "Compassion, real compassion...is a natural feeling that stirs in your stomach and comes out in your eyes, your words, and your actions."¹⁹

Jesus had compassion because the crowds were lost, like sheep with no shepherd. Sheep without a shepherd are easy prey. Their death is certain. Those outside of relationship with Jesus Christ have no shepherd. They are easy targets for the devil's schemes, and are destined for an eternity apart from God's presence. Before any

¹⁸ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 179.

¹⁹ Neil Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999).

significant progress can be made in developing a healthy life group ministry, members need to develop a compassion for the lost.

To Understand the Mission

Organizations, especially churches, in time can suffer from “mission drift.” Slowly, the focus shifts to issues of lesser importance. In time the mission is lost, and the organization ceases to be faithful to the founding purpose.

Jesus clearly articulated the mission of every Church. Matthew 28:19 says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” This mandate is summed up in the mission statement of VCC, “Victory’s Crossing exists to help people cross over to a life of victory through Jesus Christ.” This founding purpose needs to be reinforced, clarified, and embraced by all, especially those helping to begin the life group ministry at VCC.

To Appreciate the Power of a Changed Life

Much time and effort is spent on creating powerful worship experiences on weekends. These attractional events take a lot of effort and they can draw large numbers. However, it can be difficult to keep the crowds content. Pressure can develop to continue producing bigger and better experiences.

To create missional momentum in a church nothing is more powerful than a changed life. It is not something man plans. It is a miracle of God’s grace and power that creates a sense of holy awe for those in the church. It stirs a passion to see more lives changed. It also opens the door for greater outreach as the transformed person gives testimony to their network of family and friends. It will be helpful for those in the launch team to study individuals in the Bible who were transformed by Jesus’ power, and to see

the impact they had. One great example is the Garasene demoniac. Marks 5:20 says, “And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marveled.”

To Understand Spiritual Growth in the Context of Community

The rich young ruler was very proud of his personal religious accomplishment. For him serving God was a solitary endeavor. Jesus called him to forsake his solitude and to join his community. So many today see spiritual growth only as a private, personal matter. While private prayer, Bible reading, fasting, and meditation were all a part of Jesus’ life, he exemplified a balance. While he often got alone with his Father, he also spent much time in community with his disciples.

Like plants need water and nutrients underneath the soil, they also must have sunshine out in the open to grow healthy and strong. The human spirit is nourished by private devotion, but it also must have the sunshine of human fellowship. Many Christians only have one or the other. Their devotion is completely private, or their devotion is only public, with no private experience at all. Both are important and critical for growth.

To help the team at VCC understand community, the discipline of confession will be taught and practiced. Many are afraid to confess because they see the Church as a place for saints, when in reality it is a community of sinners who need grace. It is in confession that we find healing, for in confession to our brother a confession is made to God. Bonhoeffer writes of the power of confession:

Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over

him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown...In confession the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light...It is a hard struggle until the sin is openly admitted. But God breaks gates of brass and bars of iron.”²⁰

To Develop and Embrace the Skill of Hospitality

When looking at the spiritual gift lists in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4, there is no spiritual gift of hospitality. It is a discipline every Christian is called to practice. While hospitality may be easier for some, it is a learnable skill that can bring great joy in a person’s life.²¹ It is also a great entry practice for evangelism. Anyone can show hospitality.

Many of the unchurched today have a negative bias toward Christians. In a recent survey of some fourteen hundred Americans, 72 percent said the Church was filled with hypocrites.²² Having a life group dinner, and inviting neighbors gives them a chance to watch Christians up close, and to experience their genuine love for others, and the character of their lives.

²⁰ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 112.

²¹ The real person of hospitality in the writer of this paper’s home is his wife. The more people in the home the happier she is. Recently, one of our long time Hispanic neighbors, known in the community for loud parties, began attending a Spanish speaking church. We were shocked. We discovered later that the entire family had given their lives to Christ. They are now having prayer meetings in their home on Friday nights. My wife never openly witnessed to them, but was key to their salvation. The seeds for their conversion were planted through years of showing consistent hospitality.

²² Audry Barrick, "How Do Unchurched Americans View Christianity?," *The Christian Post* <http://www.christianpost.com/news/how-do-unchurched-americans-view-christianity-30793/> (accessed September 14 2013).

To Value Balance in Group Life

In the past, the life groups at VCC started strong, with energized members. As time progressed they tended to lose momentum. One key reason is that groups often lose their balance.

Mike Breen and Wal Kallestad write about the balance in Jesus' life in three areas: up with his Father; in with his followers, and out with those in the world.²³ Jesus spent significant time in each of these three areas. This kind of balance is critical for churches and groups to stay vibrant and attractive.

To Experience Joy From Multiplication

The ultimate goal will be for groups to reproduce other groups that will reproduce other groups. This will create a great sense of joy and humility. As the momentum builds instead of adding groups, VCC can begin to multiply.²⁴

Strategy Content

Planning is an important spiritual discipline. It is an act of faith. To make plans is to look into the future with eyes of faith. One sees the preferable future and the steps that are needed to arrive there. Proverbs 16:3 says, "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." A strategy to develop a healthy network of life groups at VCC for spiritual growth, fellowship, and outreach will now be presented.

²³ Breen, *The Passionate Church*, 81-82.

²⁴ Neil Cole shares a fable about a father who had two sons. He gave them the option of getting one dollar a week for one year, or one cent for the first week, that would double to two the second week, and would continue to double for fifty two weeks. One son chose the dollar, and received fifty-two dollars at the end of the year. The son who chose the penny would have enough money to pay off the national debt and then some. Cole sums it up, "Multiplication may be costly, and in the initial stages slower than addition, but in the long run, it is the only way to fulfill the Great Commission in our generation." Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God*, 22-23.

Sermon Series on Discipleship in Mark

The Gospel of Mark was written to share the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, but to also teach on the nature of true discipleship. Unfortunately, there are some at VCC that believe attendance and serving are synonymous with discipleship. The purpose of this series would be to communicate the nature of true discipleship, and to show that discipleship must happen in the context of community.

It is important to first share the vision of life groups from the pulpit. By placing the topic of life groups during the Sunday service it will communicate that life groups and discipleship are essential. It is also a way to share the message with the entire church. Preaching is also a powerful tool for communicating truth. It moves the head with knowledge while stirring up the emotions of the soul. The power of preaching is not found in personal giftedness and delivery, but in the Spirit of God working through the Word of God. In 1 Corinthians 2:4 Paul wrote, "And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

The sermon series will be called "More Than a Fan – The Marks of a True Disciple." The series will focus on the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-27. After reading the account each week of the series, a different discipleship truth will be highlighted and expounded on. Those in the vicinity of VCC are right where the rich young ruler was – career driven, young, and financially stable, but focused on themselves and their good works, and not on God's grace alone.

The weekly messages will focus on the following topics. Week one will deal with loneliness. The rich young ruler in the account is alone and more focused on himself and

his accomplishments. Loneliness will be described. Attention will be given to the epidemic of loneliness in our age, along with its effects, and how it can be treated, and used for greater spiritual growth.

Week two will focus on self-righteousness. The rich young ruler spent his life doing good works, and yet he was still spiritually empty, living with the wrong priorities. A comparison will be made between being religious, and having a relationship with Jesus.

Week three will focus on relationships. The rich young ruler lost sight of the importance of human relationship. The focus will be on the call to love one another, and how to relate well with others through forgiveness, selflessness, and service.

Week four will handle hospitality. Though the rich young ruler was far from God, Jesus loved him and welcomed him into his community. This message will focus on loving the lost, defining hospitality, and showing why hospitality is critical in our age of detachment.

Week five will focus on money. One of the great obstacles to being a fully devoted follower of Christ is money. Money can become the main god in life for both the rich and the poor. The dangers of money will be discussed, but also how money can be used as a tool for great good.

Week six will center on community. Jesus said to the rich young ruler, "Follow me." This was a call to join the band of disciples and live in community. The message will call people to come out of isolation and into fellowship. It will focus on why fellowship is needed for spiritual growth. Particular attention will be given to the power of personal confession.

Week seven will present the vision for life groups. Jesus took the experience with the rich young ruler and talked about it with his small group. In this message the structure, the vision, and the plan for life groups will be clearly laid out. Life group leaders will be introduced. Members will be encouraged to sign up for a group.

Life Group Leader Training

To get a strong start, the right life group leaders will need to be selected and trained. Leaders are critical. If wrong leaders are selected the ministry endeavor will suffer. In Larry Osborne's book, *Sticky Church*, he describes what to look for in a life group leader.²⁵ He only focuses on two requirements – spiritual warmth and relational warmth. Spiritual warmth means they have a desire to follow the Lord as much as they know how. Spiritual warmth can be found in a new Christian and in a mature believer. Relational warmth is about their ability to relate well with others. Often a church sets the standard so high that it is out of reach for most in the church. Looking for those who have spiritual and relational warmth makes it possible for a wider selection of leaders without lowering standards.

The goal is to find a group of eight leaders to participate in a pilot group. The group will meet for eight weeks, one week before the launch of the Mark series, and for the seven weeks during the series. At the first meeting, the spiritual condition of VCC and the surrounding area will be examined, along with the importance of discipleship through life groups. The focus of each week's lesson will be to further study the topic of that week's Sunday message. The goal will be to develop a life group experience during the eight-week training. There will be singing, prayer, and discussion. Along with the

²⁵ Osborne, *Sticky Church*, 124-125.

lesson, insights will be shared on how to effectively lead a group. Special attention will be given to developing the ministry of hospitality, the selection of an apprentice, how to lead a discussion, the importance of transparency, accountability, and confession, how to encourage others, how to keep members coming back, and how to multiply. This team of leaders will be ready on the final Sunday of the Mark series to recruit for their group.

To help equip leaders further, several books would be made available to them and will be the source of the leader training. Those books will be *Sticky Church* by Larry Osborne, *The Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster, and *Cultivating a Life for God* by Neil Cole. Foster's book will help them understand and appreciate the inner spiritual disciplines needed to remain strong as they minister to the needs of others. The works by Osborn and Cole will provide helpful insights, encouragement, and a theological understanding for the importance of discipleship and community.

Life Group Structure and Oversight

For six months leading up to the launch of the Mark series, the Lead pastor will give time to prayer, fasting, and networking to find the right leader to serve as the community life coach. This person will oversee the life group ministry at VCC. They will give input in the selection of the pilot group, as well as assist in the pilot training program. Both community life coach and the Lead pastor will be personally committed to participation in a life group. The familiar saying is true. As the leaders go, so goes the church. If the leaders are not committed to life groups, neither will the church.

Organization is an important component of a successful life group ministry. The launch team of eight leaders will be under the pastoral leadership and coaching of the

community life coach. After the first year the goal is to grow to sixteen groups. Two coaches will oversee a group of eight leaders. The two coaches will be under the supervision of the community life coach. The community life coach will oversee the selection of new leaders and coaches with input and direction from the Lead pastor.

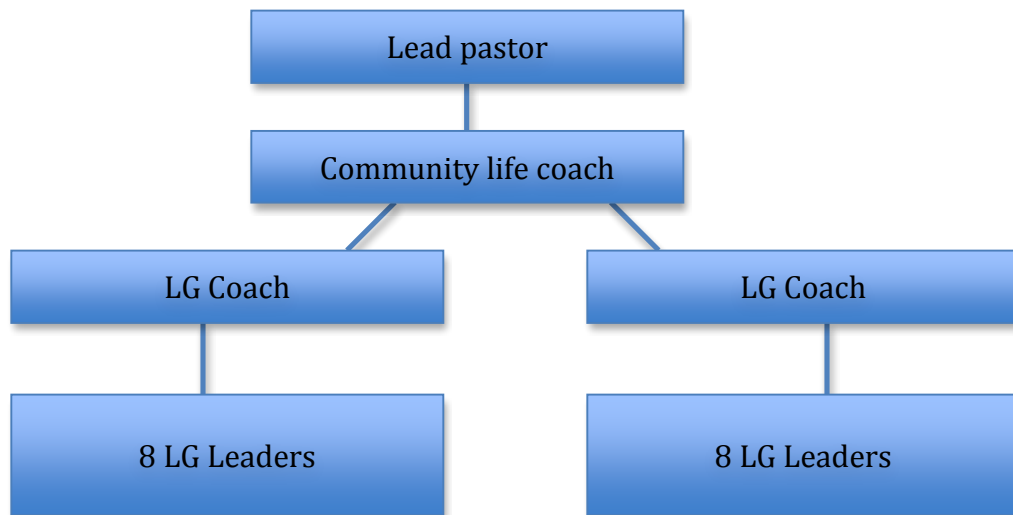


Figure 1. Life Group Structure

The curriculum for life groups will be discussion questions and material based on the weekly sermon. This will give a chance for the congregation to study the message further, and discuss how it applies to their life. Using a sermon-based approach will give alignment to the entire life group ministry. It will make it easier for leaders to prepare. Much of their preparation will be done by simply listening to the message. Everyone will come to the group ready to discuss, share insights, and to seek to apply God’s truth to their personal lives.

Groups will run on a quarter system. The winter quarter will be from January to March, and spring from April to June. July and August will be a time where groups and leaders can rest. The fall quarter will run from September to December. During each

quarterly life group session, groups will be asked to schedule two meetings, one at the beginning and one at the end, for fun, relationship, outreach, and hospitality.

Further Training

At the beginning of each quarter, there will be life group leader training for those interested in leading, and to equip current leaders with greater skills. This will be a time for group leaders to share individual testimonies from their groups. Groups that experience multiplication will be recognized and celebrated.

Target Population and Leadership

The target population for this project will be the VCC congregation. The main entry point for ministry and involvement at VCC is the Growth Track. The Growth Track is made up of four ninety-minute sessions that cover membership, spiritual maturity, spiritual gift and personality discovery, and training in meaningful service. Potential leaders will be selected from those who have completed the Growth Track, and from those who are the process of completion.

The lead pastor and the community life coach will select and recruit leaders for the pilot group. They will look for spiritual and relational warmth, but also a positive spirit, a teachable heart, and a willingness to serve others. Recruitment of potential leaders will be done relationally, in personal conversations in a relaxed environment. The vision for life groups will be shared. The plan for the ministry will be presented. Those with a desire to participate will be selected.

CHAPTER 7

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

This chapter will focus on the implementation process for the development of a healthy network of life groups at VCC. The starting point for this new initiative will be a sermon series in combination with a pilot group that meets to train the first core team of leaders. A timeline for implementation will be included. The needed resources for life group leadership training will be detailed. Finally, the questionnaire for follow-up and assessment will be discussed.

Pilot Project Summary

This new ministry initiative will begin with prayer. Six months before the launch date of the pilot group, the lead pastor will begin focusing his personal prayer time on this new ministry endeavor. Prayer will be made for direction, discernment, and for success. The Psalmist prayed in Psalm 118:25, “Save us, we pray, O Lord! O Lord, we pray, give us success!” Accompanying the prayers will be days of fasting. Another main focus of the prayer time will be the selection of the right community life coach.

Once the community life coach has been selected, the lead pastor and the community life coach will begin to meet weekly to discuss potential candidates for the

upcoming pilot group. Members who have completed the Growth Track as well as those who are in the process will be considered. This time will involve discussion and prayer. The goal will be to identify the strongest candidates. Candidates should possess: spiritual warmth, relational warmth, a positive spirit, a teachable heart, and a willingness to serve others.

The qualities a good life group leader should possess can only be assessed face to face. Both the lead pastor and the community life coach will meet with potential candidates. The goal of the meeting will be to connect relationally, and to share the vision for a healthy network of life groups at VCC. The vision will include a discussion of the pilot group, the sermon series, and the ongoing structure and plan for the ministry. Special attention will be given to their interest and enthusiasm for the new ministry endeavor. If there is interest, the candidate will be asked to pray for one to two weeks about their participation in the pilot group. A follow up meeting will be scheduled to enable the candidate to make a final commitment to participate in the pilot group, and the launch of the new ministry project.

One week prior to the launch of the series, “More Than a Fan – The Marks of True Disciple,” the selected pilot team will meet for the first time. The pilot group will share a meal at this meeting. Leaders will interact and get to know one another better. After the meal, the vision for life groups at VCC will be communicated again. Also, the social context of the Washington, DC region will be described, with special attention given to the specific spiritual needs of those living in the area. The pilot group will read and discuss the account of the rich young ruler.

That next Sunday will be the launch of the new Mark series. This will be a seven-week series built on Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler in Mark 10. Each Sunday a different discipleship truth will be highlighted from this account. The goal of the series is to help the members of VCC realize that discipleship is more than attendance and service. Discipleship is about following Jesus in relationship, devotion, and community. The hope is that many will move from the crowd, for shallow admiration, and into committed discipleship.

The seven-week series will focus on the following topics: loneliness, self-righteousness, relationships, hospitality, money, community and confession, and belonging to a life group. After the final sermon in the series, the new leaders will be introduced to the congregation. Opportunity will be given to register for a group. The registration will coincide with the beginning of a new quarter of life group ministry.

The curriculum for life groups will be sermon based. Discussion questions and additional insights from weekly sermons will be compiled into lesson form. This will give alignment to the ministry. That means the next series following Mark will be critical. The following message series will be on Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book *Life Together*. Reading the book will not be a requirement. The messages will be taken from chapters four and five that focus on ministering to one another in community. The messages will be on the ministry of meekness, listening, bearing, proclaiming, and confession.

Each life group leader will be asked to identify an apprentice. This will be done with input and direction from the community life coach. After the first quarter, the goal

is to multiply groups from eight to sixteen. At the beginning of the next quarter, a time of training and encouragement will be given to all current and potential leaders.

Timeline

January through June of 2014 will be a time of prayer and fasting for the success of the life group ministry initiative. After three months, the goal is to have selected the right community life coach. Though it is best for this person to come from within the congregation, effort will be made to look from outside the church, using the lead pastor's network of relationships.

April through August 2014 the lead pastor and community life coach will meet weekly to continue in prayer, and to discuss the vision and to adjust strategy. A list of potential life group pilot participants will be created from those who have completed the Growth Track or who are in process.

June through August 2014 informal appointments will be made with each candidate to share the vision, and to gauge interest. Each candidate will be asked to spend one to two weeks in prayer. A follow up meeting will be scheduled to get a firm commitment.

September 2014 the pilot group will meet on a Sunday night prior to the launch of the Mark series. The meeting will serve a dual purpose. It will be a time of relational connection over a meal, and to share the mission for discipleship through life groups.

September 2014 the sermons series, "More Than a Fan – The Marks of a True Disciple" will begin. During the series, the pilot group will meet on Sunday nights to

discuss that week's focus more deeply, to personally experience a life group environment, and to get equipped to effectively lead their groups with important skills.

November 2014, on the final Sunday of the Mark series, members will have a chance to sign up for a group. The community life coach will introduce life group leaders. Group leaders will be encouraged to recruit future group members from their own network of relationships.

November 2014 a new series will begin to coincide with the new life groups that are forming. The series will be called *Life Together*, and will focus on the ministry concepts found in chapters four and five of Bonhoeffer's book. Life group lessons will again be drawn from the weekly message theme.

November 2014 to March 2015 will comprise the first quarter of life groups ministry at VCC. Thereafter it will follow the following pattern: winter quarter – January to March (12 weeks), spring quarter – April to June (12 weeks), summer quarter – vacation, and fall quarter – September to December (12 weeks). At the beginning of each quarter there will be times for continued training for current and future leaders.

The effectiveness of the ministry will be evaluated in March of 2015. The lead pastor and community life pastor will review suggestions and results. At the first leadership training needed adjustments will be discussed and implemented.

Eight new groups will be launched at the beginning of the Spring quarter in April 2015. This will bring the total group number to 16. Two life group coaches will oversee the leaders of eight groups. Those coaches will be under the community life coach.

Leadership Training

At the present time, VCC is basically a “one-celled” church. The pastor carries most of the burden to connect visitors on Sunday to the fellowship of the church. If the church is to grow and remain faithful to God’s call, other leaders, shepherds, and caregivers must be trained and released. The lead pastor and the community life coach will look for members with spiritual and relational warmth. Particular attention will be given to their heart for people, their ability to interact after service with others, and their ability to welcome first time visitors.

The candidates do not have to have super relational giftedness, but need to show some natural ability. They also must have a desire to learn. Relational skills can be acquired. It is important for the first group of leaders to be relationally and spiritually engaged to insure a strong start.

The lead pastor and the community life coach will lead the eight-week training. It is easy for Church leaders to ask too much of their members, and to become disheartened with what is perceived as a lack of commitment. Ministry leaders should remember that members have full time jobs, families, and packed schedules. While pastors enjoy theological and ministry related books, members may not share that same passion. Thus, required reading will be minimal.

One book that will be required is Alexander Strauch’s, *The Hospitality Commands*. Key to the success of this ministry initiative is the practice of hospitality. Hospitality is something that should be practiced within the family of God, with members and visitors, and also to the spiritually lost in the community. This book will help leaders

realize again that the Church is the house of God, and God's house is to be filled with love.¹ Hospitality will also be critical to a thriving life group ministry.

Each week of training, the sermon theme will be discussed and expounded upon. Hospitality principles from Strauch's book will also be covered and discussed. The seven hospitality areas that will receive focus are: the power of hospitality in the first century Church, the Church as Christian family held together by love, the home as the center of evangelism, biblical examples of hospitality, the New Testament commands to practice hospitality, hospitality and its impact on children in the home, and helpful ideas for practicing hospitality.² At some point, there will also be a sermon series on hospitality. As a secondary source, leaders will not be required but highly encouraged to read, *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster. The content of Foster's book will be used and adapted for subsequent times of training.

Resources

Having the proper resources in place will communicate to our pilot group that both they and this ministry initiative is important. This will also model for future leaders

¹ Strauch opens the book by writing about a visit he had with a couple that had previously attended the church he pastored. They had since moved out of town. He was happy to hear they had found a new church home, but disheartened when he discovered that in one year of attending not one member or spiritual leader had invited them over for a meal or a time of fellowship. His friends as a result felt completely disconnected. He then writes, "These experiences distress me, and so they should! They are examples of lifeless, loveless, inhospitable Christianity. Worse, they are examples of outright disobedience to the clear commands of Scripture." Alexander Strauch, *The Hospitality Commands: Building Loving Christian Community: Building Bridges to Friends and Neighbors* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1993), 5-6.

² Strauch lists some helpful ideas: use Sunday afternoons to invite people into your home, make a list of people who are not yet connected to the body, identify neighbors that could be invited, collect a file of simple recipes, volunteer to house missionaries and visiting ministers, develop a hospitality team, be interested in people's lives, be creative with activities with guests, and pray for joy in this important service. Ibid., 49-53.

the importance of personal preparation. A well-resourced event will help build momentum and create a vision for success.

The training will be held at the church home, located on church property. The home is in great shape, but will need to be thoroughly cleaned before the training. A volunteer will cut the grass around the house.

As far as supplies, five folding tables will be needed and fifteen folding chairs. Training will take place in the living room area of the house. Tables will be set up so that everyone is facing each other around the table.

For the first event, a dinner meal will be served. The food coordinator will begin making preparations for this special night two months in advance. Two volunteers will serve food and clean. One volunteer will set up juice, coffee, and light snacks at the remaining training sessions. A paid volunteer will watch the children in a room equipped with toys, TV, and DVD.

The community life coach will purchase 15 copies of *The Hospitality Commands* by Alexander Strauch one month in advance. He will purchase folders for each leader. The community life coach will also be responsible for printing lessons.

An audiovisual volunteer will assist during times of training. The audiovisual volunteer will set up a flat screen TV to display a Power Point presentation. They will also digitally record each session on computer for future trainings.

Additional Personnel

Worship through song can change attitudes, removing fear and doubt, and setting the heart's focus on the greatness of God. This was the experience of King Saul in 1

Kings 16:23 where it says, “And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him.” A worship leader will lead a time of worship at the end of each session. The flat screen TV will display lyrics. The worship leader will select two songs for each session. On the final session there will be a time of extended worship. At this final meeting the lead pastor and community life coach will also pray for each leader, commissioning them as they begin this important ministry initiative.

Some additional ministry qualifications are needed for the important role of community life coach. The community life coach will have the primary role of pastoring the life group leaders, and in the future, other life group coaches who oversee other group leaders. The community life coach will be responsible for communicating with the life group leaders on a regular basis through text, email, and phone. This key leader will schedule informal, individual bi-monthly meetings to encourage and to let each leader know they have support, and to address any questions. The community life coach will organize quarterly times of training, working out the planning and the promotion. The community life coach will develop a vision for the life group ministry by asking the question, “Where does the ministry need to be in six months?”

The community life coach will need to be a growing Christian, and a member in good standing at VCC. They will need to have good communication skills, organizational ability, a heart for people, and be supportive of the lead pastor and the vision of VCC. If there are no candidates to fill this important role within the church, efforts will be made to recruit from the lead pastor’s circle of relationships. However, the

goal would be to find a leader that has strong relational ties with all those in the pilot group.

Assessment

In March of 2015 the lead pastor and the community life coach will assess the first session, from November 2014 to March 2015. The assessment will give the lead pastor and the community life coach a chance to hear from those leading, and from those participating. It will be an opportunity to measure results, and gauge effectiveness, making adjustments as needed.

The three areas that will be measured come from Mike Breen's book, *The Passionate Church*. Breen describes the balance Jesus had in his life in three main areas: "Up" – time alone with his Father, "In" – time in fellowship with others, and "Out" – time reaching out to the lost. Balance in these three areas is needed for every Christian, but also for every ministry. VCC's assessment will measure these three areas.

The assessment will be made up of statements related to these three categories. Participants will measure how well each statement describes their life group by a number from one to five. One will represent no agreement at all, and five meaning the participant strongly agrees.

The assessments will be reviewed by the community life coach and the lead pastor. Meetings will be scheduled with group individual leaders to discuss the results. The community life coach will focus particular attention on those with low scores. Further assessment may be necessary to bring greater balance to the ministry in these three areas.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the book, *The E-Myth Revisited*, Michael E. Gerber writes to demythologize the unrealistic picture the average American has of the successful entrepreneur. Most westerners see the prosperous entrepreneur as the rugged individualist, who rises to the top from determination and blind luck. Gerber believes what it takes to succeed is not as mysterious and difficult as many believe.¹ He sees one essential ingredient in every growing small business, and that is a healthy balance between being entrepreneurial, managerial, and technical. Gerber is convinced this balance can be learned.

The entrepreneur dreams, sees visions, paints the big picture, and builds inspiration and hope. The manager organizes, creates systems, and develops routines for consistent production. Gerber writes, “The manager is the part of us that goes to Sears and buys stacking plastic boxes, takes them back to the garage, and systematically stores all the various sized nuts, bolts, and screws in their own carefully identified drawer.”² Then, there is the technical role of doing tasks one at a time – working in the office, making the day-to-day business happen. The technician is the doer. In the bakery, the technician bakes bread. In the coffee shop, the technician makes the coffee. He knows how to create the product, and do it well. For the small business to thrive, the owner must have a balance of these three roles.

¹ Michael E. Gerber, *The E-Myth Revisited: Why Most Small Businesses Don't Work and What to Do About It*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperBusiness, 1995), 5-6.

² *Ibid.*, 41.

Unfortunately, most small businesses today do not have that balance. Most small businesses are run by owners who operate only in the role of technician.³ They started their business believing they could make it grow because they knew how to do a task well. Because they could do the task well, they believed they could also run a business. They end up carrying all the workload, slaving ten to twelve hours a day. The freedom they sought in self-employment is not realized. Instead, they are imprisoned by a job they cannot run from. Their business becomes odious because they have no balance. As a result, some 400,000 small businesses shut down every year, mainly from owner burnout, frustration, and despair.⁴ The small business owner must give adequate attention to the managerial and entrepreneurial roles if the dream is to succeed.

Many pastors today have the same struggle. Most churches, like small businesses, have pastors who see themselves as technicians only. The technical part of ministry is preparing sermons, organizing services, leading worship, counseling, hospital visits, scheduling volunteers, and other basic administrative duties. Pastors come out of seminary as highly trained technicians, armed with Greek lexicons and technical commentaries, but with weak managerial and vision casting skills. They experience the same frustration after laboring in the technical aspect of ministry, only to see little fruit.

This project has been an opportunity to develop an entrepreneurial outlook, to see with vision at what could and should be, and to also think about the pathway to get there in a more managerial way. It has been a chance to look with fresh eyes at the needs in

³ Ibid., 28.

⁴ Ibid., 78.

the surrounding community and then to develop a ministry initiative to meet those needs. This has been a chance to shift from working in the church, to working on the church.

Developing a better balance in these three roles will be essential for the long-term success of a healthy life group ministry at VCC. Along with preaching high quality sermons on the importance of life groups, and personally participating, the writer of this paper will give time to structure and system development. The future community life coach will play an important role here as they participate, observe, and listen to group leaders and members. The systems created by the lead pastor and community life coach will be developed with a preferred future in mind.

This balance can be seen most perfectly in Jesus' ministry. He was the consummate technician, who knew how to craft his message to reach his audience. He was the manager who knew who to recruit, and train his team. He did it all with the vision of bringing salvation to a lost and dying world through the Church.

The future plans center around balancing technical tasks, with the managerial, and entrepreneurial aspects of the ministry. Concretely, this will involve spending less time alone in the office and more time with people, especially those who have the potential to lead others. During these times of relational interaction vision will be cast, helping others see the impact VCC could have on the surrounding community through a thriving life group ministry. The hope is that with greater balance in these areas, and with the healthy launch of a new life group ministry, a season of revitalization will begin at VCC.

Here are the things that will characterize this season of revitalization at VCC. First, there will be a renewed commitment to discipleship. Being a follower of Christ is more than going to church. It means more than serving in a ministry. Following Jesus

means living daily with him and for him, following where he leads, and living in community with others.

Second, there will be a new passion for hospitality. The goal is for hospitality to become a core value, a part of the DNA at VCC. VCC has become somewhat ingrown. When a church begins to live for itself and its own comfort, it begins to die. The Church exists to worship, fellowship, and welcome others. Hospitality, the love of the stranger, will characterize the life groups at VCC. Each quarter life groups will host two informal meetings for the purpose of showing hospitality to those in the community. Hospitality will be a new emphasis in sermons, and in the life of the leaders. The secret to evangelizing a postmodern society is to build bridges through hospitality and community.

Third, there will be a commitment to authenticity and confession. The Church on Sunday morning can be the most inauthentic place in the world. Instead of sharing weaknesses and failures, most hide behind fake smiles and small talk. The defeated fellow believer suffers in isolation. Discipleship can only happen in authentic interaction and confession. Jesus said the truth would set people free (John 8:32). Larry Crabb in his book *Soul Talk* writes, “We almost never speak words that are formed in the center of our soul and pour out from our very being with power and a sense of life. And we almost never hear words that stir life within us, that pour hope into those empty spaces deep inside filled only with fear and fury and frustration.”⁵

The people in the Bristow area are searching for that kind of authenticity. That authenticity starts with the leadership. One idea is to have a sermon series called, “Confessions of a Pastor.” The whole series would be devoted to real struggles the pastor

⁵ Larry Crabb, *Soul Talk: Speaking with Power into the Lives of Others* (Brentwood, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2003), 14.

faces, from fear, self-doubt, insecurity, to struggles with prayer and evangelism. Life groups will be encouraged to develop one-on-one accountability relationships where this kind of confession can take place.

Fourth, there will be a new emphasis on spiritual growth through community. Involvement in a life group will become a core value at VCC. It will be stressed almost every Sunday, and modeled again by the leadership. The goal will be for every member of VCC to be connected to a group.

Fifth, there will be a new kind of structure. The life group ministry at VCC will thrive because of the community, but the community will thrive because of a healthy structure. Like a vine needs lattice, life groups will need a stable system. Key to this structure will be the community life coach who will focus on pastoring leaders, developing new systems, and developing new leaders and apprentices.

These are the plans for a healthy network of life groups at VCC. These plans are held humbly, and yet they are held with great expectancy. Ephesians 3:20-21 says, “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”

APPENDIX A

VCC LIFE GROUP EVALUATION

(EVALUATE YOUR LIFE GROUP EXPERIENCE. AFTER EACH SENTENCE PLACE A NUMBER FROM 1 TO 5. 1 BEING THE LEAST AND 5 BEING THE GREATEST)

“Up – Personal Relationship with God”

1. I am spending more personal time with the Lord as a result of my time in the group. ____
2. My personal life has changed over my time in the group. ____
3. I am often encouraged to spend more time in personal devotion while at life group. ____
4. I have confessed my sins and failures to a fellow believer recently. ____
5. I feel like I have the resources I need to grow more in the Lord. ____

Total Score: _____

“In – Time in Fellowship with Other Believers”

1. Members in the group are authentic. ____
2. Adequate time is given to discussion. ____
3. Members respond with compassion and prayer when someone confesses failure. ____
4. The members of our group are good at listening. ____
5. The members of our group enjoy spending time with one another. ____

Total Score: _____

“Out – Reaching Out to the Lost”

1. Our group had visitors this session. ____
2. Our group scheduled meetings for fellowship and hospitality. ____
3. Our group does a great job at welcoming visitors. ____
4. The value of showing hospitality is often stressed at our group. ____
5. We have had someone come to faith in Christ as a result of our group. ____

Total Score: _____

TOTAL FOR ALL THREE AREAS: _____

COMMENTS:

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Arndt, William, F. Wilbur Gingrich, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 2d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.
- Barna, George. "How the Last Decade Changed American Life." Barna Group,. <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/culture/624-how-the-last-decade-changed-american-life#.UkQgT2R4ZyG> (accessed September 13, 2013).
- Barrick, Audry. "How Do Unchurched Americans View Christianity?" The Christian Post. <http://www.christianpost.com/news/how-do-unchurched-americans-view-christianity-30793/> (accessed September 14 2013).
- Best, Ernest. *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*. Vol. 4 Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series, Edited by Ernst Bammel. Sheffield, England: The University of Sheffield, 1981.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. Translated by John W. Doberstein from 5th ed. London: SCM Press, 1972. Reprint, 1954 ed.
- Breen, Mike, Walther P. Kallestad and Mike Breen. *The Passionate Church*. Colorado Springs, CO: NexGen; Cook Communications Ministries, 2005.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964.
- Buske, Jennifer. "Minorities Become Majority as Population Booms in Prince William." The Washington Post. www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/09/AR2011020906632.html/ (accessed April 18, 2013).
- Cervero, Anthony J. "Spiritual Fusion: A Pathway for Spiritual Transformation through Small Groups in a Pentecostal Church." DMin diss. Fuller Theological Seminary, 2007.
- Chretien, Katherine. "Help Military Families by Limiting Moves." *USA Today*, March 1, 2011.
- Cohen, Sharon. "Virginia Escapes Worst of Recession, but State's Fortunes Could Change with Sequestration." The Huffington Post. www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/13/virginia-economy_n_1963805.html (accessed Thursday, April 18, 2013).

- Cole, Neil. *Cultivating a Life for God*. Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1999.
- Crabb, Larry. *Soul Talk: Speaking with Power into the Lives of Others*. Brentwood, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2003.
- Cranfield, C.E.B. *The Gospel According to Saint Mark: An Introduction and Commentary* Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959.
- Davids, Peter H. *The First Epistle of Peter* The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990.
- Drummond, Lewis A. *Reaching Generation Next: Effective Evangelism in Today's Culture*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002.
- Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas K. Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993.
- Fitch, David E. *The Great Giveaway: Reclaiming the Mission of the Church from Big Business, Parachurch Organizations, Psychotherapy, Consumer Capitalism, and Other Modern Maladies*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005.
- Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Rev. ed. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988.
- Garland, David E. *Mark: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*. NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996.
- George, Carl F. and Warren Bird. *How to Break Growth Barriers: Capturing Overlooked Opportunities for Church Growth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993.
- Gerber, Michael E. *The E-Myth Revisited: Why Most Small Businesses Don't Work and What to Do About It*. 1st ed. New York: HarperBusiness, 1995.
- Gibbs, Eddie. *Churchnext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- Green, Joel B., Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- Griffith, Dennis. "9 Church Diseases." <http://wdennisgriffith.wordpress.com/2010/01/22/9-church-diseases-2/> (accessed October 8 2013).

- Grudem, Wayne A. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994.
- Guder, Darrell L., ed. *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America (The Gospel and Our Culture Series)*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publications, 1998.
- Hunter, George G., III *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West Again*. Nashville: Abingdom Press, 2000.
- Icenogle, Gareth Weldon. *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrative Approach*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
- Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.
- Krallmann, Günter. *Mentoring for Mission: A Handbook on Leadership Principles Exemplified by Jesus Christ*. Hong Kong: Jenco Ltd., 1994.
- Land, Steven Jack. *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*. Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 1993.
- Lane, William L. *The Gospel According to Mark* The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: WB Eerdmans 1974.
- LeBlanc, David. "About Slugging." http://slug-lines.com/Slugging/About_slugging.asp (accessed June 14, 2012).
- Lovenheim, Peter. "How Well Do You Know Your Neighbor." *The Washington Post*, May, 10 2013, 3.
- Luebke, Peter. "First Battle of Manassas." Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. http://encyclopediavirginia.org/Manassas_First_Battle_of (accessed July 1 2012).
- Malphurs, Aubrey. *Values-Driven Leadership: Discovering and Developing Your Core Values for Ministry*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004.
- Marche, Stephen. "Is Facebook Making Us Lonely?" *The Atlantic Monthly*. www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/05/is-facebook-making-us-lonely/308930/ (accessed Thursday, April 18, 2013).
- Maxwell, John C. *Developing the Leader within You*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993.
- McNeal, Reggie. *The Present Future: Six Tough Questions for the Church*. 1st ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003.

- Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans; WCC Publications, 1989.
- Newcomb, Tim. "Going Nowhere: 10 Worst U.S. Cities for Traffic." Time News Feed. www.newsfeed.time.com/2012/05/22/going-nowhere-10-worst-u-s-cities-for-traffic/ (accessed June 14, 2012).
- Nineham, D. E. *The Gospel of St. Mark* Pelican Gospel Commentaries. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964.
- Osborne, Larry W. *Sticky Church* The Leadership Network Innovation Series. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.
- Peace, Richard. *Conversion in the New Testament: Paul and the Twelve*. Grand Rapids, MI.: WB Eerdmans, 1999.
- Percept Group. "Ministry Area Profile 2012." <http://www.perceptgroup.com> (accessed June 20, 2012).
- PerceptAustin. "Greek Quick Reference Guide." http://www.preceptaustin.org/new_page_40.htm (accessed October 9, 2013).
- Phillips, John. *Exploring the Epistles of Peter: An Expository Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2005.
- Prince William County Government. "Prince William Report: The Prince William County Demographic and Economic Newsletter." <http://www.pwecgov.org/demographics> (accessed July 10, 2012).
- Realty Trac Staff. "Virginia Foreclosure Activity Down in 2011." www.realtytrac.com/content/foreclosure-market-report/virginia-foreclosure-activity-down-in-2011-7055 (accessed July 13, 2012).
- Riss, Richard M. *A Survey of 20th-Century Revival Movements in North America*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988.
- Roof, Wade Clark. *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Roxburgh, Alan J., M. Scott Boren and Mark Priddy. *Introducing the Missional Church : What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2009.
- Smith, David. *Mission after Christendom*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003.

- Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church and the World The Bible Speaks Today*. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994.
- Strauch, Alexander. *The Hospitality Commands: Building Loving Christian Community: Building Bridges to Friends and Neighbors*. Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1993.
- Taylor, Vincent. *The Gospel According to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes, and Indexes*. Second Edition ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981.
- Vaughn, Bill. "Prince William County Demographics and Economics." Prince William County. www.mmrdata.com/pwchamber/Bill%20Vaughan%20Economic%20Demographic%20Presentation%20to%20PWC%20CoC%201%2018%2012.pdf (accessed Thursday, April 18, 2013).
- Vedantam, Shankar. "Social Isolation Growing in the U.S." *The Washington Post*, June 23, 2006.
- Virginia Employment Commission. "Virginia Community Profile - Manassas City." <http://www.manassascity.org/DocumentCenter/View/21686> (accessed October 7, 2013).
- Warren, Rick. *The Purpose-Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.
- Wilkins, Michael J. *Matthew: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. 1st ed. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998.
- Williams, J. Rodman. *Renewal Theology: Church, Kingdom, and Last Things*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1988.