

# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

STRENGTHENING MISSIONAL COMMUNITY: A STRATEGY FOR CREATING A  
NEW SMALL GROUP EXPRESSION

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STRENGTHENING MISSIONAL COMMUNITY: A STRATEGY FOR CREATING A  
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A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Completing a doctoral program was never that appealing to me as a young minister. The price of life it seemed to cost its students was too expensive. But when God's leading and timing seemed to all be pointing toward Fuller, I jumped in. That was seven very long years ago.

What I realize now is that the price of life was far more expensive for my family. My very supportive wife, Shannon, and my three outstandingly loving kids, Britton, Camden, and Gema have had to bear most of the brunt of what it has taken for me to complete this work.

It's a work that I am so grateful the Lord led me to. I am not the same minister I was a decade ago when embarking upon this journey. God's timing is perfect. His movement to bring me to Pantego Bible Church in just the right season, with all that was in my heart and mind in regards to missional small group life, is undeniable. Pantego Bible is a wonderful church with a strong history and even a stronger future. Its people and leaders continue to shape and sharpen me.

So I must state it clearly and with much love – I could not have done this without the endless understanding and patience of my family. I dedicate this work to them and all the times I had to say, "I'm going to work on my paper."

May the Lord be honored in this – my small offering.

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## INTRODUCTION

While hundreds of people surrounded them, Bob and Carol felt seemingly unnoticed. As they passed through the room, they could hear others share stories and laughter while they felt unknown. They were not a guest, newcomer, or infrequent attendee to Pantego Bible Church. Bob and Carol had attended worship services at Pantego Bible Church for ten years. They had even served consistently in the children's ministry for many of those years. Yet, they found themselves on the outside looking in on the community life that their church was renowned for developing and championing. During those years of service, Bob and Carol were unavailable for a Sunday morning community group and although interested in small group life, they were uncertain of the pathway to involvement. A meaningful connection to others seemed illusive, exacting, and confusing.

Although having held a very high value upon community life, Pantego Bible Church's strategies developed high hurdles and narrow pathways for entry into small group life. The process of connection was difficult for newcomers as well as for long-time attendees such as Bob and Carol. Bob and Carol had desired to belong to a small group, but because of their lack of involvement in a community group they were unable to find connection to a small group. The pathway into a small group flowed through involvement in a community group. Community groups, which have their primary expression on Sunday mornings as a time of Bible study, are comprised of small groups. Therefore, by not attending a community group, Bob and Carol missed the opportunity of connection with the only small group members and leaders that were within their

designated area. In theory, Bob and Carol would have still been welcomed to attend one of these small groups, but establishing the necessary relational connections within one of these existing groups proved difficult. They received an occasional small group invitation, but the group members had been meeting for years and Bob and Carol felt more like outsiders. In addition, new small group starts were very infrequent, isolated, and random. They just did not know how to break in to a group experience and they were not alone. Several years ago, the church's approach to community development began with strong reception and robust results, but the declining numbers revealed the unbalanced position that followed.

Bob and Carol's group-life experience drastically changed recently when they attended a Connect Event. This Connect Event was a new effort to create a different type of on-ramp for small group involvement at Pantego Bible Church. Anyone with interest was invited to come. This Connect Event was a prototype of the primary goal of this final project.

At the event Bob and Carol shared that although they had attended church almost every week for years, they did not feel a sense of belonging. They lamented, "We really are not connected anywhere. We do not have community around us." During the event, Bob and Carol met several other people from their area of town who were also longing for a small group experience. They were also introduced to a group host. After a brief time of sharing their stories with one another and considering schedules, they committed to meeting together for eight weeks. They started a new connect group together that semester. The group experienced blessings and challenges. Just several weeks into their

new small group experience, Bob and Carol's young adult daughter, Jordan, lost her battle with cancer. What followed offered a beautiful glimpse into the power of missional community as they both celebrated and mourned the passing of their young daughter. Throughout the deeply saddening illness and loss of their daughter, Bob, Carol, and their family were surrounded by their newly formed small group friends. Small group leaders organized meals. Staff pastors made visits with the family both in the hospital and their home. They worshipped, prayed, cried, and proclaimed the love and hope of Christ together at the memorial service.

At that Connect Event, Bob and Carol were introduced into a small group community who focused on Christ's presence, cared deeply for one another as family, and looked outward in ministry. This small group experience over recent months made a significant difference in Bob, Carol, Jordan, and their small group.

While having a very rich and prominent history of cultivating a culture of community, Pantego Bible Church's current small group situation is stagnant and faltering. Bob and Carol's story is reflective of the struggle many attendees face. Even in the early and partial stages, the implementation of a new expression of small groups known as connect groups have led Bob and Carol to a new connection with Christ, to other believers in community, and to their world.

This final project is about community that is missional. This does not refer to a community that comes just because people live in close proximity to one another, share the same room for a Bible study, or are all parents-with-preschoolers. It is a community that comes through sharing life; weaving people together, binding them together in



Christ, and sending them out to redeem their worlds. They commit themselves to live a different type of life than what might be the norm, even for regular church attendees. This missional life is not measured as much by attendance on Sunday as it is by the webs that stretch out to others. These webs are connections that propel lives deeper into Christ and to being lived out for the sake of Christ's Kingdom. It is a way of group-living characterized not just by their devotion to one another but also for those outside of the group. Group members have an eye on each other and another eye on the one to serve who is yet in community. Pantego Bible Church has a rich history and culture of developing community, yet it has struggled with integrating new group members and developing new groups. Although thousands of members and guests have attended the church over the past decade, the number of people attending small groups has declined.

This final project seeks to implement a model that serves a people; not a people that serve a model. Bob and Carol found themselves on the outs of a system that resembled a single lane, one-way street. They did not intend on isolating themselves, but the system did not have the flexibility to accommodate them. For years they attended worship services and served in the children's ministry on Sundays. Because of this, the pathway to community through Community Groups to small group life was blocked.

Churches, like all organizations, create systems. Systems are helpful when dealing with masses of people. They can give clarity, direction, and communicate values and processes. But systems also create limitations and build walls and gates. Systems offer control at the expense of options and suitability. Therein lies the great challenge for every organization, including the Church. Pantego Bible Church will be examined to

understand if its small group structure is wide and accessible enough to maintain a strong influence while not creating confusion and chaos. Bob and Carol were the victims of a system whose walls were too high with few entry points. A connection structure that was intended to serve the people had developed into a system of hurdles and limitations. An additional on-ramp into group life, a simpler and clear avenue, is needed for people like Bob and Carol to find a way into community. The hope of this final project is to have an influence upon the church's culture, not to just tweak a system.

The focus of this project flows from my life callings and passions. Spiritual formation in small groups and the Missional Church were the two threads of my doctoral studies. Having served in various ministerial positions and organizations, small group life has always been emphasized in my twenty years of vocational ministry. As a young junior-higher, the very first Christian book I picked out in a book store was on the subject of shepherding others and the building of community. There was something in me, even before having an understanding of what it was, that was drawn to the beautiful design of life lived within community. The biblical model and mandate, as well as my personal experience, affirm the critical component of small group community in discipleship living. We cannot live in isolation and fulfill the callings of Christ. It is an impossibility. I joined the staff of Pantego Bible Church eighteen months ago as the Connection Pastor. The staff and elder leadership of the church had been assessing for a couple of years the need to create an additional staff position that would “pastor those from curb to community.” I am the first to serve in this capacity at Pantego Bible Church. Half of the role's responsibilities revolve around first impression ministries such as greeting at the

door, guest services, follow-up, and guest luncheons. The other half involves the creation and direction of strategies in growing involvement in small group life. The role is an enjoyable fit for me and I am grateful to serve in this capacity at this particular church with all of its rich history and story.

The Church as a whole must prepare itself with all diligence to lead all to a small group experience. One of the most distinguishable emphases of the evangelical Church in the past decade has been the call to missional living as it recognizes that God Himself is on mission, that He is constantly redeeming the world, and we as His church join in those efforts. Missional living moves us to see the larger Kingdom of God at work all around us. This type of living responds to the needs that are close, such as extending an invitation to those who sit beside us in worship into small group community. It also meets those needs far away, such as collecting goods for a shoe box delivered to India. It recognizes God's presence and movement wherever it might be and responds.

The purpose of this final project is to enhance the missional culture within the small group experience at Pantego Bible Church. A primary focus of this project will be the creation of a new small group expression called connect groups. This new formation of small group life will create an on-ramp into community, and model a missional culture. These connect groups will exist in harmony with the existing small group model, while promoting a community life that is focused on outward and incarnate living. This paper will analyze Pantego Bible Church's unique history and specifically explore possible reasons the Connecting Church model might improperly balance the focus of

small group ministry and propose a more missional model that fosters assimilation and inclusion.

The creation of a new small group expression will correlate with efforts to strengthen the missional culture of existing small groups at Pantego Bible Church. The strategy of this final project will hold up both objectives. The design for building up the missional culture within existing small groups will include group training sessions twice a year, direct and consistent coaching from the ministerial staff, scheduling monthly ministry focuses, and feedback evaluations each semester from both group members and leaders. While the newly created group expression known as connect groups will be the more obvious endeavor, the more subtle efforts to guide existing small groups into more missional living will be just as critical to the changing of the culture within Pantego Bible Church's small group ministry. These two opportunities will compliment, strengthen, and sustain one another

Chapter one will review the historical setting and current context of the Pantego / Fort Worth, and Arlington area. Chapter two looks into the unique and rich history of Pantego Bible Church as well defines the significant influences and characteristics of current ministry paradigms. As the origin of the Connecting Church model, this chapter will define and explore the characteristics and influences from inception to current conditions. Chapter three will explore the foundations of God's design for community. Key resources from Garth Icenogle, Stanley Grenz, Scott Boren, Reggie McNeal, and Jay Whilhoit, will affirm that God's design of community is within the architecture of the Church and its best expression is found within small group life. Although small group

approaches vary, there are essential and primary biblical components that serve to shape the Christ follower in discipleship, including the essential workings of missional life.

Chapter four will contain the theological observations and foundations of missional community within the small group expression. These missional small groups are reflective of a missional God. The fullness of Christ's life in us models His life and work in the world to those inside the Church, on the fringes of the Church, and on the outside of the Church. This chapter will reflect on the characteristics of small groups that give life within and through its members, even in the midst of today's cultural challenges of crowded schedules and isolated living.

The specific conditions at Pantego Bible Church and these relevant theological issues will form the strategy detailed in chapter five. The strategy includes the creation of the Connect Groups which will launch periodically throughout the year. It also focuses upon the missional leadership development of all small group leaders, but particularly those leading Connect Groups. Ultimately, this strategy will provide an assimilation pathway into small group life through Connect Groups and into the wider church model of community and ministry.

The implementation of these goals and visions, the substance of chapter six, culminates at a connect group launch event in September of 2016. The months preceding the event will serve as a preparatory season to define appropriate group leader characteristics, communicate ideals to current lay and staff leaders, and carry out the recruitment and placement of Connect Group leaders. Support from staff members and consistent communication, particularly with area pastors, will be critical throughout the

process. Other keys to success are: simple and clear group leader training, effective and appropriate promotion, timely and useful group resources, and the integration of Connect Groups into church-wide practices and models.

PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

## CHAPTER 1

### CONTEXT AND DYNAMICS OF PANTEGO AND THE METROPLEX

Pantego, Texas is located in the heart of the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Pantego is a township about ten miles southeast of downtown Fort Worth, within the city boundaries of Arlington. Arlington, incorporated in 1884, ultimately became both an industrial and suburban center.<sup>1</sup> Pantego, while not incorporated until 1949, has a history that reaches just as far back. The city of Pantego has its roots in the origin of Pantego Bible Church.<sup>2</sup> In 1884, local resident Frederick Foscoe offered an acre of land for one dollar for the building of a school and a church under the stipulation that it would be named after a legendary Native American, and one of his workers, Pan Techo. The school, Pantego Common School, was opened in 1884 with an enrollment of thirty students. The school was the sight for the first “brush arbor” meetings that eventually led to the founding of Pantego Bible Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Arlington Landmark Preservation Commission, “History of Arlington, Providing a Window into Arlington’s Past,” City of Arlington, <http://www.arlington-tx.gov/history> (accessed November 3, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Anne Lemmons, “Pantego Bible Church, A Godly Heritage,” (paper presented at Church Meeting, Arlington, TX, August 26, 1996).



The city of Pantego has remained an almost completely residential, lower middle-class to middle class, suburban area. When Pantego was incorporated in 1949, it contained three hundred and fifty residents and four businesses.<sup>3</sup> In 2014, the population was 2,505. In 2013, the median income was \$71,052, and the population was eighty-four percent White.<sup>4</sup>

To fully understand the current community context for Pantego Bible Church, the picture needs to be widened. Pantego Bible Church relocated in April of 2001 to the very eastern edge of Fort Worth, bordering with the city of Arlington. Currently, less than five percent of active attendees live within the township of Pantego. The church's current location can be best described as a mix of metropolitan, residential, and industrial. Socio-economically, the area within a five-mile radius of the church is very diverse. This radius would include several surrounding cities of Arlington, Hurst, Bedford, and Euless. Racially, the Fort Worth 2010 census identified the population as sixty-one percent White, thirty-four percent Hispanic, and nineteen percent Black.<sup>5</sup> Arlington identified very similarly.

The population of Arlington in 2010 was 383,200, with 100 percent of that being urban and none rural. That was a 15.1 percent increase from 2000. The resident median age in 2014 was 32.4 years and the median household income was \$51,400. Of those age

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<sup>3</sup> Roland Jary, "Pantego Texas," Texas State Historical Association, <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hjp04> (accessed November 3, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> City Data, "Pantego Texas Profile," City of Pantego, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Pantego-Texas.html> (accessed November 3, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> United States Census Bureau, "State and County Quick Facts, Fort Worth, Texas," United States Census Bureau, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/48/4827000.html> (accessed November 3, 2015).

twenty-five and older, 29.1 percent of them have a bachelor's degree or higher. Manufacturing, retail trade, and construction were the leading industries among males, while healthcare and educational services were among women.<sup>6</sup> While there are approximately 50,000 full time university and college students in Tarrant County, they do not dominant the culture or define any of its cities.

The religious culture in the Dallas and Fort Worth areas impact Pantego Bible Church's realities, challenges, and opportunities. In the 2010 census, 44.8 percent of the religious affiliation responses were indicated as "none." "Evangelical protestant" was the second highest response at 30 percent, with "Catholic" following that with 11.1 percent. In comparison to the 2000 census, there was a 34 percent increase in those choosing "evangelical protestant." However, there was a 56 percent increase in those choosing "none." This was the greatest percentage change in religious affiliation between the two censuses. According to City-Data.com, Tarrant County, which includes Arlington, Fort Worth, and the surrounding cities of Pantego Bible Church, is the fourth highest ranked county in the United States of "evangelical protestant" adherents. Neighboring Dallas County is the third highest. Tarrant County has the fifth highest number of "evangelical protestant" churches congregations.<sup>7</sup> So, while located within one of the largest metro areas of the "Bible belt," Pantego Bible Church has an abundance of opportunity to reach and minister to thousands of non church people.

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<sup>6</sup> City Data, "Arlington Texas Profile," City of Arlington, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Arlington-Texas.html> (accessed December 3, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

Situated on a major interstate, Pantego Bible Church has also become somewhat of a destination church because of its rich history and reputation. There are regular occurrences of guests driving over twenty miles to attend church functions. Eighteen percent of active attendees drive over ten miles.

Perhaps this reflects upon another common characteristic of life within a large metropolitan area. Resident's lives are crowded and busy. Common to metro areas, residents of the Arlington area spend a large amount of time on the highways and roads. The mean commute time to work is twenty-six minutes,<sup>8</sup> which has direct ramifications upon the availability of potential and current church attendees for weekday events. The present busyness of American families, particularly within younger families of metro areas, has been well documented and the residents of the Pantego Bible Church area are not immune to this challenge. Becci Rollins, Ph.D., coordinator of counseling at Carroll Independent School District, says over scheduling is prevalent in her district.<sup>9</sup> These issues must be considered as churches seek to shape their vision and strategies for ministry and Kingdom efforts.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Shelley Pate, "Overscheduled Kids," Fort Worth Child. <http://www.dfwchild.com/features/608/Overscheduled-Kids#> (accessed December 3, 2016).

CHAPTER 2  
THE STRONG COMMUNITY HISTORY AND CULTURE OF PANTEGO  
BIBLE CHURCH

Pantego Bible Church has a unique and defining history, shaping the focus and hopes of this final project. While its roots go back over one hundred years, the past twenty years have been especially influential upon the church's current cultural values and definitions. They championed a community driven approach to church ministry that continues to influence current situations and strategies.

**Early Years**

The story of Pantego Bible Church begins in 1906. William Jefferson Fuller was a staunch Methodist. He and about twelve other families were concerned that there was no church in the area. They gathered under a brush arbor that summer for a Sunday morning Bible class on the grounds of Pantego Common School. For the first several decades, this community of believers was sustained by visiting speakers and local pastors, even of varying denominations. They constructed their first church building in 1936. These years brought a strong foundation of Bible teaching and discipleship instruction. Several of the

longstanding visiting pastors and teachers were associated with Evangelical Theological College, which later became Dallas Theological Seminary. There was a high value placed upon expository teaching and training in the Scriptures. In 1942, Pantego Community Church adopted its first constitution, and Orville Schick was the first pastor. In that first constitution, the church declared its two purposes as the opportunity for worship, instruction, and service, and to proclaim the gospel both locally and abroad. They were a people with a deep-seated passion for missions work. That influence remains today. In December of 1955, the church officially changed its name to Pantego Bible Church and broke ground on a worship center.<sup>10</sup>

### **Group Life Terminology**

There are several seemingly similar yet distinct group structures at Pantego Bible Church. This project will introduce an additional one. In order to not confuse the reader, this section will define the various group life structures. The vision and characteristics of each form are important to understand. There are unique leadership strategies and structures within each group structure.

Small groups meet in homes for primary purpose of strengthen relationships in the context of becoming more like Christ. They are a highly relational experience, designed to facilitate “doing life together.” Entire families are encouraged to attend. Children’s involvement and care needs are determined and directed by each group. The seven functions of small groups, as developed in the connection church model, are spiritual formation, evangelism, recreation through fellowship, volunteerism, international

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<sup>10</sup> Anne Lemmons, “Pantego Bible Church, The Godly Heritage,” 4.

missions, extending care to one another, and compassion to neighbors and community. Most groups meet weekly and consist of six to eighteen adults and their children. Small group leaders are appointed through the guidance of the ministerial staff and are grouped in communities under the direction of a volunteer shepherd.

Community Groups are a collection of small groups identified either by a geographical region or a life stage. According to the connecting church model there would only be geographically based groups. The church adhered strictly to this model during the first decade of its implementation. It became apparent that some age groups and some life stage groups were not comfortable in the intergenerational groups and a very low attendance record was one of these indications. Life stage groups were eventually and slowly introduced into the list of community groups options. Today, the life stage groups options are young adults, such as college and twentysomethings, young families, and singles that are age forty-five and up.

The clearest expression of community group life is the Sunday morning community group Bible study hour. The primary emphasis of these gatherings is Bible teaching, exploration, and discussion. Each community group is under the direction of a volunteer known as a shepherd, who might or might not serve as the Sunday morning group teacher. Community groups also function together outside of Sunday morning to assist in accomplishing the seven functions of small groups. For instance, they might coordinate service projects or caring for member's needs.

The connecting church model refers to the strategic ministry approach that was developed by Randy Frazee during his senior pastoral tenure at Pantego Bible Church.

Frazeo wrote and released *The Connecting Church*<sup>11</sup> book in 2001. During these years, the church hosted nationally recognized conferences on the design and implementation of this ministry model. These were very formative years in the life of the church, and they still have a strong influence upon the culture and approach of the church.

Connect events are one of the primary objectives of this final project. These events will happen three to four times a year on the church campus for the purpose of gathering people who are interested in getting involved in a small group. Connect events will take place during a Sunday morning, informing of the vision and purpose of small group life at Pantego Bible Church, encouraging involvement, and giving direction in determining best group options. The foremost goal of connect events is to create a new small group expression through the formation of connect groups.

Connect groups are an additional format of small group life that are created through connect events. Connect groups are designed to be a simpler and lower risk on ramp into group life. These groups are limited to an eight week experience, with an opportunity, and hope, to extend. They are particularly designed for strong missional expression. Members of connect groups are fit together through the filters of both geography and life stage by the direction of the connection pastor in collaboration with area pastors. Leaders for these newly formed connect groups are appointed and aligned prior to the connect events by the connection pastor. The connection pastor serves as overseer and supporter to connect groups and their leaders during this time frame.

If a connect group chooses to continue beyond their original eight week commitment, they are then grafted into the current group life model. They will no longer

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<sup>11</sup> Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001).

be known as a connect group, but as a small group. They will be identified to a community group, and therefore establishing connection to an overseer shepherd and an area pastor.

### **Defining the Connecting Church Model**

There were years of numerical and qualitative growth to follow. Randy Frazee, hired as senior pastor in 1990, led the church through significant and defining shifts. Throughout the nineties, Frazee's vision centered on building and strengthening the sense of belonging within the community of the church. His focus eventually led to the creation of a ministry model he entitled The Connecting Church. A strong selling book by the same name was published in 2001. The church soon began hosting conferences and training events that attracted attendees from across the nation.

At its core, the model served to construct strongly woven relationships such as modeled for the Church in Scripture. "The Church is truly the one institution that has the function of community – which is the development of people who follow Jesus Christ."<sup>12</sup> SERVICE served as the covenant acronym for community practices, which created a unique culture and environment within Pantego Bible Church.<sup>13</sup> Spiritual Formation, the "S," stood for the development into Christlikeness through reflection, vision, and confession. Evangelism, the "E," was focused primarily on neighbors and emphasized group accountability and prayers. "R" was the reproduction of new groups by always welcoming new members and developing new leaders. "V" stood for volunteerism of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 82.



members to service opportunities within areas of the church. “I” stood for the group’s international support and involvement of sharing Christ with the world. Care, the “C,” was the foundation of each group member being committed to one another, especially by helping in difficult times. “E” was extending compassion to the social needs within the community, by way of scheduling quarterly specific service opportunities for the group. These seven functions defined community for Pantego Bible Church.

Pantego Bible Church was the origin and poster church for the Connecting Church Model. “Community” was the battle cry and every approach, decision, and question filtered through that value. “Communitize it” was often the response to the defining questions facing the church. Intimacy was the focus, and this often meant a preference for smaller group settings. “Small is beautiful. It is hard to foster a sense of community or get things done in an area that encompasses too much space or includes too many people.”<sup>14</sup> This colored everything. For example, baptisms were typically held apart from the large group worship services so that the experience might be more intimate, only sharing among family and close friends with the Community Group or small group. The church staff did not direct or arrange opportunities of community volunteer service. It was an expectation of each community to discover and design. International mission partners were not supported by the general budget of the church, but were sponsored by Community Groups. Although unintentional, these dynamics fed a narrowing view of ministry.

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<sup>14</sup> Randy Frazee, *The Connecting Church 2.0* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 171.

## **Group Culture in the Connecting Church Model**

Several characteristics gave Pantego Bible Church and the Connecting Church Model definition in the years of Frazee's leadership. Perhaps the most notable was the geographic approach to the organization and alignment of ministry. Group membership, shepherding responsibilities, and staff roles were strictly and exclusively defined by geographic zones, set by city and school boundaries.

This model was driven by two values. One, the deepening of community and connection was more likely to happen among people who lived in closer proximity to one another. Perhaps their children shared schools, or the families shopped at the same grocery stores. Community and deep friendship could not be built by only seeing one another on Sunday mornings. Therefore, staff ministers' assignments were geographic. There was a pastor for North Arlington, another for Central Arlington, another for Fort Worth, another for Dallas County, and another for South Arlington. All Sunday morning Community Group Bible Study units and small groups were arranged by geography, not by the more common stage of life divisions. The other critical value was intergenerational living. There was no age distinction within small group structures. Children's and youth programming were available on Sunday mornings, but families were encouraged to experience small group life and fellowship together. The opportunity for multiple generations to gather and share with one another from the Scriptures was valuable and the small group structure was the provision.

Another defining characteristic was a multilayered approach to group life. Three sizes of group interaction were elevated as fulfilling community and discipleship. There

was participation in a large group (worship gatherings), in a mid-sized group (Sunday morning Bible classes of thirty to sixty people), and in a smaller small group of eight to fifteen members. Known as Community Groups, the mid-sized groups met on Sunday mornings, and emphasized Bible teaching and discussion. There would be a time of biblical presentation and commentary, as well as group discussion. The staff Spiritual Formation Pastor wrote a Bible study guide for each week based from the sermon text for the personal preparation of Community Group members. Community Group teachers met Saturday mornings for instruction and deepening theological understanding.

Each Community Group contained several small groups, which is the third level of group involvement in the Connecting Church model. Small groups were designed to be highly relational and encouraged to “do life together.” The weekly or biweekly gatherings included a meal, fellowship, sharing, and prayer. These were identified as the “four levels of involvement.” Worship in a large group was about inspiration. Studying in a medium-sized Community Group is about instruction, and participating in a small Small group is about involvement. The fourth level is about individual responsibility, which is about introspection and life application.<sup>15</sup> These dynamics gave definition to Pantego Bible Church and their influence still remains to this day. To understand the church today one must understand the sway of the Connecting Church Model. As seasons of change come to all churches, Pantego Bible Church faced some dramatic challenges.

The descent down a mountain can often be a bit trickier and scarier than the ascent and as much as one would like to just remain at the top of the mountain, the trip never lasts forever. For a church, it is an exceptionally precarious position to be in.

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<sup>15</sup> Frazee, *The Connecting Church*, 92.

Pantego Bible Church, under the pastorate of Randy Frazee, was once the champion of what was known as the Connecting Church Model. It was a novel, sensible, and attractive approach to a more integrated, intergenerational, and highly-relational way of church life. At that time, the senior pastor gave a strong and compelling vision for the model of the Connecting Church. The church staff and members supportively implemented the program. For about five years there was a season of growth and vitality. There especially seemed to be a heightened sense of connectedness and community within group life. Group members were drawn close to each other and relationships grew strong. In a very Christ-honoring way, those involved in group life during those years gave their lives to one another. But two decades from its genesis, the ruts are deep and the routines have revealed some cracks. The church had to descend the mountain.

### **Pastoral Changes**

All senior pastoral changes are difficult for churches to navigate, but perhaps adaption and change is a greater challenge for the church that experienced a departing pastor who created and orchestrated a highly refined and encompassing ministry strategy. Randy Frazee's tenure at Pantego Bible Church could be described as such. The first few years after Frazee's departure were marked with difficulties. Although the number of worship attendees during Frazee's last years as pastor remain the highest in the church's history, there was about a 25 percent drop in the number of weekly worship attendees during the period of transition immediately following his resignation. Reductions in budget receipts and a multimillion dollar building debt forced the layoff of twelve full

time staff members. Several other key ministerial staff members, including the worship pastor and the executive pastor, moved to other church ministries.

Although the challenges were significant, a commitment to Randy's model of ministry remained strong. Randy is a dynamic and charismatic leader. He was very well loved and respected by the church members and ministerial staff. He communicated and directed his vision for the connecting church with passion, clarity, and consistency. Staff alignment and structure, such as the creation of the area pastor roles and spiritual formation Bible study writer reflected the deep commitment to the model. Therefore, very few strategic changes were made within the first ten years of Frazee's departure, even though the succeeding senior pastor had given well received, strong, and faithful leadership. The blueprint for group life, discipleship programming, worship, and staffing alignment remained unaltered. Under Frazee's leadership, lay leaders were well instructed and highly empowered in the connecting church model, deeply embedding its attributes in the fibers of the church. Therefore, there was not a sense that the strategy or vision was broken or in need of an overhaul. The changes that have taken place have been slow in development and execution. A new mission and vision statement was crafted by the succeeding senior pastor and elders seven years after Frazee's departure, and alignment to its ministry directives is continuing to develop.

### **Group Life Challenges at Pantego Bible Church**

The more obvious issue in the past decade is the lack of new growth, particularly in group life. In the beginning, participation was strong. But while the numbers of those attending worship services have had slight increases, those involved in small groups have

decreased. During this time the number of recorded guests attending a worship service remained consistent, yet there was not growth in the small groups. At the height of the Connection Church Model implementation in 2003, Pantego Bible Church had approximately sixty percent of worship service attendees also attending a small group. Average worship attendance that year was 1,632, with an average of 525 in Community Groups, and an average of eighty-five small groups. In the past twelve years, the number of small groups has steadily declined. In 2009, there were seventy small groups, while average attendance in worship was 1,396. In 2012, there were fifty-three small groups, while the worship attendance average was 1,566. Only 34 percent of worship attendees attended a small group that year. In 2013, it was only 36 percent.

Vision for group multiplication and new group growth had become stifled. One of the five-year vision goals for the church in 2010 was to establish five new small groups each year, only twenty new groups in five years, representing a total of approximately two hundred people. On average, from 2010 to 2014, there were thirty-two first-time adult guests registered each Sunday, approximately 1,712 per year, adding up to 8,560 people over those five years. Considering an average of ten adults per group, reaching this 2010 small group vision goal would have only potentially connected 2.3 percent of all the guests. This does not account for those regular attendees in worship who are not involved in group life. In actuality, the number of small groups from 2010 to 2014 actually dropped from sixty-two to fifty-seven. Although not the sole culprit to blame, these low numbers are reflective of a system that is not clear and compelling. An October 2014 survey of Sunday morning worship service attendees revealed that of those not

involved in a small group, half of them responded that they would be open to visiting a small group. The church was clearly falling short of potential and several primary challenges can be identified.

#### Intimate Small Groups are not Guest-Friendly

Small group life took on an “insider” culture. The higher value of most groups was building relationships among members. While this was a great thing for those who were already members of a small group, it made entry for outsiders difficult. There is a natural and appropriate deepening of relationships when a small group spends years meeting together. Over the seasons they shared in joys, laughter, struggles, deaths, births, holidays, vacations, and memories. It is beautiful when a community develops such a strong connection. However, the calling and ultimate aim of small group life extends beyond the benefits to its group members. There was a common self-centering drift within small groups. The natural tendency of small group life was to draw inward and focus on another. In recognizing these dynamics, some church models only integrate new group members through new group formation. The longer a group remains together, and the deeper their bonds become, the more difficult it would be for an outsider to sense belonging. They would not have known the stories, the struggles, and the victories. Therefore, the integration and belonging process for a new member to step into an existing group was long and trying.

Although ideally the Connecting Church Model was that small groups would continually birth additional new groups, it did not happen. Group members spent weeks and years getting to know one another, sharing stories, shedding tears, and building deep

trust. It was exactly what one might hope for in small group life. However, this dynamic was a major deterrent for a guest. No matter how hard a group might work make them feel welcome, guests still felt like an outsider. In addition, some group members simply saw the injection of new group members as a disruption to the life and harmony of their group. They did not want to invite new guests. This compounds the difficulty of birthing new groups from within these relationally close groups because no one wanted to leave great friendships and have to begin all over again relationally. In other words, because of some good but unbalanced dynamics, a closed small group culture was created, with little impetus for the creation of new groups.

#### Confusing and Exacting Pathway to Group Life

Another reason for the lack of growth was the cumbersomeness of the pathway into small group life. In the existing Pantego Bible Church model, all small groups were aligned within Community Groups. Their primary expression of gathering was Sunday morning Bible study groups. Therefore, if a prospective small group visitor inquired about which small group to attend, he or she was directed to a Sunday morning Community Group Bible Study determined by where they lived. When attending a Sunday morning Community Group, the prospective small group visitor was informed of the small group options within his or her area. Each Community Group has multiple small group options. They met on various days, at various times, and in various patterns of regularity.

Small groups were intended to have a variety of ages within them. Although Pantego Bible Church highly values intergenerational community, the majority of small



groups evolved into distinguishable life stages. Some are empty-nesters, some are young families, while others are middle-aged adults with teenagers. To be involved in a small group also necessitated involvement in a Community Group, requiring a high level of commitment and interest. Having several steps in the entry process made it complicated, especially for an inquiring newcomer. In between each step in the process there existed space where inquirers might lose interest or direction. A greater number of spaces lower the percentage of inquirers that complete the process. A simpler and more accessible on-ramp for those interested and prepared for small group life is needed. This new on-ramp would not replace the current pathway, but compliment it.

A cumbersome pathway into small group life is detrimental to the growth of small groups and worship attendance in any church, but even more so at Pantego Bible Church. As designed by Pastor Randy Frazee and adopted by the church, the Connecting Church Model's primary entry point into community was through the smallest unit, the small group. The point of integration for the Connection Church model was the small group, where the group is not designed to be segregated by age or life stage. Singles, families, adults with or without children, divorced, married, young, or old would be the potential blend of any small group that a new attendee might experience. This lessens the likelihood that a guest would find commonality or similarity with those present. These commonalities are critical to aid in establishing friendship and community, and for them to not be present at the primary entry point is detrimental. Utilizing the small group, the smallest group size available, as the entry, combined with lessened commonalities among those attending, created unnecessary hurdles.

The other gatherings of the mid-sized Community Groups and the large group worship services had some life-stage segregation by offering of children's and youth programming. Guests were welcomed in these gatherings, but the culture that developed was not focused upon guests in that setting. Therefore, commonality and connection were more likely in these mid-sized and large group offerings, but yet they were not fully utilized as the point of entry for guests. As an example, these mid-sized Community Groups were encouraged to sit together in "their section" during the large group worship services thus furthering an insider culture.

The point of integration for the conventional church model is through the largest group gathering, the worship service, where there is less segregation. Again, driving this inverted approach of the Connected Church Model was the aim of a richer offering of community and sense of belonging, not for larger attendance in worship. The overall success for this ministry approach hinged upon the ability of small groups to not only function, but to also consistently reproduce. This decentralization placed greater responsibility and dependence upon the small group and its leaders. Evidenced by the low numbers of members and the lack of new group development, the model suffered breakdown.

In addition, the focus in this growth strategy is that the unchurched would be more drawn into faith by participation in a small group than in a corporate worship experience. While this might be the case for some, it certainly would be challenging to those who prefer to investigate and experiment with faith experiences anonymously and from a distance. Still recognizing the power and calling upon Christ followers to initiate

influential personal relationships, common sense informs that people are more likely to attempt new experiences when the risks are lowered. The probabilities of encounters and confrontations are low when attending a corporate worship gathering. A small group setting with eight to fifteen people, where one would have to speak and dialogue with others, is a much riskier environment than a large group setting of several hundred. Members are practically forced to engage at the small group level.

Author and researcher Joseph Myers details Edward Hall's list of the four spaces of human interaction: public, social, personal, and intimate. In their relation to ministry and the church setting, he writes, "A healthy strategy for those working to build community entails allowing people to grow significant relationship in all four areas – all four. It means permitting people to belong in the space they want or need to belong."<sup>16</sup> There are some who would certainly prefer a small group setting because large groups are intimidating and overwhelming. They feel lost in a large group setting or perhaps in the programmed ritualistic nature of a worship service.

The central point of the challenge to the Connecting Church Model is that one size really never fits all. Promoting only one entrance into community, as the Connecting Church Model intends, limited the potential of the church's ministry to develop followers of Christ. Preparation to receive guests by additional avenues would broaden the net and be more inclusive of others' personalities and preferences. The church was not well-prepared for both of these types of attendees. There was a low expectation and little readiness to draw in the attendee through the corporate large group worship gathering.

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), Kindle, Chapter 3.

Moreover, the design and architecture of the church campus reveals these values. When the church relocated in 2001, although situated less than three hundred yards from a major interstate, they chose to build behind the trees and woods to create more of a retreat-type of setting, losing the potential visibility of tens of thousands of drivers each day. Church campus grounds were not marked with signage directing to entrances or guest parking. There were few interior signs. Overall, it revealed a lack of anticipation that guests might enter, and have their first steps into community, through the large group worship gathering.

#### Narrow Pathways to Community

Pantego Bible Church's geographically-centered ministry structuring created another one-dimensional, one-lane approach to group growth. The premise was that neighborhoods would be the most fertile ground for relationships to flourish and provide opportunity for ministry. Author and Pastor Randy Frazee described the critical element. "The characteristic of community that facilitates and drives the previous four is geography. The simple fact is that in all laces of effective community people live in close proximity to each other [...]. Community requires being geographically close enough to be available for each other."<sup>17</sup> This final project affirms this dynamic, yet calls for a more inclusive vision for relational connection. While we are guided by the Scriptures to always consider our neighbors, other opportunities of building relationships exist in today's culture by which people make connection and build friendship. Organic rhythms

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<sup>17</sup> Frazee, *The Connecting Church*, 132.

of life such as sports teams, dance classes, and school activities are more likely to provide opportunities of connection. There is immediate commonality and availability.

The fortress nature of most neighborhoods makes it challenging for relationships to flourish. This is acknowledged in the Connecting Church Model, but perhaps the climb is steeper than most are prepared to handle. Americans are losing touch with their neighbors more and more.

Robert Putman's revealing work in *Bowling Alone* highlighted that American life was going through a social connection revolution, and neighboring was no exception.<sup>18</sup> Americans who spend a social evening with a neighbor had declined by 33 percent from 1974 to 1999. "The average American still might socialize with their neighbor about every two weeks, but as far as in the case of friendship, these ties are measurably more feeble now than a generation ago."<sup>19</sup>

A 2014 research article found that only a quarter of those polled could name a neighbor. A strong sense of neighboring seems to be sliding further away. Social researcher Marc Dunkelman describes neighbors as a "Middle ring," in contrast to the inner ring of family and close friends, and the ever-expanding outer-ring relationships fostered by the digital age. Dunkelman reflects that this "Middle ring" is not holding. "Middle-ring relationships take persistence and grit, because we don't always like our

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<sup>18</sup> Robert Putman, *Bowling Alone* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, Kindle: Chapter 6.

neighbors—it's not a relationship by choice—and we don't even run into them while shopping and the like, we drift.”<sup>20</sup>

We grab onto what easy commonalities we can discover in building connections. Otherwise, we face building relationships that take great effort and are time consuming. Reflecting on Frazee's approach in *The Search to Belong*, Joseph Myers writes, “It is true that people who live in close geographical proximity may connect with one another. Yet space in some sense is a matter of perspective [...]. ‘Close proximity’ need not be geographic.”<sup>21</sup> Geography should be considered, especially in a metro area, but having it as the only filter for building community is limiting. Pantego Bible Church's narrow emphases and ministry arrangement upon neighbors and geographical determination seriously limited their potential ministry influence.

### **Current Ministry Influences**

The current mission statement of Pantego Bible Church is “To make God known by making disciples who are changed by God to change their world.” There is a weekly effort through print and verbal communication to impress this statement upon the congregation. It carries on the strong tradition of making disciples through biblical attention and personal devotion. It also indicates a recent shift towards a more missional directive. This included the hiring of a global and local mission pastors and brought a more centralized effort rather than the individual efforts of each Community Group.

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<sup>20</sup> Brian Bethune, “The End of Neighbors,” MacLeans, <http://www.macleans.ca/society/the-end-of-neighbours> (accessed December 22, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Myers, *The Search to Belong*, Kindle: Chapter 1.

During the defining years of the Connecting Church Model, the mission statement was, “Transforming lives through the work of the Holy Spirit into full developing followers of Christ.” This statement reveals the emphasis placed upon equipping and development, thus leading to the robust and focused Bible study program. However, it lacked an outreach or missional component, indicative of an unbalanced vision and approach.

Today, Pantego Bible Church defines the spiritual pathway as the “3Bs.” It is an acronym for belong, become, and live beyond. “Belong” is about the identity of every individual and the community. First and foremost, one would belong to Christ, by grace through faith. He or she would then belong to others as the Church and as community. The idea of “Becoming” indicates growth, learning, and changing. God still has ideas for each life. This becoming happens both intentionally, through rhythms, disciplines, and structures, as well as incidentally, in ways that surprise yet impact. Living “Beyond” is the life of Christ flowing through believers to the world around them, next door or around the world. Christ followers steward all of their life for the sake of the Kingdom.

The governing leadership model at Pantego Bible Church has remained consistent over the decades. It is a non-denominational church, with no affiliation with any denominational organization or entity. It is a pastoral staff-led, elder-governed church. The senior pastor is a member of the elder board which maintains nine members who are confirmed by church member vote and rotate in three year terms. Therefore, most day-to-day decisions as well as staff hires are directly handled by the pastoral staff, and reviewed by elders. The senior pastor position requires a candidate search team determined by the

elders as well as a church vote. The elders provide oversight and approval to the overall strategies and vision of the church which is mostly determined through the leadership of the senior pastor and executive pastoral team. The elders also provide some shepherding and care ministry to church members, including personal monthly meetings with pastoral staff.

### **Strengthening Missional Group Life**

Strengthening the missional character and culture of group life at Pantego Bible Church is the aim of this project. Although the primary directive is the creation of a new small group expression, the full scope of this effort also involves modifying the existing focus and experience of current small groups. As detailed above, the current group culture is in need of redirection in order to accomplish a more robust missional impact. This project will address and develop a strategy to sharpen the vision and practices of current small groups. In collaboration with staff members and select current small group leaders, training and equipping opportunities will be developed to reorient current small groups towards a more missional experience. These opportunities will take place in both group and individual settings, and mainly defined within the rewriting of the small group leader's training manual.

A new expression of small group life known as connect groups will be created to involve additional attendees at Pantego Bible Church in a missional small group experience. Connect groups will be launched three times a year through connect group events. Distinct from the existing small groups, connect groups will have a specific duration of eight weeks. The intention and hope is that the members of connect groups



choose to extend their commitment. As they enter a second season of commitment, the group will be grafted into the current strategy of training and shepherding. Connect groups provide an easier on ramp and lower the risks for entering group life, especially for those who have not yet experienced a small group. Through infusing the church's vision of the spiritual pathway of belonging, becoming, and living beyond into these connect groups, participants will share in a balanced missional community. Connect groups will influence the missional culture of the small group ministry by serving as a model to a new generation of small group members through their activities and behaviors.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER 3  
REVIEW OF CRITICAL LITERATURE FOR MISSIONAL SMALL GROUP  
FORMATION

Chapter three will review literature critical to the development and strengthening of missional life at Pantego Bible Church. These works will inform, instruct, guide, and help develop the culture of small group life, particularly in the formation of Connect Small groups. Garth Icenogle and Miroslav Volf's works will define the biblical foundations of community, providing key principles for the content and purposes of life within community. Being the principal expression of community, missional small groups take on certain characteristics and attributes. The additional works of Benner, Boren, Roxburgh, Wilhoit, and McNeal will inform our examination of current conditions within small group life at Pantego Bible Church, and shape strategic future efforts.

**Biblical Foundations of Community**

The foundations of community are rooted within the character and purposes of God. The Scriptures guide the Church in defining community and creating strategy, particularly in small group formation. Gareth Icenogle and Miroslav Volf works are the

two primary sources explored in this final project for establishing the biblical foundations of community.

*Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrational Approach*, by Gareth Icenogle

Gareth Icenogle writes a full and complete analysis of small group ministry in *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry*.<sup>1</sup> It will assist this final project through informing on the nature of small groups that reflect the very nature of God, and in examining effective group ministry structures and habits. The book's three sections examine the Old Testament Foundations, the gospel Foundations, and the Apostolic Foundations (the Church in groups) for small group ministry patterns. God's own existence is revealed as being in community. The Church has historically described God as Trinity, three persons in one. "It might be overly dramatic to say that God lives as a small group, but God is described as existing in divine community, in dialogue with other members of the God-self."<sup>2</sup> Life that is given and shared within community reflects upon God's very character. Through the Old Testament view into the life of Adam and Eve, broken community with God and others can be seen from the beginning of creation. Small group life mirrors a hope of reconciliation and communion. "Small groups are trapped in the 'paradox' of hunger for intimacy ['it's not good to be alone'] and fear of intimacy ['they sewed fig leaves to cover themselves.']"<sup>3</sup> A building of community

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<sup>1</sup> Gareth Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry; An Integrational Approach* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 27.

comes from a “covenant God, a God who convenes people into healing and intimate relationships.”<sup>4</sup>

In Dueteronomy, God reminds the Isrealites not only of his covenant with his people, but of how he “spoke to [them] face to face” (Dt 5:4). Small groups are about this face-to-face community. “God desires face-to-face relationships with humanity. God desires to bring people into face-to-face relationships with one another. The very nature of God is face-to-face community.”<sup>5</sup> This project pursues the creation and edification of small group life because God is a small group-type of God. God’s purposes are best fulfilled in healthy small group life. This type of a community provides a means for all to be known and come out from hiding and isolation.

Every small group structure requires leadership. Icenogle’s work informs the leadership approach in this final project. In Exodus 18, Moses receives advice from his father-in-law Jethro. “[Share] leadership with a few carefully chosen people [...] Godly acts of sharing power breed wider acts of shared power. Healthy leadership in small groups forges the basis of healthier leadership in larger groups.”<sup>6</sup> Pantego Bible Church has struggled mightily in multiplying group growth and group leaders. It is critical that this final project address and provide an avenue for group multiplication. The basis for a ministry of multiplication comes through the equipping and empowerment of leaders. “The development of a healthy small group ministry structure has to do with the careful

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 89.

appointment and placement of key leadership.”<sup>7</sup> While leadership development is supported within the scope of this final project, Icenogle’s specific approach is more complex and controlling in nature than that of Pantego Bible Church.

In the defining of a small group structure, Icenogle acknowledges that unique qualities must be considered. Pantego Bible Church’s rich traditions, both the helpful and challenging ones, are kept in view in this final project. This is not a blank slate, new church plant, type of situation. Therefore, the unique culture and conditions of the church have been taken into consideration. “Each small group ministry structure needs to be developed appropriately for its unique context.”<sup>8</sup> Icenogle shares implications that are relevant to the aim of this project. He affirms the greater likelihood of groups to connect when they share similarities which Pantego Bible Church’s model attempted to construct through the one filter approach of geography. As this final project contends, that approach failed to recognize other high-similarity filters. People are more comfortable with those with whom they have something in common, and just living in the same zip code or school zones does not ensure a high probability of sharing commonalities. However, as groups mature, Icenogle finds they tend to expand their sense of diversity. The creation of a new pathway via the Connect Groups, and the grafting of those groups into Pantego Bible Church’s existing model, will mirror these findings.

Another quality is the missional design of Connect Groups. “Every group needs to be guided into this holistic vision for life together [...]. The group’s life purpose is more fully seen as they move beyond themselves into the presence of God, the presence of

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 103.

outsiders and the presence of God's wider creation."<sup>9</sup> He acknowledges the nature of groups to turn inward, "becoming ingrown and insensitive to the wider world [...]. Groups can become self-satisfied, protective and self-secure [...]. The group's journey inward to Christ and one another must become a journey outward into the world."<sup>10</sup> If not, the group might actually be its own idol. "When the group becomes too self-contained, too self-reliant, too self-possessed or too self-determining, it has become its own idol. The life of a small group is not an end to itself."<sup>11</sup> Icenogle warns that not only individual small groups, but small group structures can also slide into a similar position. "They can fall in love with their own polity and lust after their own bureaucracy."<sup>12</sup> The Church should guard against investing more into orders, laws, and processes. Having been the poster church, book producer, and conference host for the Connecting Church Model, Pantego Bible Church faces this challenge. For some within the church, the aim of this final project will be disturbing.

Icenogle touches upon another small group ministry structural design this project will interject into Pantego Bible Church. Part of Jesus' strategy within forming community was not only that of a gathering of the people, but also at times, the scattering of the people. In John chapter six, "many of his disciples turned backs and no longer followed." Every group will come to a time of scattering. For some, it might be a crisis of faith, interpersonal conflict, loss of leadership, or physical relocation that leads to a

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 356.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 347.

season of segregation. For others, this scattering might resemble the apostle's experience after Christ's resurrection. What can be understood from this is that out of persecution, difficulty, and fear, the ministry of Christ may carry farther and reach further. In another type of scattering, Saul and Barnabas are sent out by the church "to the work by which [God has] called them" (Acts 13:2). God's specific mission upon some will lead to seasons of change within small groups for the sake of advancement. What might look like losses are, in the end, additions. This principle guides commitment and strategy to ongoing recruitment and development of missional leaders.

*After Our Likeness, The Church as the Image of the Trinity*, by Miroslav Volf

Volf's work in *After our Likeness, The Church as the Image of the Trinity* affirms foundational biblical principles of faith and community.<sup>13</sup> Its particular benefit to this final project is the communal nature of the Trinity and the essential nature of the Church within faith. The essential nature of life in Christ by definition involves life with others who are in Christ. "The God in whom one believes is the triune God, and thus not a self-enclosed unity, but rather a community of the three divine persons [...]. Fellowship with the triune God is therefore at once also fellowship with all other human beings who in faith have surrendered their existence to the same God"<sup>14</sup> Reflecting upon Galatians 2:20, "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." The passage affirms that those who come to Christ have a new center of life. "To believe in Christ accordingly

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<sup>13</sup> Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness, The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.



means to ‘enter’ into this corporate personality and for that reason also into communion with others.”<sup>15</sup> This communion that is shared with others reflects the fellowship shared within the triune God. A soul linking into a communal God creates a communal thread into the lives of others. “The Spirit dwelling through faith in the hearts of human beings issues from his fellowship with the Father and the Son, and the fellowship into which he enters with believers corresponds to his fellowship with the Father and the Son.”<sup>16</sup>

Helping shape an urgency of incorporating all Christ followers into community, Volf reflects on the required presence of the congregation in sharing in Christ’s presence. Individual experiences alone do not define faith. “For where two or more are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Mt 18:20). There is an emphasized presence for the gathered, not the individual. “This is why no one can come to faith alone and no one can live in faith alone.”<sup>17</sup> There must be connection for all. We are incomplete in His presence and workings if we are apart from the community. If we have communion with this Triune God, then we must by design have communion with others who have also trusted in this God. “This is why life in the congregation is not something added to faith and its confession. Faith always occurs with and in the Church. Life in the congregation is the execution of this confession of faith.”<sup>18</sup>

Pantego Bible Church currently has less than fifty percent of worship service attendees in small group involvement. This communal design within humanity that Volf

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 173.

illuminates fuels the purposes of this final project. This project aims to guide the people of Pantego Bible Church to recognize this faith urgency not just for both themselves but also for those that are yet experiencing community.

### **Small Groups as Expressions of Community**

Small group formations are a best expression of community life. Benner, Boren, and Roxburgh help inform and shape the core dynamics of a missionally focused small group life. They highlight the critical relational connection between group members in spiritual growth while focusing upon a dynamic interaction with God and His movement.

*Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction*, by David Benner

Benner centers his publication on the development of our journeys in Christ through the power of intimate spiritual friends. Our growth, in fact, depends upon it. “If you are making significant progress on the transformational journey of Christian spirituality, you have one or more friendships that support that journey. If you do not, you are not. It is that simple.”<sup>19</sup> His contributions will enrich the character and nature of the relational experiences within group life at Pantego Bible Church. They define elements for leader training and group cultural development.

Sacred companions are in friendships, as well as in what has traditionally been described as mentorship, but their particular characteristic is “the way they help us become more aware of the presence of the sacred. The supreme gift that anyone can give

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<sup>19</sup> David Benner, *Sacred Companions, The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), Kindle: Preface.

another is to help that person live life more aware of the presence of God.”<sup>20</sup> In supporting “the care and cure of souls,” Brenner writes for a work that might include “parents, spouses, friends, [...] elders, small group leaders.”<sup>21</sup> The task of a sacred companion is to help in discerning the presence, the will, and the leading of the Spirit of God. This is the heart of missional living.

Several elements within the focus of *Sacred Companions* are woven into the life of Connect Groups. Beyond emphasizing a list of the traditional individual or group disciplines, the destination of Christ followers is to “become a great lover” of God. “We must learn to spend time gazing on him, being still before him and focused on him. And we must learn to listen to him.”<sup>22</sup> In this, we are not trying to be more loving per se, but to allow Him to love us. “To absorb his love so that it flows out from me.”<sup>23</sup> Practices such as journaling, reflection, and remembering within the group are fostering.

Hospitality is the passageway for sacred companions. “It reminds us to make space in our lives for others.”<sup>24</sup> A significant culprit in the failure of group growth at Pantego Bible Church is the group member using their relational space only for close group members and not for any outsiders. In this love, “there is no exclusiveness in friendship [...]. Circles of friendship expand as other ‘kindred souls’ are discovered.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Preface.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 6.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

This space is a place where all things are safe. “Anything can be said without fear of criticism or ridicule... a place where masks and pretensions can be set aside... It is a place of grace.”<sup>26</sup> Brenner describes that dialogue is the core of encounters between soul companions. It is richer and fuller than conversation. “In dialogue the intent is exploration, discovery, and insight.”<sup>27</sup> It involves a sharing of the soul, its deepest longings and anxieties. The Connect Group development within this final project will serve as a doorway for smaller, more personal, encounters to develop.

Sacred companions share spiritual direction. It is not authoritarian, where one tells another what to do. It is not just where spiritual advice is dispensed. It is not discipleship, where things are structured and accountability has a primary role. It is not counseling, although they share features. “The most important of these differences is that while counseling is problem-centered, spiritual direction is Spirit-centered.”<sup>28</sup> While counselors avoid self-disclosure, these sacred companions are open about themselves and willing to share from their journey. “Spiritual direction is a prayer process in which a person seeking help in cultivating a deeper personal relationship with God meets with another for prayer and conversation that is focused on increasing awareness of God in the midst of life experiences and facilitating surrender to God’s will.”<sup>29</sup>

Small groups, such as the Connect Groups created through this project, are a viable arena for these experiences. There are simply too many in need to expect that all

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 2.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

will find individual spiritual directors. Brenner believes that the “hope for the church lies in the small group movement.”<sup>30</sup> These groups have an obvious fellowship feature, but they strive for “soul friendship rather than spiritual acquaintances.”<sup>31</sup> Four common activities characterize these groups of spiritual companions. First, there is a priority of questions over answers. Seekers are encouraged, not just having groups that are full of finders. The second activity is prayerful listening. This is a climate of attentiveness to one another and to God. Sharing spiritual experiences is the third. The focus is not just on the circumstances of our life, but more on the participant’s experience of God in the midst of those circumstances. Lastly, there is an environment of support and acceptance.

*Introducing the Missional Church, What It Is, Why It Matters, How to Become One*, by  
Alan Roxburgh and Scott Boren

At the core of the missional Church expression is more than a consideration of how to fill the seats on Sundays or how to make the church better. Instead, the consideration is “the ways we need to change in order to engage the people in our community who no longer consider church a part of their lives.”<sup>32</sup> For this, there is no magical formula or specific model. Authors Roxburgh and Boren flesh out a missional life that is not as much about church structure or programming as it is a people sent out in their neighborhoods, social interests, and work places. In moving the Church forward in missional living there are three foundational understandings. One, the western world that

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 8.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Alan Roxburgh, and Scott Boren, *Introducing the Missional Church, What It is, Why It Matters, How to Become One* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2009), 20.

we live in is a mission field, including the church fringe attendees or investigators.

Missions is not something only reserved for the other side of the world. Two, the Church existence must be reset upon the *Missio Dei* (“mission of God”), not upon personal needs.

“It is God’s story, and we are participants in His story and mission.”<sup>33</sup> Three, it is the reimagining of Church as the embodiment of Christ in the world. Not defining church by where a group gathers, but learning to be present, practicing hospitality, and “inviting those in their neighborhoods to taste and see what it means to be shaped by Jesus.”<sup>34</sup>

These are the considerations for small groups at Pantego Bible Church to advance in missional living.

A church that engages its context will enter to listen. It will be attentive to what it senses that God might be doing in their midst while it connects with the people in all the little ways that build a relationship. In response to all of the observations, the church allows the mission and intentions of God to reshape what could be. This places a high value on a people, and a place, not a program, “which arises out of an incarnational theology of place.”<sup>35</sup> The alignment of the Connecting Church model, with its emphases upon geography and neighborhoods, strengthens this missional model.

There are five elements a local church moves through to enter the missional journey. They are the “five stages of innovation any group moves through to effectively negotiate a set of new realities.”<sup>36</sup> The stages are awareness, understanding, evaluation,

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 134.

experimentation, and commitment. They will be a critical guide in the transition and growth of Pantego Bible Church's existing small groups. It will serve as a piece of the training for current group leaders. Awareness is the willingness to risk a new journey and to see things and people as they really are. It means we "suspend our answers and plans."<sup>37</sup> The stage of understanding creates a confidence that the church is listening to one another and they are safe to "ask each other new kinds of questions that stimulate new forms of thinking."<sup>38</sup> Evaluation brings the kind of open dialogue over current practices and conditions that leads to decisions about future movement. Experimentation is creating some simple and practical ventures, not wholesale change. "We invite people into [...] risk in missional life while all the time providing security by keeping the regular life of the church basically the same."<sup>39</sup> Commitments allow the church to transform. The key is not as much for pastoral leadership to propose or create strategy as it is for the current and future small group leaders to be empowered to discern and develop action.

*MissioRelate; Becoming a Church of Missional Small Groups*, by Scott Boren

Author Scott Boren relates that missional living is far from the normal group life and small group ministry. "Nominalized small groups in America are nothing more than nice little groups of traditional Christians who gather because it's fun to hang out with

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 142..

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 145.

other traditional Christians.”<sup>40</sup> Boren’s key to missional small group life is the quality and content of group experiences. The challenge is to go beyond primary goals of connecting people in small groups to an understanding and expectation for what happens within that small group. Pantego Bible Church’s current laissez-faire approach to small group experience is challenged to be more engaged in consistent shepherding. “‘Missiorelate’ is an experience with God and others that makes a difference in the world.”<sup>41</sup> As a first principle in missional small group life, Boren recommends that integration is taken in small steps. Changes should be applied a little at a time and in quiet increments. “We don’t need any new programs, fanfare, or grand announcements about how small groups will change the life of our churches.”<sup>42</sup> To encompass these designs the goals and aims of this final project will build upon some of the elements already in place in the small group life at Pantego Bible Church.

Churches developing missional life in small groups keep their focus on several issues. They serve as guides for the integration of missional dynamics in new Connect Groups. One, the focus is not upon numbers, but upon empowering people to have a role in God’s redemptive work. Two, they focus upon the quality of the small group experience, not just that it happened. Three, they hold up a high call to missional living and are not afraid to lose attendees who were only looking for a traditional experience. Four, they train and train some more, because these efforts are so different and not

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<sup>40</sup> Scott Boren, *MissioRelate, Becoming a Church of Missional Small Groups* (Houston: Touch, 2011), Kindle: Preface.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Chapter1.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.



routine or natural. Five, they experiment with the new ideas of God's people, but do not attempt completely new models or programs.

Missional small group cultures have varying stories. Boren writes that these expressions are found in groups that are trying to make a difference in the world. "Missional Re-creation" flows into some unpredictable but structural expressions. Particularly relevant to Pantego Bible Church's current culture is understanding that service projects or outreach programs do not equate missional living.<sup>43</sup> Even a small group structure that is based upon group outreach projects or ideas will not necessarily create new culture. A group could serve and complete a task for those outside of its group, but go right back to the norms and patterns of a traditional small group. Connect Groups will be held accountable for outreach projects and service but autonomous in making decisions about particular services.

The right exercises bring about the right type of culture. Boren affirms that at the core of forming missional groups is a strategy of discipleship. "Small groups are just a great way to organize and facilitate that business."<sup>44</sup> This will mean that churches position small group life upon theological vision, not current cultural values or direction. So, the question that needs to be asked is not "What can we do to have our small groups be missional?" Instead, we must ask, "How are we going to create a culture of discipleship that will form people for mission?"<sup>45</sup> No matter the primary form that small groups take, such as for fellowship or accountability, there are several necessary

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 3

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 7.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

experiences for missional life to occur. One, the groups focus on the presence of Christ in their midst. They are mostly concerned about connecting with God. Two, they love and embrace one another far beyond just a weekly meeting. Three, they live in such a way that Christ is seen in them. Four, these holistic missional groups move forward, leading others to follow Christ in all things which yields generations of new followers and leaders.

Relational health and relational intelligence are significant matters to small group life. It is a critical component to group leadership development. Boren encourages several levels of training and equipping to help people grow in their patterns of relating and communicating. One would be the simplification of our schedules and lives so that we have margin to connect with others. This might have implications on job dynamics, where to live, financial commitments, or sports commitments with children. Randy Frazee offered some clear guidance in this area during his pastoral years at Pantego Bible Church through the Connecting Church model. A next step would help people develop some basic skills such as introducing themselves, listening, or working within a team. Small group culture can foster the atmosphere where these, although elementary, are practiced and esteemed. Three, there is growth in love for others, following the scriptural model of service. Missional engagement is the final development within these groups. “They have developed good relational skills on the first three levels and are fully ready to engage their neighbors, friends, family, and coworkers in missional dialogue.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 11.

In the process of connecting people into group life, Boren's focus is not upon the connection itself as the end goal, but as an important segment in the journey. Notable to this journey is that the approach has commitment and buy-in from leadership. "Most of the time, a strategy fails not because it is flawed, but because the church has not found commitment."<sup>47</sup> The implementation process of this final project will include collaboration, input, and evaluation from across the pastoral, worship, discipleship, and communication ministerial teams.

### **Characteristics and Behaviors of Missional Groups**

Missional small groups share common principles. These principles give definition to the efforts and boundaries of group activity as well as guide the strategic steps outlined in this final project. The featured works by Wilhoit and McNeal assist in the development of these group characteristics and behaviors.

*Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered, Growing in Christ Through  
Community*, by James Wilhoit

"The church was formed to form."<sup>48</sup> Wilhoit's work focuses upon the central responsibility of the Church to spiritual formation. All of humanity is shaped and formed by something. The design of the Church was to be as the primary influence. His contributions will inform the characteristics of formation within small groups at Pantego Bible Church. They will provide instruction and content for small group leader

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 17.

<sup>48</sup> James Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered, Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 15.

development and small group focus. The design of the newly created Connect Groups, as well as the existing small groups at Pantego Bible Church, is to shape and form participants more into the likeness of Christ. At its core, this work of spiritual formation is communal. “Spiritual formation is communal because the Christian life is best lived in community, where worship, fellowship, and service are practiced, and spiritual formation takes place in, through, and for community. Spiritual formation must extend beyond the individual to the church, the family, and society.”<sup>49</sup> This work of formation encompasses all aspects of church life and its ministries. Small groups cannot accomplish this task fully if it functions in isolation to the other dynamics of the church.

There are four dimensions of community formation: receiving, remembering, responding, and relating. All are happening within the context of community, yet each can be seen within various group practices at Pantego Bible Church. Receiving pertains to practices of confession, worship, sacraments, and prayer. Primarily, these are experienced in corporate, large group worship services. Brokenness and repentance are prerequisites to receiving. Within community, “A true spiritual openness has at its core a personal brokenness that results in humility and a tender openness to God’s work in us.”<sup>50</sup> Remembering is a part of teaching, sharing, and encouragement. The Community Group structure provides this formation element. The design of mission-infused small group life provides the arena and context for the last two dimensions of community formation. Responding occurs through our service and relational wholeness. The smaller

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 82.

setting of a small group provides participants the arena to be spent out for the needs of others. Relationships are highly valued and carefully maintained. “Relating affirms that spiritual formation takes place best in and through community.”<sup>51</sup> Wilhoit writes that this dimension of relating comes in the form of mentors as well as spiritual friendships, providing a climate where relationships and spiritual life can be nourished.

Wilhoit’s piece affirms the approach of this final project in maintaining the design and function of Pantego Bible Church’s various group sizes. The four dimensions of community formation outline the healthy practices of communities in spiritual formation. They serve as a guide for distinguishing the purposes of each form of group life at Pantego Bible Church whether they be connect groups, existing small groups, community groups, or corporate worship.

*Missional Communities: The Rise of the Post-Congregational Church*, by

Reggie McNeal

McNeal views the missional community as varying significantly from the traditional congregational church model. His work guides through the great challenges for churches striving for a switch. While the goal of the congregational model is attendance and participation, “missional communities have maturation as their end game—developing people who are increasingly identifiable as followers of Christ.”<sup>52</sup> The decline of congregational church attendees opens the door for a new model. But the

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>52</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Missional Communities, The Rise of Post-Congregational Church* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2011), Kindle: Introduction.

“corresponding issue for the church is whether or not we are going to insist that people first become church people in order to experience the gospel of Jesus.”<sup>53</sup> This missional culture “requires a strategy of engaging people right where they already live, work, play, go to school, and pursue their hobbies [...] It lets them live more intentionally, learning to love God and their neighbors more, making a contribution to their community, all with people they know and are known by. This is the recipe for a new church life form-missional communities.”<sup>54</sup> The Connecting Church model Pantego Bible Church pursued in the 1990s formed a strong community genetic code within the people. Wherever the people of Christ are, the Church is present.

The leadership form for the missional community is very different from that of the congregational church. Leadership within missional communities is simple and shared, not usually relying on a theologically trained clergy. Examples of missional communities take leadership development very seriously, but the focus “resides in the person, not in a position.”<sup>55</sup> McNeal argues that this is not a form of rebellion against spiritual authority. He points that out that participants in missional communities often live under great accountability, more so than those strictly in a congregational church. Accountability remains high, while control is low. The leadership culture at Austin Stone Church serves as a good example. Leaders have the opportunity to step out and nominate themselves. They aim to lower the bar up front for leadership in missional group life, but dedicate themselves to their development. Their mantra is “little by little, topic by topic,

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 1.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 2.

overtime and on the job.”<sup>56</sup> Staff pastors and executive leaders within this missional church understand one of their primary jobs is the disciplining of their leaders through modeling. Of all the models that McNeal observes, there is a common component in these missional communities. Each small group has a distinct calling, but there are two variations. These two variations provide great modeling for Connect groups. They are identified as a group with a mission or as a group with missionaries. The groups with a mission have a common cause and they strive together on the mission. The groups with missionaries “have a relational affinity and covenant to hold one another accountable for their individual missions.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Kindle: Chapter 6.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER 4

### THEOLOGY OF MISSIONAL COMMUNITY WITHIN SMALL GROUP LIFE

Purpose and direction is birthed into the soul when one comes to faith through God's grace. This gospel is larger than one person's salvation experience. A personal declaration of faith in Jesus is only the beginning of the journey, not the end. This is a foundational principle in understanding the theology of missional community. This chapter will examine several key passages, giving direction and illustration of missional living within small group life.

#### **Models of Life in Mission**

The indwelling presence of Christ in the life of a believer reflects the embodiment of God in Jesus. This incarnational way of life is the Kingdom's mode of operation and can be seen in the scriptures through the life of Christ, the life of Jeremiah, and the lives of the first believers. Jesus' view of and interaction with the masses, as recorded in Matthew, reveals the heart of an incarnational minister and the pathway of ministry. Jeremiah's time of captivity in a foreign land models a manner of living that blesses those outside of God's kingdom, the focus of a missional life. As recorded in Acts, the newly formed church reveals the out-flowing practices of these principles.



## The Incarnational Mode of Christ

Jesus is the model of incarnational living, fostering a life of purpose and meaning. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.” (Jn 1:1). Jesus, “the Word,” was with God and was fully God. “The ‘Word’ was deity, one with God, rather than ‘a god’ or another being of the same class. This is the real meaning of the phrase. Unity of nature, rather than similarity or likeness, is implied. The external coexistence and unity of the Word with God is unmistakably asserted.”<sup>58</sup> This uniqueness of Christ positioned Him to be the perfect instrument in the Father’s hand for serving as the ultimate revelation of God to mankind.

To that end, Jesus took on human flesh to dwell with humanity and carry out His father’s designs. “And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. [...] No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.” (Jn 1:14-17) Jesus was the instrument of connection, serving as a bridge between man and woman and God. He came and made his home among all humanity. He lived a life in human form so that humanity might recognize God and have communion with Him. Jesus ate of the food and breathed the air of a time-bound earth. “He took on Himself sinless human nature and identified with us in every aspect of life from birth to death. ‘The Word’ was not an abstract concept of philosophy, but a real Person who could be seen, touched, and heard. Christianity is Christ, and Christ is

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<sup>58</sup> Merrill Tenney, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 9:28.

God.”<sup>59</sup> Though entitled in every way, He humbled himself to His father’s desires. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness, revealing the character of God.

Christ followers share in this incarnational character, called to reveal God’s designs and purposes in the world through the indwelling presence of God in their lives. Incarnation is the doorway to missional living. All that missional living represents begins as a believer embodies the heart and purposes of Christ. As Christ took on flesh to live among humanity to display and express all the fullness of God the Father, Christ followers take on Christ to live among their neighbors, coworkers, friends, and family to display and express the same. They are the hands, the feet, and the voice of God, following His intentions and purposes.

Several principals of missional life are seen in this incarnational example of Christ. Jesus stated that, “I can do nothing on my own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will, but the will of Him who sent me.” (John 5:30) He listened and followed the desires of His Father who sent Him. Jesus was not on his own personal mission. He was not trying to obtain something for His own glory. Jesus’ desire was the Father’s renown. Jesus abandoned any self-centered ambitions. His life was surrendered to the Father’s plans. Jesus’ life reflected the Father’s glory. His first and central desire in life was to please His Father is everything that He did. “I do not seek my own will, but the will of Him who sent me.” (Jn 5:30) His own desires and wants were surrendered so that the Father’s desires would be sought and accomplished. Evidenced by the selfless and sacrificing nature of His life, Jesus’ life

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<sup>59</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1989), 1:284.

purposes were to serve His Father. With devoted obedience, Jesus completely followed the will of the Father. Jesus tuned into His Father's voice through times of lingering in His presence. These times of personal interaction and fellowship provided direction to Jesus' life and mission.

The missional life of a Christ follower begins in this manner. The soul is still before God for communion, connection, and direction. These times provide a believer strength to surrender selfish plans and strive for the Father's glory. The only means through which Christians will fulfill their missional calling is through the daily surrendering of their personal desires and ambitions. They allow the Father's commands, whispers, and nudging to guide their life. Missional impact opens up for the one that follows the voice of the one who birthed their mission. Missional small groups discover ways to communally seek the Father's will and practice surrendering the group's desires for the desires that the Father has for them.

The purpose of incarnation is connection, and connection requires proximity and purpose. Although the proximity and space may take various forms, there is a crossing of lives. Friendship might begin incidentally, but it will mature only through purpose and intention. God made his home among humanity through Christ so that He might be close to them. Noted in the upcoming reflection upon Matthew chapter nine, Jesus made connection through sharing in the joys, troubles, healings, grief, and insecurities of those around him. Jesus became human that He might know mankind intimately and deeply, living a life that connected Him to them, not in isolation. In reflecting upon this character of Christ, missional living directs the believer to live in close proximity to those he or she is sent. Just as Christ engaged the daily life of humanity, meaningful relational

connections for the sake of the Kingdom can only happen through spending time together and sharing the moments that shape life. Missional living cannot take place from some reclusive place. It will not happen from isolated living. “As we see the needs of people all around us we must get close enough to them to see how we can bring the healing touch of the gospel of the kingdom to their deepest needs.”<sup>60</sup> The removal of layers between the Christ followers and their world bring a powerful depth to missional efforts. It will require focused efforts and the margin of life to make true impact.

### The Pathway to Incarnational Life

The gospel of Matthew unveils a glimpse into the heart and the ministry approach of Christ. Through his life, Jesus revealed the essentials of ministry and Kingdom living, modeling for all of His followers the elements of missional living. The Church has an example to follow in constructing its philosophy of ministry and the priorities that flow from it.

Christ offered an initial movement in establishing connection with others. Christ went out to the people where they were instead of calling them to come to Him. He was active in His pursuit. “Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom” (Mt 9:35a). He came as a servant, surrendering his heart to the will of His Father. As He went out among the people, He gave proclamation to the Kingdom through His words and through His healing service. As the people might have experienced with other rabbis, Jesus taught them in the synagogue, yet His teachings were unlike anything they had heard before.

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<sup>60</sup> J. Andrew Dearman, *The NIV Application Commentary; Jeremiah and Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 384.

Through His words, He gave them insight to the Kingdom of God that was now among them.

His teachings were accompanied with acts of love and services of healing. Note from the scriptures that Christ “[healed] every kind” of issue. There was not a sickness or affliction that He could not and did not heal. Christ “did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (20:28). His ministry was not one of only words and talk, but of service and meeting the needs of the people. Jesus did not only share a message or give a pronouncement, but offered Himself to the people. He was among the people, listening to their stories and sensing their needs. He touched them and restored them. His words and message were validated by these acts of love and demonstration of power.

Christ was fueled by His focus on the souls of the people, not just their outward circumstances or appearances. His attention was on the inward condition of their heart, and it moved Him. “Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd” (9:36). Jesus had a different way of viewing the people. Instead of only seeing the physical or outward needs, He understood the condition of their soul. Seeing their brokenness, hopelessness, and need for meaning, Jesus was most concerned about filling their souls with purpose. The service of physical healings Christ offered was an expression of love that stemmed from His concern for their soul. “The crowds continue to be the object of Jesus’ ministry, and the motivating force is his compassion [...] The verb ‘have compassion’ [means] to be moved in the inward parts, which usually indicates deep feelings in the heart and

affections.”<sup>61</sup> Jesus was moved by compassion. He allowed Himself to feel what they were feeling, taking the time to empathize with their dire needs. He did not consider His position too high that He could not relate to their situations. He empathized with their hurt.

Jesus models the proper focus for His followers who live in mission with Him. The condition of soul is the center of the calling. It is the condition of the human heart that is the focus of those living on behalf of the Kingdom. It is people’s need for life and a fulfilling purpose in Christ that provides a rightful motivation. This is the preeminent purpose of our calling. “Jesus’ empathy is guided by a deep understanding of the real needs of people.”<sup>62</sup> It was the spiritual condition of those He served that directed Christ to meet their physical needs. This concern for their soul issues drove Christ into action. “What causes Jesus’ deep compassion at this point is not the abundance of sickness he has seen but rather the great spiritual need of the people, whose lives have no center, whose existence seems aimless, whose experience is one of futility.”<sup>63</sup>

There is a practical and tangible expression to the love that believers share to their world that opens a pathway for their deeper connection to the gospel and biblical proclamation. Acts of service unlock the doors to that pathway. Missional followers must consider the ways to serve those around them, just as Christ did. They must spend enough time in close proximity to their world to understand the needs and then discover meaningful opportunities to meet those needs in the names of Christ. All the while, the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 374.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 379.

<sup>63</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary, Matthew 1-13* (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, 1998), 33A:260.

missional Christ follower's focus is on the soul, bringing wholeness and new purpose to a "distressed and dispirited" people (9:36). This approach also instructs the missional small group.

A missional community will have these same characteristics that are modeled by Christ. As a group, they are concerned for and engaged with their world. They give of themselves to live among their world, closely listening and perceiving their stories. They serve together to demonstrate the love and character of Christ, being fueled by a focus upon God's renewing work of the soul. Groups might have a single unifying common cause such as a particular neighborhood or ministry need such as an elementary reading program or women's center. In this case, all members of the group are involved in this one opportunity. Other missional groups will not have a single missional cause, but each member would be involved in a unique cause. These missional groups would serve as a source of support and encouragement for members as they live out these particular callings. Missional small groups, whether they have a single group focus or multiple individual focuses, hold the characteristics as seen in Christ.

#### Living to Bless: Jeremiah's Model

A young Jeremiah received a clear and urgent calling from the Lord. There is no mistaking God's commands for Jeremiah or His intentions for his life. "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nation [...] To all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak" (Jer 1:5-8). God reveals His personal involvement in Jeremiah's life, thus giving Jeremiah a purpose that is bigger in scope than any self-

focused plans. “Notice the starting-point, that God has sent these exiles to Babylon.”<sup>64</sup> Jeremiah was to be a part of the mission and intentions of God. His life would be in service to the God of this calling.

Jeremiah’s calling was a difficult one. The message the Lord gave him to share with the people was one of warning of impending judgment unless there was repentance. In the midst of God’s judgment of exile upon the people, God uses Jeremiah to share words of purpose and promise. They are a reminder of God’s ultimate goodness and designs. Chapter twenty-nine is the focus of both a command of how they are to live in this foreign land and a promise of what is to come. “The exiles in Babylon have not been rejected from their place among God’s people; rather, they have been called to reconsider their place in God’s economy in light of new temporal circumstances.”<sup>65</sup> While in exile, God’s people are called to engage, not isolating themselves from, the foreign land and the people they are in the midst of. “Build houses and live in them, and plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and become fathers of sons and daughters, and take wives for your sons and give you daughters to husbands, that they might bear sons and daughters; and multiply there and do not decrease” (Jer 29:5-6). The expected reaction of those in captivity would be withdrawal and isolation from their captors. Yet, God calls His people to the exact opposite. He called them to take these new people in as family.

“The advice given by Jeremiah was revolutionary and altogether contrary. [...] By these words the people were cast adrift from all those things on which they depended and which they regarded as essential to their own well-being, a nation-state, kindship, an army, national borders, the temple. Without all these Yahweh

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<sup>64</sup> David Kinder, *The Message of Jeremiah: The Bible Speaks Today*, ed. J.A. Motyer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 100.

<sup>65</sup> Dearman, 264.



could give the nation new perspectives and a new understanding of their calling.”<sup>66</sup>

In every possible way, God’s people were called to settle their hearts and make this place of exile a home.

The Hebrews were to see past the exile and hardship to the opportunity to continue God’s mission. “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare” (29:7). God had placed a direct connection between His people and the Babylonians who held them in exile. The fate and life of both groups were tied together by God’s purposes and for His glories. God’s people would bring influence to this new and foreign culture, and even to a larger community, through their own families and friendships. “It would be easy for the Jews to wage constant warfare against their idolatrous Gentile captors, but Jeremiah instructed them to strive to get along with the Babylonians. The exiles were to be peacemakers, not troublemakers, and they were to pray sincerely for their enemies.”<sup>67</sup>

God’s purposes for those taken into exile also carried promise. “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not calamity to give you a future and a hope. [...] You will seek me and find me when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore” (29:11-14). God would bring a greater blessing to His people. They would not only suffer for His purposes, but would eventually experience restoration and the presence and communion

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<sup>66</sup> J.A. Thompson, *Book of Jeremiah*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 546.

<sup>67</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Decisive, Jeremiah Commentary* (Colorado Springs: Cook Publishers, 1995), 140.

with God. God's words to His people read as if their seeking the Lord could be presumed. Perhaps it speaks to the truth that times of hardship and struggle are often a catalyst for deeper and more passionate seeking. "The offer of a lively relationship with God through prayer is the second resource. Prayers can be made and will be heard, even in exile, where they do not rise with the smoke of sacrifices."<sup>68</sup> As they searched for God, He promises that He will indeed be found. He will not be distant or aloof.

God's words to His people through Jeremiah model a missional perspective for all believers. While we too are described in the scriptures as "aliens and strangers" in this land and time, we push against the instincts to regard the current days as worthless (1 Pt 2:11). Even when we feel imprisoned and confined to the current culture we resist bitterness and instead focus our hearts on the greater purposes and plans of the Kingdom. We do not withdraw and insulate in fear or anger. We pray for the welfare of our cities and communities. We engage our world for God's glory and movement. Small groups have opportunity to live out this model through community. Missionally focused believers will mirror the life of the Hebrew exiles by engaging their world, seeking their God, blessing their city, and holding to the promises of God.

### Masterpiece with Purpose

The new life that one has in Christ is filled with purpose and calling. A missional life in Christ is based upon not only a surrendered past but also a surrendered future. God's redemptive work directs a life in an earthly motion for His purposes. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared

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<sup>68</sup> Gerald Keown, Pamela Scalise, Thomas Smothers, *Word Bible Commentary, Jeremiah 26-52*, ed. John DW Watts (Nashville: Nelson Reference and Electronic, 1995), 27:80.

beforehand so that we would walk in them” (Eph 2:10). God identifies the believer as His workmanship. “As His children we stand on display throughout eternity [...] not just as a result of effort or labor. It is a result of artistic skill and craftsmanship.”<sup>69</sup> He has ideas and plans for every believer. Those plans did not end the day one became a believer, they were just being birthed. Christ followers become a part of the greater vision and motion of God’s purposes in the world. These ideas are tailor-made and purposed for each believer. “It means that God has a plan for our lives and that we should walk in His will and fulfill His plan [...], not an impersonal fate that controls our life. He is talking about the gracious plan of a loving Heavenly Father, who wills the very best for us.”<sup>70</sup>

Although a salvific profession of faith is emphasized by some faith traditions to be the climax of God’s work within a life, it serves more as the beginning, not the end. A common tendency within the evangelical tradition is the viewing of a personal profession of faith in Christ as the completion of the spiritual journey. It is the focus of the preaching. The central message of the sermons is understanding this decision, why and how to make this decision, and celebrating those who do. This salvation of souls fills the mission and vision of these churches and is a significant measurement of success or failure. Once a person expresses this step of faith it would seem that the entirety of their faith journey is complete, as if there is nowhere else to go or any anything to learn. There are both obvious and subtle cultural characteristics within these traditions. Yet, the gospel is far more encompassing and its implications are far more sweeping than a momentary

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<sup>69</sup> Max Anders, *Holman New Testament Commentary, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 113.

<sup>70</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary, Ephesians-Revelation* (Colorado Springs: Cook Communications, 1989), 2:21.

decision. The design and purpose of salvation impacts and directs all of life. It births a life purpose and resets the heart's identity within the believer. This salvation recalibrates one's life focus from self to the Kingdom of God. "Too many Christians think that conversion is the only important experience, and that nothing follows. But this is wrong [...] The same resurrection power that saved you and took you out of the graveyard of sin can daily help you live for Christ and glorify Him."<sup>71</sup> Salvation is not the finale of God's work in a believer's life. It can be likened to the download of a new type of life program whereby one now lives for God's purposes in the world. He or she now lives for the purposes of God. Believers join in His redeeming mission. They are a part of His chosen instruments in the world to bridge the lost back to Himself. The means of God's redemptive plan is also a blueprint for every believer's Kingdom activity.

The richness of personal communion between God and His people was designed to ripple into the world. These are not good deeds or works that are self-reflecting and self-serving, mistaken as favors for God to gain a right-standing. "This does not mean that we do a good work for God. It means that God does a good work through us as we are faithful and obedient to him. God is at work. In faith we join him in that work to the praise of his glory."<sup>72</sup>

Every movement of God in a believer's life is not even primarily for the sake of that believer. Even the more personal dynamics of spiritual formation such as communion with the Father, prayer, and meditation do not only have purposes that end in

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>72</sup> Anders, 113.

the life of the practitioner, but they are intended to flow out into God's great plans. Yet, some have confused this passage and push away any work and action on God's behalf over concern that they would be striving to earn God's favor. Therefore, they shy away from opportunity to serve. "It is too bad that many believers minimize the place of good works in the Christian life. [...] We do not perform good works to glorify ourselves, but to glorify God. [...] Our works are actually 'spiritual sacrifices' that we offer to God."<sup>73</sup>

Personal growth in discipleship to Christ is also often mistakenly viewed as an individual equipping and training operation for the sole focus of gaining knowledge or improving skills that would draw one closer to Christ. Tools or techniques for Bible study, or a deepening practice of prayer or meditation, might improve an ability to communicate or defend theological truths or positions. It is especially easy to interpret these types of exercises as producing a complete disciple when set within a classroom environment. Although these are good and a rightful attributes of a Christ follower, the ultimate end of these practices is not revealed in the self-development of that individual believer. The reflection of true discipleship is seen more in the outflow from a believer, than the inflow. In other words, all the practices that flow into a believer can only be valued by the manner in which they are lived out into their world. Discipleship reflects a calling, not just an individual growth plan. God has designed a tailored place of service within the Kingdom's economy for every believer. Specific giftings and settings are scattered among the believers for God's purposes. The fulfillment of God's sanctifying work in a believer cannot be accomplished without the believer living out these purposed callings. The fulfillment of discipleship will not happen apart from missional living.

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<sup>73</sup> Wiersbe, 21.

Living in tune, in step, and in activity with God's purposes in the world is God's developmental plan for His followers.

### **Outflowing practices of community in small groups**

There is an outflow of practices in small groups who live in missional community. The previous highlighted scriptures provide foundational elements, yet the description found in Acts of those in the newly formed church provide the quintessential model of missional small group life. The closing verses of Acts chapter two describe the activities of their lives that provides a blueprint for today's missional small groups, characterized by their devotion to God, His teachings, and to one another.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, and to the breaking of bread and to prayer [...] And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common [...] sharing with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. (Acts 2:42-47)

Several notable elements serve to inform and guide the missional efforts of group life and community at Pantego Bible Church and the further efforts of this project. They had a commitment to the study of the Scriptures. They met daily in the temple, listening to the reading and expounding of passages. "The expression 'devoted themselves' has the idea of persistence or persevering in something. [...] Instruction is an important part of the new community."<sup>74</sup> They were growing and learning from the apostle's teachings. "The

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<sup>74</sup> Darrell Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament, Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 140.

teaching refers to a body of material considered authoritative because it was the message about Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed by accredited apostles.”<sup>75</sup>

Prayer was central in their life together. “A community at prayer is something Luke emphasizes about community life. It seeks God’s direction and is dependent upon God because God’s family of people does not work by feelings or intuition but by actively submitting themselves to the Lord’s direction.”<sup>76</sup> Prayer centered their life on God as they daily sought His guidance and empowerment. Prayer was the conduit of their remaining in tune with God and His missional directives, and the glue that bonded their relationships.

The Scriptures reveal that the first Christians shared a deep fellowship with one another that was evidenced in daily points of connection. They shared in meals together in their houses, enjoying time together. They were glad and grateful for their time together, sharing a genuine and authentic friendship. “Luke points to fellowship to underscore the personal interactive character of relationships in the early church at all levels. There is a real sense of connection to, between, and for each other.”<sup>77</sup>

Evidence of their deep and sincere love for one another was their willingness to sell and or share their possessions to help other believers in need. Their sense of community ran deep, and it was attractive to anyone who witnessed it. “It is an indication of the depth of fellowship and mutual care at work in the community. That a community is really functioning with appropriate love and compassion is evident when material

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<sup>75</sup> Tenney, 289.

<sup>76</sup> Bock, 150.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

needs are also a concern and are being generously provided.”<sup>78</sup> Those around them were not cast off or seen as outsiders. “A vibrant community extends itself in two directions: toward God and toward neighbor. [...] This positive activity is accompanied by joy and glad hearts, and their worship and praise of God are ongoing. But this is not an isolated, private club or a hermetically sealed community.”<sup>79</sup> Bock also adds that, “Everything in the gospels and Acts tells us that God’s people are to take the initiative to show community and serve those around them. [...] The biblical picture is not of what someone receives from the church, although one does receive a great deal, but of what one gives and how one contributes to it.”<sup>80</sup>

The organic result of these dynamics was the spread of the gospel. Flowing from their genuine interactions and expressions was a way of life that grabbed the attention of the outsider. It was written that they were “having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.” (Acts 2:47) The Kingdom was expanding into more lives every day.

These elements of devotion to the scriptures, prayer, commitment to meet one another’s needs, and relishing in times of meals and fellowship serve as the cornerstones of missional small group life. They guide the church in the formation and function of small group ministry, and direct the efforts of this final project.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 155.



PART THREE  
MINISTRY STRATEGY

## CHAPTER 5

### AN INTEGRATED STRATEGY FOR DEEPENING MISSIONAL LIFE WITHIN SMALL GROUP

A more robust theology of missional life informs this project's development of strategic goals and content. The implications will be seen in the life change and transformation of small group members and leaders. This project will enhance personal and group missional practices, bringing influential shifts to Pantego Bible Church's current small group culture. The creation of a new small group expression will serve as the pilot project.

#### **Theological Implications for Missional Small Groups**

Small group members and leaders will experience the elements of missional small group life. The focus will be on what takes place within the small group gatherings. These experiences will provide insight through both conceptual learning and modeling, beginning with the training and direction of small group leaders.

Small group Leaders Demonstrate Missional Living

Small group leaders will demonstrate through their lives the characteristics of missional living. This is a key to the success of this final project and to the development of any missional group life strategy. Group leaders must understand and live out the elements of missional living. If not, the opportunities of missional impact upon their groups are lost. Only as group leaders model and give direction can groups be influenced. The greatest leverage for change in the lives of those in small groups comes from the life example of the group leader.

The opportunities and practices of a leader's personal communion with God are best not narrowly defined, but they do hold common characteristics. These will manifest in several ways in the life of a leader. The common practices of personal communion with the Father and communal expressions that were revealed in the previous theological section are the foundation for group leaders demonstrating missional living. Missional small group leaders reflect a life that is surrendered to God's plan, personally practicing a daily communion with the Father, awaiting His presence and direction. They view their lives through the lens of God's purposes. Just as Christ modeled a dependence upon the Father, a small group leader's missional influence upon group members also requires a personal and intimate reliance upon Christ.

Core expressions of this communion such as prayer, reflection and silence, meditation, and study are the elements of connection. The leader's heart is not just in tune to the Father's leading, but their will is shaped by the Scripture's principles and truths. Consistent and faithful exploration of the Scriptures, in all types of manners and expressions, exposes the heart and mind, opening a door for God's eternal truths to bring

influence to a life. As group leaders give their time and attention through devotion and study, they are both infused with truth and inspired toward Godly living. As group leaders live in close communion with the Father, living out His desires and purposes, there will be influence upon group members in missional living. Members will have a living example and model for this foundational element of personal communion with the Father, being shaped by His influence.

Communal practices, as seen in the model of Christ and the early Church, distinguish missional small groups. Small group leaders incorporating these practices will develop missional cultures within their groups. In the life of Christ, his ministry model was one of compassionate service, both proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel. Group leaders fulfill and demonstrate these in both group and individual opportunities. As individuals, there is consistent and on-going focus upon the people in the sphere of their daily influence such as family members, coworkers, and neighbors. Group leaders regularly discuss the people in their life whom God is leading them to ministry to and care for. As leaders readily identify and share stories of personal opportunity they set a vision for group members to do the same. Missional group leaders are devoted and diligent about reaching the world right around them. They mention these in personal prayers as well as in times of group prayer. Group leaders are intentional and thoughtful about the ways in which they can serve, bless, nudge, and express the truth of Christ. Group members will see the ways in which their group leader thoughtfully, courageously, and gracefully ministers

Group Members Understanding Missional Behaviors

Key to fostering missional small groups is for members to understand and embrace the elements of missional living. The Biblical model for small group life has certain characteristics that inform the development and strategy of a small group ministry. They give influence to both existing small groups as well as direct the formation of new groups.

Members understand that they are an instrument of Christ to their world. The indwelling Spirit of Christ sets their identity and purposes. Just as Christ lived as the incarnation of God, members live as the incarnation of Christ's presence. Groups with members who embrace this principle are distinguishable by their outward focus. Their groups are not just focused on self-reflective learning, but upon the task of their callings. There is a shared sense of mission between them that extends beyond their care, support, and challenge for one another. When the sense of incarnational mission within group members is not just acknowledged but surrendered to, the ramifications are evident. Members do not view their group as closed to the outsider. They are willing to extend invitations and widen their friendship circles. They see the work of God not only in them, but flowing through them.

#### Missional Principles Inform Small Group Content

The believer's communion and fellowship with the Father is the substance of missional living. As we examined in the life of Christ, he remained in close communion with the Father. As Christ followers, our source of truth, direction, and substance of life only comes from Him. "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in

him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Small group members experience this communion both in private connection with the Father as well as through community interaction. Times of prayer, meditation, reflection, and scriptural study make up the substance of missional communion and fellowship. As food is to the body, these rhythms and disciplines are to the soul. Missional groups are comprised of members who consistently and regularly feed their souls, privately and corporately, with these intimate encounters with the Father. Christ followers can only share and give away what they have received. “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (1 Cor 1:3-4). Missional small groups inspire members to nurture their communion with the Father, for the fullness of Christ’s glory in and through their lives.

The blessing of others in the name of Christ is the ultimate purpose of the life of a missional Christ follower. The journey of Jeremiah while in captivity, examined in the previous chapter, serves as a model for today’s Church. Christ’s church is the agent of blessing and benefit to their community, city, and world. Missional small group members view their personal purposes and the group’s purposes in light of this truth. This principle is a constant filter and template for the group’s habits and activities. They resist a sheltering type of mentality that allows fears to justify their withdrawal. They resist the natural default of all small groups to only consider what is best for their group and therefore only focus on their own individual needs and feelings. Missional small groups

press to influence their neighbors and communities by committing acts that do good and bring hope. Just as Jeremiah's listeners had to surely overcome their fears and insecurities, today's missional Christ followers push through the challenges to enrich the places they live and touch.

Jesus' model of ministry sets a paradigm for missional small group. As reviewed in the previous chapter, Matthew detailed Jesus thoughtfully living in touch with his world, reaching out to bless them through service, and revealing the gospel in proclamation and demonstration. This model of proximity, service, blessing, and revelation serves as a strategic guide for missional small groups. Planned and impromptu group activities provide these opportunities. A missional small group's influence upon the world around them begins as they place themselves close to the lives they are attempting to reach. Christ went to the outsider. He sought them out, giving them His time, attention, and focus. The mode of ministry for a small group member is not the itinerate approach of Christ, yet this essential beginning point remains the same. Missional small group members seek out and purposefully spend time with those outside of their group, the church, and a life in Christ. Each interaction with a neighbor, a parent of a child's sport team, coworker, and family member is a relational bridge that builds trust and opportunity, and moves lives closer to friendship.

As group members have ongoing interactions with ones around them, it will be actions of serving and blessing that truly open doors for the influence of the gospel. Christ, even while being God, did not live expecting the world or even His followers to serve Him or cater to His desires. Instead, Jesus lived to serve and bless others. "The Son

of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28). Group members of missional small groups adopt this same attitude in their approach to ministry. Whatever opportunities there are to practically serve the ones around them become the pathway to blessing. A natural momentum toward the blessing of the outsiders occurs when the group focuses on their needs. The strategy is not to share invitations and wait for others to come, but to seek after and pursue. Missional Christ followers go toward the world in need around them. In everyday ways, they demonstrate the gospel through helping a coworker, a neighbor, or family member. By checking on pets, helping a coworker with their duties, and giving rides when the car is broken demonstrate simple ways that we show love and concern. These small demonstrations build and provide platforms that lead to more meaningful interactions. The conversations become more rich and personal, providing encounters that mix life stories and the truth of the gospel. Missional small group members involve themselves and their group in thoughtfully serving and blessing the people in their life. Their personal and group behaviors are evidence of their concern.

Through living relationally close to the ones around them, and purposely giving time and effort to serve and bless, missional groups have opportunity to both demonstrate and proclaim the gospel. Acts of love and concern done in Jesus’ name are a force that light a path for the story of Christ to enter in. Christ’s compassion was displayed in the way in which He served and blessed others around Him though healing, praying, restoring, and instructing their lives. He taught with influence because He had earned their trust. The words of the gospel are never more clear as when they follow a thoughtful



act of care. Where theological concepts and spiritual talk might be hard for some to comprehend, a loving act more clearly communicates care and concern. In a world where selfless acts are rare, they generate a curiosity and a wonder when received. These acts open the doors for sharing the story of Christ. Grace and truth are being modeled as well as spoken, providing understanding to faith in Christ. Missional small groups purposefully step into the opportunities to share spiritual conversations that their acts of service and blessing bring. As a community, they encourage and offer accountability to one another in their day-to-day callings to speak of the things of Christ. Missional group gatherings contain conversations filled with the hope and challenge of personally and corporately representing the Kingdom through the words of truth and grace.

#### Churchwide Alignment

Pantego Bible Church's rich history and current culture holds both challenges and benefits in aligning with the theological implications of missional small group dynamics. As detailed in the first chapter, Pantego Bible Church adopted and strictly followed the Connecting Church model of ministry, as crafted by previous pastor Randy Frazee in the late nineties. Although the church has gone through several layers of evolution since that time, several dynamics remain in place that must be recognized if more enriching missional church elements are to be integrated.

The church's vision for member growth and formation is framed within a multi-group design. There are three different group settings that complete the experience for church attendees. Each group gathering is of a different size and serves a different purpose. The first and largest gathering is within the worship setting, containing hundreds

to thousands of people for the purpose of inspiration. The next group gathering is the mid-sized group of twenty-five to seventy-five people, designed for instruction. These mid-sized groups, known as community groups, gather on Sunday mornings for the primary purpose of expositional teaching of the scripture and group reflection. The third setting is the small group gathering of eight to sixteen people where involvement is emphasized. The primary purpose of these small groups is relational development and social connection. Therefore, if one only attends a small group and not a community group they would miss out on the component of biblical study and interaction. Likewise, if one only attends a small group and not a community group they would not have the deeper opportunity of friendship and connection. In an effort to integrate a greater sense of missional living, adjustments will need to be made within the current group structure and practices. Enhancing the missional focus will have implications upon the number of group experiences that are considered truly necessary for a full experience as well as the nature of a group's activities and focus.

An individualistic nature within the groups has eroded the missional effectiveness of the ministry. In an effort to empower and give autonomy, a wide margin of activities and pursuits has developed within group life. There is a range of experiences from group to group. Greater harmony and consistency across the small group ministry will allow for the integration of some missional components. Identifying and incorporating some common core expressions such as biblical interaction and personal reflection would provide synergy and strength to integrate missional components.

As a result, there has been a lack of momentum and direction in creating new small groups. Current small groups have not taken upon themselves to birth new groups. As noted in part one, very few small groups have been created in the past decade. The current culture within the small group ministry of Pantego Bible Church does not place a high value upon the development of new groups.

The core values of the small group ministry are currently identified in the acronym SERVICE. Spiritual formation is the spiritual development and growth of members. Evangelism reaches primarily to our neighbors. Recreation ensures that groups also play together. Volunteerism represents the places of service within the church ministries. International Missions directs small groups to regular awareness and participation in overseas ministry. Care is meeting the needs of one another within the group. Extended compassion reaches to the more vulnerable and needy in the community. Although holding missional components, this SERVICE strategy has not led to missionally balanced communities and small groups. In addition, the strategy for new group leader development is cumbersome and ineffective.

Current small group leaders are to identify potential new group leaders and invite them into the Leader in Training (LIT) program. LIT is a four week training program for a potential leader to get practical experience and interaction with a current small group leader and an area pastor. However, there is not a uniform and consistent application of the program between the various area pastors. The actual length of time in training and the components within their experiences are not uniform. Additionally, the most common approach to creating new groups has been to split groups when they get too large. This

approach discourages both growth group and leadership development, and therefore missional life. The emphasis of relational connection is lost. There is a natural desire to continue the relationships that have taken effort and time to develop. The splitting of a group is defeating. Strengthening the influence and opportunity of a small group ministry takes place best through a more missional approach, where gifts and callings are the impetus. The influence of an enhanced missional theology will bring adjustments that lead to greater emphasis upon the creation of new small groups.

The current small group ministry fabric has strong relational expressions, yet has developed an imbalance by not containing the inclusivity as seen in the incarnational models of Christ or the out-flowing practices as seen in Acts chapter two. The current ministry design and individual group tendencies contribute to this. By design, small groups are currently not necessarily expected to have times of Bible study or scriptural interaction. They are mostly relationally centered, intended for group members to deepen their friendships and connections. Small group meetings are centered around the sharing of a meal and social interaction. While the small groups that do not have children present are more likely to include a time of scriptural reflection, the ones with children typically do not. Opportunity for bible study and interaction is intended solely for the Sunday morning mid-sized group experience.

Currently, about twice as many people attend a small group than a Sunday morning bible study group. In addition, some of the out-flowing practices of missional life, as noted in the models of Jeremiah and the first church, are not currently a part of the small group experience. The involvement of a small group in activities that bless and

reach the outsiders within their influence, whether that is a neighbor, co-worker, or family member, is minimal and inconsistent. Programmed efforts, centered both locally and globally, generally have a fair reception, but these opportunities are very limited. A thicker strategy is needed for the small group experience.

The integration of missional elements described in this theological section will be contained and expressed through the 3B vision of ministry for Pantego Bible Church's small groups. The "Belong, Become, Beyond" expression is currently embedded in the core of the church. They identify the primary pathway of spiritual development and the fulfillment of the mission statement. Although each "B" has unique and purposeful expressions within the church, they also embody a balanced guide for small groups. Members of small groups have belonging through Christ to one another and the church, providing our identity and an opportunity to care for one another.

As members practice private and corporate communion with the Father and one another, they become more like Christ. They will live beyond themselves and their group as they share in opportunities to bless the world around them. Employing a familiar language will strengthen the transitional learning process. These three vision words are in the DNA of the church family, providing a good opportunity to further develop their influence upon the day to day behaviors and activities of small group members. Developing a brand new set of verbiage or concepts for implementing these missional elements would prove more challenging to communicate and take more time to take root within the culture of the groups.

### **Strategy Goals**

The strategic goals of this final project continue the developmental process of enhancing missional life within the small group ministry. These goals will address three particular components, guiding toward the development of a new group model. Leadership development, small group growth, and partnership across church ministry areas are these key components.

#### Enhance the Personal Understanding and Practice of Missional Life

The road to influencing a small group is through the individual hearts and lives of small group members. Therefore, a critical strategy of this final paper is to enhance the personal understanding and practices of missional life within the members of small groups. Several key components will provide the structure for the connect group expression to offer both group and personal missional experiences. There will be a consistent practice of communion with the Father through Biblical reflection and testimony, exploration of the unique Kingdom callings, and acts of service to bless one another and the world. In utilizing the current mission statement language of the church, each member will experience a belonging to Christ, the church, and community. Each member will continue to become more like the Father through communion with Him. Members will live beyond themselves in the missional purposes of God.

These core elements of connect groups will be developed and implemented into the group experiences through the training of leadership, clear and simple communication, and measurable expectations. Group leaders will be trained and prepared. This experience will emphasize the core mission expressions that will bring

definition to connect groups. Through presentation and modeling, group leaders will understand developing a plan for integrating encounters of missional life. A clear and compelling statement for connect groups will strengthen the missional culture and bring synergy across the small group ministry. There is not a clear and recognizable statement that gives identification and purpose for the groups. Through collaboration with current staff, a new statement of vision and purpose will be forged for small groups. This statement will provide inspiration to and inform of the connect group experience. There are currently varying expressions within the small group ministry.

To build synergy and consistency within the small group ministry, key experiences will be identified and reviewed to further develop the missional culture within each group. These identified opportunities will assist in determining the missional health and life of each group. Identifying elements such as each week's scriptural focus, group member's efforts to bless their world, or ways in which members show care to one another are examples of possible expressions that each connect group will be expected to experience and develop.

#### Increase Percentage of Worship Attendees in Small Groups

This final project aims to increase the percentage of attendees in worship services who are also involved in a small group. For many, attending a worship service on a weekend is the entirety of their experience with the church and community, thus leaving a deficiency in their spiritual development. A strong missional small group experience will enrich the efforts of Pantego Bible Church's mission to "make God known by making disciples who are changed by God to change their world." A small group

experience makes a significant impact upon the ongoing discipleship and growth of the church attendees.

There are some challenges in accurately measuring this goal. Although Pantego Bible Church has had a small group expression for over twenty years, the number of people involved has never been consistently reported. As noted in part one of this paper, the number of small groups has been reported, but not the number of people involved in each group. About once a year, the Pantego Bible Church staff area pastors would request a list of small group attendees from the small group leaders, but these lists were not compiled or documented. In addition, there was not clear definition given to group membership or involvement. These lists could have contained someone who had only attended one small group gathering in a year, or someone who attended every week. So while past small group numbers might not be highly precise, some fairly accurate estimates can be determined.

In moving forward, a more accurate reporting system will be put into place for both connect groups and existing small groups. This will require investigation and collaboration between the executive staff members to determine the most simple, effective, and efficient program. The goal will be for every small group leader to report every week the names of those in attendance. Therefore, some measurements can be made for the number of people who are involved in a small group in comparison to the number of those attending a worship service.

Provide a Clear and Unencumbered Pathway into Group Life



A clear and unencumbered pathway to small group life is another strategic goal of this final project. It will provide a simple process for those who are interested in connecting to community. The necessary steps for involvement will be minimized and uncomplicated. Small group enlistment information to guide interested members will be clear and user-friendly.

Currently, for those who are interested in joining a small group there are a number of steps and a substantial amount of information to dissect in determining a prospective small group. This current pathway into small groups is weighted with additional involvement in Sunday morning group life. These small groups are grouped geographically into a Sunday morning community group which is designed to be the entry point into a small group. By attending a community group, one can discover the small group options. This could possibly require attending more than one Sunday morning group before choosing a preferred small group. While the community group experience itself will remain a central element to the church's strategy, having it serve as the only entry into a small group is detrimental. For those seeking a small group, requiring attendance in an additional form of group life might be a hurdle and deterrent.

A new additional pathway into small group life will center upon regularly occurring interest gatherings. For those interested in small group life, these meetings will inspire and inform, directing them to the ideal small group option. These gatherings will become the primary on-ramp for entry into small groups. Offered on a periodic basis, they will provide a supportive and informative experience that directs attendees into the

best small group option, whether that is a new group or an existing group. These gatherings will provide an opportunity for the formation of new small groups.

### Accelerate the Launch of New Small Groups

Accelerating the launch of new small groups is a strategic goal of this project. Numbers reveal that currently only about half of worship attendees are involved in a small group. Yet, half of those not involved are interested in joining a small group. Increasing the number of small groups will provide opportunity that is currently not available. Many of the current small groups are filled with a maximum number of members. They do not have the room for these additional members.

Accelerating the process of new group creation and development will ensure a perpetual provision for small group opportunity. The aim is not to simply form many new groups at one time, but rather to develop a more robust culture and process for the on-going multiplication of small groups.

### **Content of Strategy**

A specific aim of this project is the creation of a new expression of small group life. This new design will compliment and align with the current small group ministry structure while bringing an influence of missional content. Known as connect groups, they will have identifiable characteristics that will assist in reaching this project's strategic goals.

## Creation of Connect Groups

The primary strategic goal of this final project is the creation of an additional small group program that compliments and influences the existing small group model. This new program will create a less cumbersome pathway into small a group experience while containing a balance of missional components. These connect groups will have several distinctions from current small groups.

Connect groups will be birthed through Connect Events that will take place three times a year. Connect Events will be a sixty-minute gathering for encouraging small group participation and identifying an attendees' next steps in group connection. Through testimony and scriptural exhortation, the hope and vision of living in missional community will be shared. A primary hope would be to identify and birth as many new connect groups as possible with those in attendance at the Connect Event. By gathering some personal data and a time of interaction with staff leaders, assessments can be made during the Connect Event as to the feasibility of forming new groups. The general boundaries considered in grouping will be geography, stage of life, and availability of schedule. Connect groups will range in size from eight to sixteen adults. If there is an appropriate match from those who attend the Connect Event, they will be identified as a new connect group.

Connect groups will have an eight-week term. Connect groups are intended for those who are not currently involved in a small group, and especially for those who have never been. Small group life will be a new experience for some and therefore a shorter time commitment will lower possible hurdles. Currently, there is not a clear ending date

or exit protocol in leaving a small group. To leave a small group is difficult and awkward no matter the reason. A defined shorter season will allow a more redeemable experience for those who might not experience a good fit with their group, while also leaving an open door for those who are interested in continuing to meet. At the conclusion of their term, connect groups will have the option of continuing, which is the hope. By the sixth week of group meetings, group leaders will guide their members to a consensus on whether the group concludes or extends. Group leaders will accomplish this through both private and group discussions with members. If a connect group decides to extend the commitment, it will begin a process of grafting into the church's small group model. If the group decides to dissolve, the group leader and connection pastor will collaborate to assist those individual members from the group who would like to continue in a small group life in connecting to an existing small group. Group location and stage of life will be the key considerations in guiding these individuals to a more highly probable group fit.

#### Missional Leadership Training for Small Group Leaders

Group leaders must have clear and precise direction for effectively leading their groups to missional living. Training small group leaders in the characteristics of a missional small group is a significant element to accomplishing the aims of this final project. As group leaders design and create strong missional small group experiences, group members will experience and deepen their lives in Christ. Therefore, it is crucial that leaders understand the components of missional life within community and are committed to generating reflective components.

Effective leadership training can take place before even individuals are identified and enlisted as group leaders. As group members experience a strong small group missional model, they are informed of the behaviors and culture of missional life. This is certainly the “caught” part of learning. It is being modeled before them. Therefore, one of the components to training future leaders will be to have current small group leaders of strongly aligned missional groups to identify members to be potential leaders. These members will already have a strong base of experience and knowledge as they begin leading another group. This principle can also be put in practice through capable staff or lay leaders serving as developmental coaches while leading a small group. These developmental leaders will possess the gift set and calling to continuously serve as a small group leader while nurturing group members to be leaders in the next season. These developmental leaders will then at the appropriate time turn over group leader responsibilities to an identified and equipped member. The developmental leader will then begin leading another newly formed small group in the hopes of repeating the same process. These potential developmental leaders will be identified cooperatively by staff members and progress with assistance from the Connection Pastor.

A more traditional approach to preparing missional small group leaders will begin once a potential leader is identified and enlisted. The development will take place through the complimentary methods of a three-hour workshop presentation and the coaching support of a staff minister. The workshop will serve as an orientation to the core elements of missional small group life, presenting both the vision and the best practices. These workshop training experiences will be offered twice a year, and will be required of new

group leaders. A newly created manual that blends both current small group leaders training components as well as newly introduced missional elements will be the key resource. This training manual will highlight the core missional elements of small group experience that this final project has accentuated. Workshop training will feature simulations of small group functions and practices.

### Defining the Pathway for Grafting Connect Groups

The key components to grafting these new groups into the current small group hinge upon their connection to staff pastors and lay shepherds. In the existing small group model, leadership and care to group members and group leaders is extended through the role of the shepherds and area pastors. Shepherds serve as coaches over a small number of small group leaders in their geographical area to provide accountability, assistance, and support. The shepherd also directs the Sunday morning Bible study gathering of the several small groups known as a community group. A staff pastor serves as director of a small number of shepherds. This model provides a means to pastoral care and accountability at both a layman and ministerial staff level. Therefore, it is critical that small group members have a connection point within this model. When a connect group agrees to extend past the original eight week commitment it is then linked to one of the community groups, and therefore a shepherd and an area pastor. The specific placement of a new small group into a community group is weighed mostly upon geography, but the stage of life is also considered. The team of area pastors and the Connection pastor collaborate to make the most appropriate assignment. In this manner, new connect groups

will have an ongoing support structure for pastoral care, shepherding, and missional exhortation.

Connect groups will influence the entire small group culture at Pantego Bible Church through modeling missional living. The components in missional life of incarnational identity, mission calling, and serving to bless one another and the world will be displayed through these groups. Their stories and experiences will encourage and spur on a new perspective of group life. As new group members enter the small group ministry through connect groups, their expectations and experiences will shape a new generation of small group life.

#### Personal Pastoral Coaching

Each small group leader will have a personal connection to a ministerial staff member for support and direction. The role of the staff members will be to maintain a close and regular connection to each group leader for on-going encouragement, skill development, and accountability. The connection pastor will direct the leaders of newly formed connect groups, while area pastors will take responsibility for those small group leaders in their region, including connect groups that have extended past the initial eight weeks. The primary aim of this partnership between ministerial staff and small group leader is to ensure their health and vitality. The functionality of a small group leader is a huge determinant in the overall experience of those in the small group. These pastors are present to pray with, cheer on, guide, remind, and lead the development of the small group leader while he or she is doing the same for those in their group. One of the resources of this effort will be a small group leader spiritual development self-evaluation

to be given at both the beginning and end of each semester. Pastors and small group leaders will use this tool to target God's work and presence in their lives for growth and development. In addition, each ministerial staff will have a huddle meeting twice a semester with all the small group leaders in their care, providing an opportunity for building community and strength among the team as well as a platform for further developing direction and vision.

#### Development of a Training Manual for New Small Group Leaders

A training manual for new small group leaders will compliment these strategic efforts, enhancing a uniform and supportive small group ministry. Developed and written by the connections pastor, it will be used primarily during new small group leader orientation for all newly formed small groups. This manual will provide a platform for sharing the theological foundations of missional small groups, the distinctives of small group ministry at Pantego Bible Church, and some leadership practices. A manual will provide uniformity and synergy to the pastoral staff, who are each involved in recruiting and developing new small group leader, in their training of new group leaders. Currently, each pastor is independently recruiting and training new small group leaders. A collaborative yet combined training effort will lead to a stronger implementation of vision.

#### Implementation Meetings with Executive Staff

Collaborating and communicating with both pastoral staff and executive staff will take place throughout the development and implementation of the strategic goals of this



final project. The awareness, input, and involvement of the entire ministerial staff is critical to the success of this project. This begins with the support and leadership of the executive staff. The senior pastor, executive pastor, and lead pastor of community have the significant influence needed to lead the staff, lay leaders, and church family through the necessary adjustments and changes. Previous vision and strategy discussions with the executive staff reveal a strong concurrence in assessing the current condition of the small group ministry and the potential adjustments to be made. Group and individual discussions with the executive team will be reoccurring and consistent.

A collaborative partnership with the pastoral staff is the other key to implementing the elements of this project. The team of area pastors serves as directors and staff leaders of the small group ministry. They give care, correction, training, and development to current small group leaders. They also lead in the growth of new groups. The weekly meetings of this team, the biblical community team, will provide opportunity for discussion, development, and refinement of the implementation of this paper's strategic goals.

#### Development of Promotional Strategy

Church members and guests will be made aware of small group opportunities through the available resources of print and social media, platform support during worship services, and consistent personal contact. The promotion of significant and timely small group opportunities, such as Connect Events, will be placed in print through bulletin flyers and wall posters. It will correspond to media site support such as through Facebook and Instagram as well as video and live announcement support from the

platform during worship services. The Connection pastor will follow up by email and phone with people who indicate interest from in take information cards or web site inquiries, providing a highly personal touch component.

A most effective method of promotion is a personal invitation. As new methods and approaches to small group ministry are integrated, those in the current church leadership, and especially those within group ministry must be well informed. In relating and connecting to those across the church and in their personal spheres, they represent an important part of the promotion awareness strategy. Direction and strategy for small group ministry will be communicated across the various leadership teams of youth, children, elders, and community groups. Current small group leaders require an even greater depth of knowledge and awareness. They give daily leadership within the one ministry most impacted by all developments and changes. Their awareness and involvement through times of adjustments will buffer the natural resistance that comes with change and help maintain trust with staff leadership. NEXT is a biannual training conference for current small group leaders at Pantego Bible Church that was established several years ago and is well supported. It will provide a good instructional opportunity. Private discussions between small group leaders, their shepherds, and staff pastors will provide furthering support and clarity to ministry adjustments and efforts.

#### Target Population

There are three primary target populations of this final project. One involves those who attend Pantego Bible Church worship services but are not involved in a small group. The second concerns leader recruitment and development for newly formed connect

small groups. The third includes connection to those in leadership positions across the church, paid staff members or volunteers.

In strengthening the missional community within the church, the primary aim in the creation of a new small group expression is involving attendees who are not currently in a small group. This population is mostly those who attend a worship service on Sunday, but are not involved in anything else. The goal is to lead them into a regular small group experience. It might also include those who are not attendees of the church yet have relationships with those who are; these are neighbors, coworkers, family members, and friends.

Recruiting and directing new connect small group leaders will be a significant part of the target population of this project. New connect small group leaders will predominantly be currently active and involved attendees of a small group, but opportunities will not be limited to these. Through a proper vetting process performed by a pastoral staff member, new connect small group leaders might arise from the church congregation who are not currently in a small group but demonstrate a sufficient understanding and possession of the gifts to serve in this capacity.

Various leadership team members within the church will provide support and collaboration in accomplishing this final project's goals. The most significant level of leadership is the executive pastoral team which consists of the senior pastor, executive pastor, executive pastor of finance and operations, and the lead pastor of biblical community and missions. This group of leaders holds an ultimate authority in all matters of church vision, direction, and resourcing. As a member of the elder board, the senior

pastor offers direction and guidance. In addition, the senior pastor gives expression to the highest priorities of a church through preaching and leadership opportunities. The ministerial staff is the next tier of leaders in the target population and they will remain informed and engaged. The area pastors hold a large degree of the small group ministry responsibilities. Traditionally, they have held all of the responsibility, but the addition of a connection pastor on the staff shifted some of their roles. These area pastors are and will continue to be a significant part of the current small group ministry. The volunteer shepherds of the church give support, direction, and care to the current Sunday morning group gatherings as well as the current small group leaders. They are the coaches offering daily service to the members and guests. Each of these levels of leadership within the church will be an important part in the accomplishing the goals of this final project.

## CHAPTER 6

### IMPLEMENTATION OF GOALS AND EVALUATION

The implementation plan of this project centers upon the creation of a new small group expression at Pantego Bible Church. These connect small groups will offer an enhanced missional small group experience that will explore and model a culture of small group life that is characterized by a communion with the Father that guides into a life calling of Kingdom mission. Connect small groups will form at periodic connect launch events. Collaboration with current ministry directors and staff, group leadership training, timely and useful resources, and integration into church wide models are keys to success.

#### **Pilot Project Summary**

The launch of a new small group ministry model, known as connect groups, will take place in January of 2017. As previously described, these connect groups will begin from a gathering known as the Connect Event. To capitalize on the best possible gathering time, the Connect Event will take place on a Sunday morning during the second

worship service. Interested worship service attendees will be invited to leave the service to attend the Connect Event.

Led by the connection pastor, those gathered at the Connect Event will be informed of the vision and function of connect groups. They will be encouraged and inspired to participate in missional group life through scriptural exhortation and testimony from a newly engaged small group member. At the conclusion of the event, attendees will be grouped at tables by geography or life stage, having a staff pastor who will serve as host. Through gathering information and leading in discussion, the pastor will help assess the potential for forming a new small group. If a new group appears viable, the group will be encouraged to dedicate themselves as a connect group. They would begin the following week and gather weekly for eight weeks. Group leaders of these newly formed connect groups would be previously recruited and prepared. The first meeting for every connect group will be the following Sunday over a lunch at the church. This will provide a lower-risk opportunity of introduction and connection.

The connect group leaders will be responsible for personal contact with each enrollee prior to and after the first meeting. Attendees at the Connect Event who are outliers and for whom there is not enough from their area to create a connect small group will be encouraged by the table host pastor to consider joining an existing small group. The Connection pastor will be responsible for contacting these outlying attendees to assist them in making a relational connection to their recommended group and its group leader.

## **Timeline**

A timeline of events in implementing the strategic goals of this final project will guide ministry efforts. The events are primarily centered upon the development, introduction, and implementation of connect groups, but they will also assist in enriching missional elements within existing small group life. While most of these efforts will be calendared events, some are ongoing incidental opportunities.

A series of meetings among ministry staff divisions will begin in the spring of 2016. The first meetings will be with the executive pastoral staff. These will allow for in-depth exploration and discussion of the goals and aims of this project. A strong collaboration and support must exist within this executive team prior to attempting to gain support from across the church leadership teams and members of the church. Individual conferences with each executive pastor will take place both prior to and after these group meetings to further refine and clarify the vision. The executive staff pastors will inform and seek direction from the elders at their discretion. During these same months, discussions with the area pastors will take place periodically during their weekly staff meetings. Area pastors are the foot soldiers in the implementation of much of these goals. Their input, support, and assistance is critical to accomplishing success. Throughout the spring and summer, other divisional meetings will take place with the youth and children's ministry teams.

The training manual for all new small group leaders will be written and produced by the connections pastor. Completed by November of 2016, it will provide a uniform

and clear foundation for group leaders. It will be utilized in both the orientation training and individual development.

The recruitment for new connect small group leaders will take place through the fall of 2016 and completed by December of the same year. Area pastors will be well-informed and most aware of potential leaders. Their recommendations will be a critical component to recruitment, especially in sustaining ongoing growth. The connection pastor will follow up with both those who are recommended and others that initiate interest. A new leader will be identified and appointed in each of the five identified areas in preparation for each Connect Event. A leader for each of the areas of North Arlington and Grand Prairie, Central Arlington, South Arlington and Dallas Counties, Fort Worth and North Trinity, and Young Adults will be prepared to serve as the group leader if a group develops.

Training orientation for new small group leaders will take place in early December of 2016. This three-hour gathering will take place at the church. Through inspiration and information, it will direct small group leaders in guiding groups towards a missional small group experience. Training will be offered twice a year.

Public promotion of the Connect Event will begin in December of 2016. All avenues of communication within the church will be utilized to build inspiration, create awareness, and provide information about group life and the pathway to connection. Posters and bulletin insert distribution will begin in late December and run through January. Video announcements will be produced in December and run in worship services two weeks prior to the Connect Event. Live announcements given by the senior



pastor from the platform during worship services will take place in the two consecutive weeks prior to the event.

The Connect Event will take place on a Sunday in January of 2017. The gathering will be at the church, simultaneous with the second worship service, from 10:45-12:00.

The connection pastor will debrief with new connect group leaders in early March at the conclusion of their eight-week commitment. These individual meetings will provide an opportunity for recognizing and celebrating God's work and provision, sharpening and affirming each group leader's gifts, and expressing gratitude for faithful service. Group leaders and group members will complete a questionnaire which will serve as a resource during debriefing. The connection pastor and group leaders will assess the viability and potential of the group extending their group meetings. It is hopeful that new small groups will extend past their original eight-week commitment and become a lasting and consistent small group.

Each connect group member will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire about their experiences. The questionnaire will be sent electronically to each member in March. Paper copies will also be distributed during group meetings. The questionnaire will explore members experiences with God's movements in their own lives, with those in the group, and with the group leaders. It will be turned in directly to the connections pastor.

If new groups extend past the original eight-week commitment, efforts will begin to graft them into the existing small group structure by identifying them with one of the community groups, which is a collection of several small groups. Placement of small groups within a community group is determined upon geography, stage of life, and the

current relational connections of the small group leader. Staff leaders consider the community group placement implications from the inception of each group, but in March these group members will be made aware of which community group they now belong to. Community group leaders will visit these new small groups in March to help build relationship and awareness. This complete Connect Event process will be repeated in April, following the Easter season, and again in September at the start of a new semester.

### **Leadership Development for Group Leaders**

Identification and recruitment of new group leaders will be a collaborative staff effort and directed by the connection pastor. In order to provide for the anticipated need of group growth, this will require continuous effort and attention. The pastoral team will share recommendations both in team meetings each semester as well in personal discussions with the connection pastor. Shepherds and group leaders will also be consulted and given opportunity to share recommendations.

Potential group leaders will be assessed based upon their gifts, personality, small group experience, and recommendations. The gifting and personality of candidates is primarily identified through the witness and testimony of group leaders and pastors. In addition, gift and personality assessment profiles, such as SHAPE, will be utilized in both the new small group leader interest and training meetings that will be held twice a year and in personal discussions between pastoral staff and candidates. Prior involvement in a small group will be required for new small group leaders. Previous service in a leadership capacity is not required, but faithfulness and devotion are some of the indicators of a candidate's position depth of passion for small group ministry. The depth of their group

involvement and support affirm a sense of calling and interest. This affirmation among other group members, leaders, and pastors is a final piece of confirming a candidate's readiness for serving as a small group leader.

A clear and compelling understanding of the church's vision pathway, known as the "3 B's," will assist in developing new small group leaders. The "3Bs" of Belong, Become, and Beyond define the heart of the church's vision, and also express the desired culture within the small group ministry. The experience of the people within small group life is a part of the collective experience of the church. The elements experienced within a small group must feed into the vision of the church as a whole. Through group orientation training and personal interaction with staff ministers, new group leaders will be directed to build their group experiences upon these three elements. As defined earlier in this paper, the "3Bs" are a foundational vision, providing a guide for missional small group strategy at Pantego Bible Church. Within the small group ministry, belonging emphasizes personal and group connection with Christ, with the church, and with one another. New small groups are designed to be a part of a family, and therefore to participate in the church-wide emphasis such as worship and prayer. The vision of the become component contains the elements of personal and communal spiritual formation that develops through fellowship with the Father, including times of exploration and sharing of the scriptures. Living beyond has expression in both personal and group missional outreach callings. New connect groups will be centers of support, organization, prayer, and encouragement for members to live out the mission and purposes of God around them.

New groups will be directed in missional components that lead them in some best practices of outreach. Enhancing the small group ministry's focus upon the outsider will define the intended changes brought about by this project. The pathway for reaching outward is defined by prayer, blessing, and sharing. As detailed in part two of this final project, this is a pathway modeled within the scriptures. These three steps provide for both a demonstration and proclamation of the gospel. Group time will regularly be given to praying for those known by the group who are in need of Christ. In accord with their prayers, small group members will determine avenues to service and blessing. As individuals and as a team, they will assess and carry out practices to help and demonstrate care to those in their prayers. These acts of love and service that are intended to bless others reflect a Christ-like love. Through demonstration and prayers, a door is opened for the sharing and recounting of God's story of redemption through Christ. "They are groups that empower people to discover God's ways and live out God's story."<sup>102</sup> Small group experiences of praying for, blessing, and sharing with member friends, family, neighbors, and coworkers will guide a missional culture.

To further leadership development, pastoral staff members will engage in ongoing individual dialogue with small group leaders. Through times of sharing and prayer, pastors will offer encouraging assessments with recommended adjustments or actions if necessary. Much of leadership development in ministry is "on-the-job-training." Unforeseen issues, concerns, and challenges arise during the life of all small groups. Pastoral support will help new leaders learn, adjust, and grow. The connection pastor will serve as the primary pastoral connection for new group leaders. As a new connect group

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<sup>102</sup> Boren, *Missioretate*. Kindle: Chapter 2.

extends past the original eight-week commitment, area pastors will take on more of these responsibilities with group leaders.

### **Resources**

In implementing the primary objective of this final project, identifying and securing host homes for new small groups will have two sources. The most common source for securing new host homes will be through the new small group leader. In most cases, those who are recruited and placed as group leaders are also prepared to host the weekly group gatherings. This has been the traditional approach at Pantego Bible Church. However, new small group leaders can be appointed without them also serving as a host location. In this case, a host home will be identified by the new group leader or the connection pastor. A new small group leader who secures a host home through a personal relationship often gains a very beneficial partner in ministry. Securing host homes in this manner is the preferred approach in that it provides a sharing of ministry responsibilities and widens the net of influence and support. The other source for securing a host home is from within group members. As newly formed groups need a host home, members will be given an opportunity to serve as host. Rotating host locations in between members is also a viable option. The connection pastor will direct new small group leaders on some general standards for host homes to ensure that warm, clean, and spacious conditions are present.

The writing and production of a training manual is the key piece of the resources needed for the orientation of new group leaders. This will be the responsibility of the

connection pastor. The existing training manual for new group leaders will be rewritten to integrate elements within this final project.

The location of new small group leader training will be at the church in room one hundred and thirty of the Connection Building. Reserving the room will be made through the proper protocol of staff consents and placement in the software management system. Several other rooms on the church campus may be utilized if necessary.

Promotional materials for the Connect Event will be produced through the connection pastor's department. As a new component of ministry within the church, branding the opportunity will assist in creating awareness and interest. The connection pastor will work with approved designers to create a logo and motto. Once created, the design will go through approval processes from the editing team, content team, and the executive pastoral staff. The two primary print pieces will be a poster, which will be placed in the several poster frames located in all the church buildings, and a bulletin insert, which will be placed within the worship bulletins three consecutive weeks prior to the Connect Event. In addition, weekly church announcements during worship services are made through previously recorded video in a feature called Connections for Life. The Connect Event will be emphasized in the three consecutive Sundays prior to the event.

### **Support Personnel**

Area pastors serving at Pantego Bible Church provide a critical partnership for the successful implementation of this final project. They have shouldered all of the small group ministry responsibilities, among other duties, up until the hiring of a connection pastor. They continue to serve as the pastors of the people. Their continued connection

with members, as well as their relational development with new attendees, will enhance their opportunities for care and influence. As newly formed connect small groups extend to being permanent small groups, these area pastors will serve as their coaches and leaders. Therefore, their comprehension, like-mindedness, and partnership in integrating the components of this project is required. Through personal and group meetings, the area pastors and connection pastor will design, inform, and direct small groups toward missional characteristics.

A senior pastor who champions and not just supports or promotes the efforts of this final project will empower the life of a missional culture. Verbal promotion from the senior pastor while on the platform during worship services will aid in informing and encouraging participation. The senior pastor who speaks from his personal experiences as a leader of a small group, and not just in the context of promoting an event, delivers a much more powerful message. The senior pastor at Pantego Bible Church will provide a very persuasive and influential element of support to these final project components. Additionally, the senior pastor will allow for and give personal encouragement to attendees in the worship service to be excused from the service so that they might attend the Connect Event if they have interest.

The worship and media department of the church will provide support for the Sunday morning worship service announcements. Although the senior pastor might provide some emphasis as he sees fit upon certain opportunities, the weekly Connections for Life video is produced in coordination with the media team. A request for media

support must be made three months in advance of the Connect Event, in conjunction with calendar planning and requests.

### **Assessment Plan**

Numerical growth will be assessed in the two areas of the total number of people involved in small groups and the percentage of worship attendees to those in a small group. A worship service attendance count is taken weekly by the pastor's office. Beginning in the fall of 2016, attendance at small group gatherings will be recorded. Previously, an annual report from small group leaders provided some general understanding of involvement.

The Thirty Core Competencies (Appendix A) of life in Christ, as identified by Pantego Bible Church, will serve as an individual and group marker for elements of growth. Small group members will be given opportunity at the beginning of each term to identify areas of focus. These responses will serve as a guide and reminder for the efforts of formation within members, especially at the end of semesters.

Small group leaders and members will each be asked to complete a unique questionnaire. For connect groups, this will take place at the end of their eight-week term. Existing small groups will complete one at the end of the each semester. The questionnaires (Appendix B and C) will primarily provide insight to the personal experiences of group members. Both a paper copy and an online response will be provided. There will be unique questionnaires for the group leader and the group member.



Connect groups that choose to extend their meetings past their original eight-week commitment will be celebrated. While those connect groups that dissolve at the conclusion of their term are not vilified, the hope is that members will continue to experience life in community. There will be things to learn from both groups as elements of this final project continue to influence the small group strategy. Through personal discussions with group leaders and members, along with interpreting evaluations, the connection pastor will identify common threads of both positive and negative influences. The goal of this assessment is an increase in the percentage of Connect Groups that extend past their original eight-week commitment.

## APPENDIX A

### CORE COMPETENCIES

The Thirty Core Competencies is a spiritual formation theology based around Ten Core Beliefs, Ten Core Practices, and Ten Core Virtues. Focusing on these beliefs, practices and virtues helps us to fulfill the biblical mandate to love God and love our neighbor.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" – Luke 10:27

### CORE BELIEFS

#### **Authority of the Bible**

*I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.*

2 Timothy 3:16-17 – "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

#### **Church**

*I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.*

Ephesians 4:15-16 – "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

#### **Compassion**

*I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.*

Psalm 82:3-4 – "Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."

#### **Eternity**

*I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.*

John 14:1-4 – "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

**Humanity**

*I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.*

John 3:16 – "For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

**Identity in Christ**

*I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.*

John 1:12 – "Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God."

**Personal God**

*I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.*

Psalm 121:1-2 – "I lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth."

**Salvation by Grace**

*I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.*

Ephesians 2:8-9 – "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast."

**Stewardship**

*I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.*

1 Timothy 6:17-19 – "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."

**Trinity**

*I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.*

2 Corinthians 13:14 – "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

## CORE VIRTUES

### **Gentleness**

*I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.*

Philippians 4:5 – "Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near."

### **Faithfulness**

*I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.*

Proverbs 3:3-4 – "Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man."

### **Hope**

*I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.*

Hebrews 6:19-20 – "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf."

### **Joy**

*I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.*

John 15:11 – "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

### **Love**

*I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.*

1 John 4:10-12 – "This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us."

### **Peace**

*I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.*

Philippians 4:6-7--"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

**Self-Control**

*I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.*

Titus 2:11-13 – "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ"

**Humility**

*I choose to esteem others above myself.*

Philippians 2:3-4 – "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."

**Patience**

*I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.*

Proverbs 14:29 – "A patient man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly."

**Kindness/Goodness**

*I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.*

1 Thessalonians 5:15 – "Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else."

**CORE PRACTICES****Bible Study**

*I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.*

Hebrews 4:12 – "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

**Biblical Community**

*I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.*

Acts 2:44-47 – "All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as He had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate

together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

### **Giving Away My Faith**

*I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.*

Ephesians 6:19-20 – "Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should."

### **Giving Away My Life**

*I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.*

Romans 12:1 – "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."

### **Giving Away My Time**

*I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.*

Colossians 3:17 – "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

### **Giving Away My Money**

*I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.*

2 Corinthians 8:7 – "But just as you excel in everything, in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us, see that you also excel in this grace of giving."

### **Prayer**

*I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.*

Psalms 66:16-20 – "Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what He has done for me. I cried out to Him with my mouth; His praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and heard my voice in prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld His love from me!"

### **Spiritual Gifts**

*I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.*

Romans 12:4-6 – "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one

body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us."

### **Worship**

*I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.*

Psalm 95:1-7 – "Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before Him with thanksgiving and extol Him with music and song. For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. In His hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to Him. The sea is His, for He made it, and His hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care."

### **Single-mindedness**

*I focus on God and His priorities for my life.*

Matthew 6:33 – "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well"

## APPENDIX B

### **Small Group Member Review**

We are so grateful that you were involved in a small group here at Pantego Bible Church. Please take a few minutes to share about your experience. We believe this brief process will assist you in understanding more completely the work of God in you and it will also help us as a church strive for improvement as we “make disciples who are changed by God to change their world.”

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Small Group Leader \_\_\_\_\_

1. What was the best part of your experience in this small group this semester?
2. How connected did you feel to other group members?
3. What challenges or difficulties, if any, did you face in being a part of this group?
4. In what ways did you see yourself grow closer to the Lord and stronger in faith through your small group experience?
5. How was your group time of Bible discussion and exploration?
6. How did your group experience serving others outside of your group and the church – “living “beyond” yourself?
7. Did you find encouragement and support from your group to personally reach out to those in your life in need of Christ and the church?
8. How would you describe the way that your small group leader led your group’s experience this semester? Did you have one on one conversations or meetings with them?



## APPENDIX C

### **Small Group Leader Review**

We are so grateful for your faithful service as a small group leader this semester here at Pantego Bible Church. Please take a few minutes to share about your experience. We believe this brief process will assist you in understanding more completely the work of God in you and it will also help us as a church strive for improvement as we “make disciples who are changed by God to change their world.”

Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. What was the best part of your experience in this small group this semester?
2. How connected did you feel to other group members?
3. What challenges or difficulties did you face in leading this group?
4. What brought you the most joy?
5. In what ways did you see the group grow closer to the Lord and stronger in faith through their small group experience? In what ways did you personally?
6. How was your group time of Bible discussion and exploration? Did you use the Scrolls small group study group? Another study material?
7. How did your group experience serving others outside of your group and the church – “living “beyond” yourself?
8. Did you find encouragement and support from your group to personally reach out to those in your life in need of Christ and the church?
9. How did you feel about the support and communication you received from your group Shepherd and area pastor or the connections pastor

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