Public Discipleship: Forming Disciples for the Sphere of Neighborhood and Justice

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THE SPHERE OF NEIGHBORHOOD AND JUSTICE

Written by

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
ABRAHAM CHO
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ABSTRACT

Public Discipleship: Forming Disciples for the Sphere of Neighborhood and Justice
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2017

As Western urban centers continue to secularize, religion increasingly finds itself relegated to the realm of private opinion. Religious beliefs are rendered largely inadmissible in the public sphere of shared truth. As a result, the Christian gospel increasingly tends to be heard as a statement of personal preference rather than the proclamation of a public truth available to all.

While the culture has shifted, the American evangelical church has continued to approach discipleship largely in terms of beliefs, practices and morals—the very things the culture regards as a matter of personal preference. This essentially privatized approach to discipleship assimilates well into our culture, but it struggles to reflect the public nature of the gospel. The American evangelical church is in need of an approach to discipleship that does not concede to these cultural categories.

This doctoral project introduces a framework for discipleship that will address this specific challenge at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, New York. It will propose an intentionally public approach to discipleship by beginning not with religious beliefs, practices or morals, but with day-to-day realities encountered in our shared spheres of life—both public and private. It seeks to enter into the real issues of these spheres in which all people are engaged with the goal of forming them to live with Christian distinctiveness in every sphere of life. In the interest of space, this project will highlight one sphere—the sphere of neighborhood and justice.

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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

Philosopher Charles Taylor has famously labeled our present cultural moment in the West as a secular age.¹ This label, for Taylor, is not so much a statement about religion’s retreat from the public life of the West, nor about the decline of religious in these societies—true though both may be. Instead, Taylor is interested in a deeper kind of secularity, one for which these are but symptoms. Ours is a secular age because of the monumental shift in the conditions in which religious belief is held. He notes that this is the first era in history in which belief in God cannot be taken as axiomatic.² In fact, the conditions of belief have changed so radically that belief in God is not even considered to be particularly plausible. Thus, while religious belief may persist—even as a majority position in some cases—the conditions in which those beliefs are held have radically changed. Religious belief is now inescapably contested. The rest of his magisterial work A Secular Age is a wide-ranging exploration of how, in such a short amount of time, this came to be in modern Western societies. For Taylor, this remarkable turn of events is an achieved disenchantment and not the result of some inevitable process brought about scientific enlightenment. It is the singularly unique feature of Western societies today.

A consequence of this shift is that religion, now contested, finds itself increasingly excluded as a legitimate source for public truth or action. Religious reasoning is ruled inadmissible tout court in the public sphere of shared truth. Religion is effectively relegated to the realm of private opinion. After all, if faith in God is no longer

² Ibid.
self-evident, then it can only be treated as one option of belief among many. What is more, without materialistic empiricism to adjudicate its competing claims, religious belief cannot be considered as anything other than a matter of personal or perhaps ethnic preference. Rowan Williams puts it starkly: “There is public reason and there is private prejudice.”

As a result of all of these complex forces, the Christian gospel in today’s globalized, pluralized, and secularized environment is increasingly heard as a statement of personal opinion. It has been a remarkable change, indeed.

While the culture has been shifting, the American evangelical church’s approach to discipleship has remained largely unchanged. It has continued to frame the question of Christian maturity largely in terms of orthodox doctrinal beliefs, practices of piety, and moral precepts. As vital as these are, they also happen to be the very things that a secular culture regards simply as a matter of private preference. The contextual ground in the West has shifted underneath the feet of the church and its traditional approaches to discipleship, rather than challenging the culture, now play directly into its hands. The church has unwittingly been co-opted into a privatized approach to its own faith as dictated by a secular culture. The degree to which this assimilation continues to occur uncontested is the degree to which the church loses its ability to bear witness to the public good news of Jesus Christ. The gospel, after all, presents itself unapologetically as public truth-for-all for it deals with the acts of God accomplished on the public stage of world history for the sake of all humanity, accessible and verifiable to all. To lose this public character would amount to nothing less than a syncretistic denial of the biblical faith. The

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American evangelical church, it would seem, is in need of a new approach to discipleship that does not concede so readily to these cultural categories.

Pastorally speaking, these larger cultural trends manifest themselves in very concrete ways in the day-to-day lives of church members. As the Lead Pastor of the East Side congregation of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, for example, I interact with countless Wall Street bankers in my congregation who hold influential positions at large banks. Each of these individuals is a devout Christian believer, sincerely seeking to follow Christ in every area of their lives. They often share their faith with their co-workers, actively participate in the church, engage in ministries to the poor, and give generously. Yet in the months leading up to the so-called Great Recession of 2008, many of these women and men of faith were involved in the sub-prime mortgage-lending crisis that nearly brought the American economy to its knees. One cannot help but wonder how deeply these men and women had integrated their faith with the public realm of their work. All this despite the fact that Redeemer has a robust Center for Faith and Work whose very mission it is to disciple Christians in this regard. Nevertheless, it seems as though their faith was not able to penetrate a great wall in their lives, the same wall that is the distinguishing feature of the modern West today—the wall dividing the private from the public.

Consider another example. Our congregation is filled with Millennials. These individuals are very often passionate about justice, deeply cause-oriented, and activist in their outlook. They are drawn to Redeemer, in part, because of our emphasis on compassion and justice. They serve in soup kitchens, mentor youth, assist with job training, and build homes with Habitat for Humanity—to name just a few examples. Yet,
these same Christians seem to be relatively uninterested in engaging locally in their own neighborhoods with institutions like community boards, block associations, or local elected officials. It is often these local institutions that work against systemic issues like gentrification, red-lining, or police violence. In fact, these Millennials are often the very demographic that ends up displacing the poor in gentrifying neighborhoods. What is more, if one were to ask these younger Christians whether they have meaningful friendships with neighbors of a differing socio-economic class, most would be surprised at the question itself. These observations raise questions about whether these well-intentioned young men and women have essentially commodified justice and made it into a neatly-defined calendar item that can be used to enhance their self-image as a justice-oriented person while minimizing the genuine cost that accompanies a just life. Examples like this are too numerous to recount and could include other important issues like sexual ethics, materialism and consumerism, political polarization, and intense workaholism, to name just a few. These issues are not merely academic by any stretch of the imagination. They strike at the heart of very real lives and what it means to follow Christ in our complex, contemporary world.

To begin to address these pervasive challenges in our Redeemer congregations, the Executive Team and Session of Redeemer Presbyterian Church created an inter-congregational working group that would be tasked with creating a shared approach to discipleship that would equip our congregants to better integrate their faith into every aspect of their lives, both private and public. This shared approach to discipleship would also serve the critical role of functioning as the software that would unify all the Redeemer congregations as we enter into the chapter of our history as a family of
churches for the city. This collaborative working group, which I was asked to chair, was to be comprised of senior leaders from each of the three congregations (i.e. Redeemer East Side, West Side, and Downtown) as well as the Executive Director of our Center for Faith and Work. This was the first group of its kind and was being given an enormous challenge: to create a shared approach to discipleship during a time in which Redeemer was moving from a single mega-church into a family of three independent churches. In an environment where all vision, energy, and resources were being focused on the process of becoming more separate, this group was asked to swim upstream and produce a collaborative approach on the enormously complex topic of discipleship. Nevertheless, there was a shared sense of the challenge that we were facing as the church in seeking to form Christian disciples for all of life in a secular context.

As such, this doctoral project seeks to propose a new framework for Christian discipleship that may prove to be more effective in resisting the relegation of the Christian faith to the realm of private values in a secular age. It will propose an intentionally public approach to Christian formation by beginning not with the traditional starting points of religious beliefs, practices, or morals, but by starting with the spheres of life—both public and private—that all people are necessarily engaged in simply by virtue of being a member of modern society. This approach, which we have been calling public discipleship, proceeds not by starting with abstract beliefs and then applying them to personal lives. Instead, the framework begins in the practical workaday world of life—the challenging tasks that every individual faces—and seeks to foster biblical reflection on those tasks. Beginning in these unavoidable spheres of life not only meets people where they are, but also draws attention to the ways a Christian may be unreflectively
occupying these spheres, and therefore inhabiting them no differently than a peer who rejects Christianity. It exposes the lack of Christian distinctiveness in the most practical areas of life. As they identify this deficit, they can begin to reflect more actively on how the Christian faith speaks to every sphere of life. We have identified these five spheres as: Christian identity, church and mission, family and relationships, neighborhood and justice, and work and rest. It is as Christians learn to inhabit these ordinary spheres of life in distinctively Christian ways that disciples are formed to follow Christ winsomely in public.

While this project will introduce the overall framework of public discipleship, in the interest of space it will at times limit its scope to the development of one of these spheres—neighborhood and justice. The purpose of this doctoral project is to develop a holistic discipleship experience for adult Christians at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City to equip them to engage in local, Spirit-led personal ministries in the neighborhood sphere as the first part of a larger vision for public discipleship in every sphere of life. To accomplish this purpose, this paper will proceed as follows.

The first section will introduce the primary contextual realities of Manhattan as they are experienced at Redeemer Presbyterian Church. It will interact with three of the most prominent challenges a secular city presents for the church: 1) the privatization of religion in a pluralistic environment, 2) the fragmentation and compartmentalization of lives and identities, and 3) the transience of a hyper-mobile culture that discourages Christian public and local engagement. This first section will also survey aspects of Redeemer’s history in New York with a particular eye towards its previous attempts to address some of the issues. It will trace the history of the formation of key organizations
like Hope For New York and the Center for Faith and Work as examples of how the
curch has sought to wrestle with these issues head-on. This first section will conclude by
suggesting some possible ways to begin to address these three primary challenges.

The second section will turn to theological reflection. It will begin with an
examination of relevant literature that speaks to the issues most pertinent to public
discipleship in general and the sphere of neighborhood and justice in particular. Then, it
will consider important works by missionary-theologian Lesslie Newbigin, Dutch
statesman Abraham Kuyper, sociologist James Davison Hunter, practitioner Paul Sparks
and his colleagues, and the work of philosopher James K.A. Smith. Each of these works
have served as key conversation partners in the development of public discipleship. After
reflecting on the extant literature, this second section will conclude with a biblical-
theological reflection on the nature of the gospel as public truth, the notion of spheres as
an organizing framework and the biblical call to be rooted in place.

The third and final section will provide an overview of the process for strategic
implementation. It will outline the stated goals and intended audience of public
discipleship at Redeemer. It will include a discussion of the three primary strategic values
that have guided the ongoing implementation of public discipleship as well as general
timelines, program design, and key leadership teams that will be required to prototype the
program before a larger rollout. It will conclude with a discussion about the importance
of a process of feedback and evaluation to optimize the effectiveness of our approach.

Finally, a brief summary and conclusion section will report on initial outcomes,
best practices, and insights gained. Due to the broad scope of this new approach, public
discipleship at Redeemer will require a multi-year rollout that will begin in the Fall of
2017. It will also require an ongoing posture of constant feedback, assessment, and optimization. In a sense, the prototyping of public discipleship begins in the Fall of 2017 with its roll-out to our congregation, but then it never ends as we seek to take a posture of constant feedback-based improvement. As such, our concluding assessment of the pilot of the neighborhood and justice sphere will be a preliminary assessment based on the initial feedback of much smaller focus groups.
CHAPTER 1
THE MINISTRY CONTEXT

In 1965, Harvard theologian Harvey Cox in *The Secular City* famously identified anonymity and mobility as the two primary features of urban life that constitute the “shape of the secular city.”¹ More than fifty years later, they ring as true as ever. A third feature of a secular city that would need to be added today in our globalized world is that of plurality. These three features — anonymity, mobility, and plurality — dominate the social skyline of the city today and constitute the very air city-dwellers breathe. Their impact is not limited to the realm of sociological trends. They radically shape the inner life and the conceptual horizons of urban dwellers. This section will examine each of these three features, slightly recast for the purposes of this project, to gain a deeper understanding of the contextual challenges that a public discipleship framework seeks to address. To that end, the next few sections will consider the divided world (public and private in a secular city), the fragmented life (plurality and identity in a secular city), and the transient self (pace and permanence in a secular city).

The Divided World: Public and Private in a Secular City

In a city as densely populated as New York, so much of life is experienced as part of the shared, public world. The arenas of work and neighborhood are decidedly public in a city. Even basic daily tasks—from groceries to exercise to school pick-ups—take on public dimensions simply due to small living spaces, population density, and the use of public transportation. As a result of this relentlessly public existence, the anonymity of private life takes on a nearly sacred character for most New Yorkers—often as a matter of survival. Harvey Cox describes this well:

Urban man [sic] must distinguish carefully between his private life and his public relationships. Since he depends on such a complex net of services to maintain himself in existence in a modern city, the majority of his transactions will have to be public … [but the] technopolitan man must cultivate and guard his privacy. … Otherwise public life would overwhelm and dehumanize him.²

For many who live in an urban environment, the fundamental need to separate their social worlds into clear categories of private and public is a daily reality. What is more, these realms of private and public are also tacitly marked by very different sets of social norms, customs, and expectations. They constitute almost entirely separate social worlds. It is perhaps not too much of an overstatement that the cultural and relational environment of a city dweller is defined by this first distinction. To navigate the myriad of social interactions, New Yorkers must consider whether the nature of this relationship is public or private/personal and what obligations ensue accordingly. This is why so many visitors to New York tend to describe New Yorkers as cold and aloof. They interpret the lack of acknowledgement or friendly small talk as a sign of indifference or hostility. In reality, it is merely managing the otherwise overwhelming social realities of a densely populated environment and respecting others’ need for that private space. Ironically, to ignore you

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² Ibid., 41, 46.
is to offer you an act of neighborly kindness. Anonymity is the gift of privacy in a relentlessly public space.

But this division of the world into public and private reaches far beyond the social realities of urban life. These daily social interactions create and reinforce the conditions that make the unexamined belief in a thought world marked by the same division so instinctively plausible. As Peter Berger and others have pointed out, our social milieu has a powerful influence on what we consider as plausible knowledge about our world. Our social structures invariably and invisibly shape our plausibility structures. Put another way, how we live in the world acts back upon us and shapes how we understand that world. As Winston Churchill famously said in a speech in the British House of Commons on October 28, 1943: “We shape our buildings and afterward our buildings shape us.”

Because residents of a secular city are inescapably immersed in the ways different rules of interaction apply to their public and private relationships, it becomes natural and even self-evident to them that different rules of reasoning would apply to public and private truth claims. Public truth claims in this view would naturally be claims that could be adjudicated by empirically verifiable facts and scientific objectivity. The veracity of a public truth claim would be determined by means that are seen to be universally accessible and verifiable. Therefore, if a public truth claim has been satisfactorily verified, then any thinking person ought to be in agreement. That is to say, a public truth

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claim when confirmed by scientific reasoning creates an obligation in any thinking person to acknowledge and even submit to it. There is no room for a tolerant relativism here.

Private truth claims, however, are matters of opinion, preference, or perhaps even prejudice. Private truth claims are claims that are true because they are true for you. They are, in one sense, inviolable because in our culture no one else has the authority to tell you what is or ought to be true for you. These sincerely held personal beliefs have value not as statements about a shared reality but as statements of self-expression. For example, William James famously defined religion as “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men [sic] in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine.”\(^5\) The result of all this is that personal beliefs have no more weight or value in a secular culture than as a form of consumer preference—it is a statement about taste rather than a statement about truth. As such, there is no socially or rationally acceptable way to go from a private belief as true for oneself to creating an obligation to believe in others—apart from the exercise of some form of manipulative power. Thus, public and private are not merely sociological categories; they have become ontological and epistemological ones.

This raises obvious challenges for the proclamation of the Christian gospel in this ministry context. Depending on which of these two categories the gospel belongs in, different rules of engagement would apply. On the one hand, if the truth claims of the Christian faith are treated as public, Christianity could be reduced to verification by what

the modern mind counts as empirical fact and scientifically verifiable. On the other hand, if the historic Christian gospel fits into the category of private value or personal beliefs, it could be reduced to a system of personal ethics, or the hobby of choice of the religiously inclined, or the particular form of self-help for the spiritually minded. If Christianity is reduced simply to a form of privatized spirituality, the question must be asked whether it can actually be considered Christian any longer. These are contextual questions the church must address as it considers the nature of discipleship in a contemporary world.

**The Fragmented Life: Plurality and Identity in a Secular City**

A world neatly divided into public and private creates conditions for the second prominent feature of a secular city: fragmentation. As divided social structures without and divided plausibility structures within reinforce one another, individuals immersed in these different worlds invariably begin to experience themselves differently depending on the world they happen to be inhabiting at any given moment. If that were not complex enough, the bundle of multifaceted forces that we refer to collectively as globalization have created an astonishingly diverse and plural urban environment. And so the urban public space has become something of a contradiction: it is purportedly a space that is free of private beliefs and values (that is, the so-called naked public square) and yet it is simultaneously celebrated as a space that is bustling with a panoply of diverse peoples, cultures, worldviews, languages, and values—many of which, we are discovering, are fundamentally incommensurable. That is to say, the differences that we celebrate are real and go all the way down. They are not merely cosmetic or aesthetic and therefore simply cannot be reduced to the thin reasoning that is required for a naked public square. A
world thus divided renders diverse selves fragmented in that only selected parts of a self are given permission to be expressed depending on the social environment. What is more, this divided world also renders the diverse self bereaved by declaring that an individual’s deepest motivations, reasons, and purposes are inadmissible and irrelevant to our shared life. One’s public self must be separated out from one’s deepest self in order to be given a voice. The public square, ironically, imposes a forced anonymity on those who have supra-secular reasons and silences the particularity of diverse voices even before words have had the chance to form. In this situation, the world moves quickly from being divided neatly to being fragmented arbitrarily.

The day-to-day implications of this fragmentation get refracted through yet another lens that introduces another layer of complexity. While it is meaningful to speak of the great division of public and private and the great fragmentation that happens as a result of plurality as analytical categories, most individuals do not experience their lives-on-the-ground in these categories. Instead, individuals immersed in this social milieu experience reality simply as being part of their normal spheres of life: work, family, leisure, neighborhood, etc. And yet, the upshot of this is that the average person now experiences each of these spheres as being dramatically disjointed and therefore utterly compartmentalized. It has become a commonplace to hear offhand comments like “I am a completely different person at work—you might not even recognize me!” Or, “I feel like I become a different person depending on the circle of friends I’m with.” Or even, “When I’m with my family members, I feel like I’m expected to be something that I’m not anymore.” Though not explicitly recognized as such, the average person experiences something of a transition as he or she moves between the various spheres of their lives.
They prepare themselves to enter into another world as they transition from work mode to family mode. Take as an example a working mother and consider her as she inhabits the multiple spheres of life to which she is called—the workplace, the home, the PTA meeting, the church, the board meeting, the charity benefit, the soccer game, etc.—and the shifting values and assumptions implicit in each sphere. It is not difficult to imagine the challenge of integrating a sense of self across these jarringly different worlds, each of which is inhabited by markedly different people.

Yet when a Christian turns to the church and the resource of their faith as a possible source of integration and identity, they often do not find what they are looking for. The church has approached the task of forming this Christian in terms of biblical knowledge, spiritual practices and ethical boundaries. These critical topics may inform some of the spheres of this woman’s life, but the connections are often indirect and far removed. There is very little offered that will directly equip her to inhabit her multiple callings with biblical distinctiveness. In fact, much of what may be offered falls short of even equipping her to maintain a consistent Christian identity across the diversity of these spheres. This is particularly challenging when we remember the ways in which the culture itself conditions the Christian to leave her most deeply held beliefs, motivations, and purposes at the door before diving into her work or into civic engagements or even in the raising of her children.

For example, a parent must consider how the exclusivity of the claims of Christ interacts with a religious studies curriculum at their child’s public school. This grows increasingly complex when one’s neighbors and classmates are wonderfully devout Muslims and Jews and Hindus, or equally convinced atheists. Similarly, someone with a
career in finance must ask how the biblical faith informs the nature and purposes of their work in a global economy, particularly in a world where economic disparity seems to be most pronounced across racial and ethnic lines. One must consider whether or how the Christian Scriptures speak about how one ought to inhabit one’s neighborhoods, particularly in a city that is gentrifying at breakneck speeds, and how to be a neighbor, particularly to those whose culture, language, assumptions, and worldview differ dramatically from one’s own. These questions illustrate the fact that, increasingly, life is experienced as the cumulative aggregate of a series of fragmented but largely unrelated experiences with a diversity of people with whom one has very little in common. A fragmented life and a compartmentalized faith go hand in hand—particularly in a pluralist society.

The Transient Self: Pace and Permanence in a Secular City

A third feature of the secular city that is equally powerful and pervasive is the feature of transience and mobility. Cities have been notorious for their fast pace, mobile lifestyle, and transient communities for as long as can be remembered. But breathtaking advances in communication and transportation technologies in the last few decades have served to intensify the pace and mobility of the city at astonishing rates. The ubiquity of smartphones, emails, texts, social media along with innumerable other technological advances have created an environment of incessant connectedness which, in turn, has enabled a new expectation of around the clock availability, both professionally and socially. And yet, these advances that tout the new possibility of an astonishingly interconnected world have also made meaningful presence, attentiveness, rootedness, and
belonging increasingly difficult to cultivate and sustain. It has resulted in a social world in which community has come to mean something not too far from an isolated self surrounded by an unlimited possibility of connection. Availability, no matter how incessant, turns out not to translate so easily into genuine belonging.

As with the features of the public/private divide and social fragmentation, the sociological experience of transience and pace is resonating with, reinforcing, and shaping how we view reality as a whole. Our social structures of transience and mobility (and the freedom from commitments and obligations they promise) are shaping our plausibility structures about what it means to live a meaningful life. For example, Gail Sheehy in her then classic book entitled *Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life* describes the journey of self-actualization as a journey of increased mobility. She writes: “You can’t take everything with you when you leave on the midlife journey. You are moving away. Away from institutional claims and other people’s agendas. Away from external valuations and accreditations. You are moving out of roles and into the self. If I could give everyone a gift for the send-off on this journey, it would be a tent. A tent for tentativeness. The gift of portable roots …”\(^6\) What is noteworthy about this exhortation is the unquestioned belief that the fulfilled life is found exclusively somewhere within and therefore all external commitments, roles, and obligations unequivocally restrict one’s ability to find true fulfillment. They immobilize the self, as it were, in the straightjacket of other peoples’ claims and agendas and ultimately reduce the self to finding its sense of worth in “external valuations and accreditations.” Mobility is not merely a statement

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about the social life of a secular city; it has become a sort of quasi-religious liberating hope that holds the key to one’s rebirth. And it turns out that salvation is a gift after all—

“The gift of portable roots.”

And yet, in the forty years since Sheehy wrote those words, we are just beginning to discover that these portable roots turn out to be far too shallow to sustain a meaningful life and a stable sense of self. The French philosopher and sociologist Gilles Lipovetsky writes that in our modern, mobile world:

… the individual appears more and more opened up and mobile, fluid and socially independent. But this volatility signifies much more a destabilization of the self than a triumphant affirmation of a subject endowed with self-mastery … The more socially mobile the individual is, the more we witness signs of exhaustion and subjective ‘breakdowns’; the more freely and intensely people wish to live, the more we hear them saying how difficult life can be.7

Mobility actually turns out to be volatility for the self, disrupting and destabilizing it rather than liberating and nourishing it. Roots, it would seem, cannot root themselves in itself without becoming ruinously brittle. They need a wider field and a richer source. They need to be deeply embedded and enmeshed in a larger environment, enriched over years and generations, in order to draw into itself the nutrients required for a flourishing life.

Practically speaking, the average on-the-ground city dweller experiences the challenge of transience and mobility in two primary forms which act back upon them leading them to an individualist posture toward community (what Jean Vanier calls “community for myself”) rather than a communal posture towards individuality (“myself

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for the community”). The first is the sheer pace of life in the city and the expectation of around the clock availability, which makes the investment in a deeper community a genuine challenge. This frenetic pace leads one to treat one’s community as a lifestyle element that, much like a hobby, one would be glad to engage in but primarily in one’s spare time. The second is the challenge of relational turnover. For those who do sacrificially invest the time in cultivating meaningful relationships, their efforts can be undone in that all-too-familiar moment when a friend tells you that they have bad news—they have decided to move out of the city. So, even when people do prioritize that search for that wider field of a more permanent community, they find that there are very few stable fields left in which it is safe to sink the roots their lives. How one approaches the challenge of Christian discipleship is profoundly shaped by the factors of pace and mobility. Without a deep and fundamental rootedness within a larger moral community, it must be asked whether Christian discipleship is even possible; people have been conditioned all of their lives to seek out the gift of portable roots, and permanence and embeddedness are often only seen as limitations. These are some of the pervasive challenges that an approach to discipleship in a secular city must address in order to provide the counter-formation necessary to form public disciples. It was in this context that Redeemer Presbyterian Church had its beginnings and it is this question with which it has been wrestling for nearly three decades.

Redeemer Presbyterian Church: Reaching the Unchurched Urban Professional

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Redeemer Presbyterian Church began its first public worship service on the first Sunday of April 1989 led by its founding pastor, Dr. Timothy Keller. In rented space at the Church of the Advent Hope, a Seventh Day Adventist Church on East 87th street of Manhattan’s Upper East Side, eighty-five people gathered on a Sunday evening with a vision to “transform the city of New York by enabling Manhattan professionals to reach their web of relationships for Christ, and through time to change the whole city.” That informal mission statement grew out of several years of research, networking, and groundwork that revealed that the demographic landscape of New York City was beginning to change in dramatic ways. Here is how Timothy Keller describes it:

I continued to do research on New York City. Superficial research resulted in a lot of "red lights" traditionally thought to militate (mitigate??) against church planting.

1) The overall population of NYC was growing only slowly.
2) The middle class, both Anglo and black, was continuing to leave as part of a twenty year trend.
3) The city had lost 250,000 jobs since the Wall Street crash of 1987 and, though I did not yet know it, was about to go into a recession.
4) The quality of life in the city was deteriorating as crime rose and schools were deteriorating.
5) The cost of operations in Manhattan were [sic] so enormous that virtually no church could be found that was not operating on an endowment or with continual denominational subsidies.

But further research revealed to me that, while the middle class was shrinking, three other sectors of the city were growing:
• the professional elites,
• the new immigrants and ethnics, and
• the poor.

New York was 'de-homogenizing' economically and culturally. There was a growing new professional 'elite' class of knowledge workers. There was a dizzying variety of new immigrant working-class communities. And the poor of

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9 Timothy Keller, unpublished white paper outlining Redeemer’s history written for Redeemer staff training, October 2007.
the inner city were becoming more isolated from other groups. Almost all of the evangelical Protestant churches had been serving the shrinking and aging English speaking middle class. This was even true of the African-American churches. There were almost no churches at all trying to reach the new (later to be called) post-modern young professionals, nor many seeking to reach the new immigrants or their bi-cultural children, nor even many seeking to reach the poorest residents. To 'reach' the emerging NYC there would have to be a generation of new churches among the educated, liberal, upwardly mobile young professionals, the non-English speaking new immigrants and their children, and among the poor. This was exciting, though I didn't see many other people noticing this. And I wondered a lot about whether my insights were valid.  

In the midst of this changing landscape, Keller set out to start a church that would seek to reach the “educated, liberal, upwardly mobile young professionals” that were moving into the city. Redeemer formulated four core convictions that would guide its ministry:

**The Gospel:** The law yet grace. The gospel transforms everything. Not a legalistic church nor a cheap grace church.  
**The Bible:** Authoritative but covenantal and personal. Not just a book of rules but not merely literature.  
**The City:** God loves the city. The kingdom of God is to grow in the city. Not withdrawing from it but not just reflecting the values of the city.  
**The Church:** A connectional form. Very distinctive and true to our locale and our community, yet accountable to other churches in the region and the country.  

Five months later on the last Sunday of September 1989, Redeemer had started its first morning service. The two services now attracted about ninety people each, with roughly thirty people attending both, for a total attendance of about 150 people. Here is how Keller recounts the days that would follow:

In the fall the first conversions began to occur. A sense of God's power was evident. After the services, the church both upstairs and downstairs would be filled with people in groups, usually talking for another hour, often about deeply personal and spiritual issues. Because the church was still small, the other leaders and I could meet most everyone who was new each week. It became evident that about 20% of the attenders each week were non-Christians. We began a

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10 Ibid., 5-6.  
11 Ibid, 9-10.
'coordinating group' which was an informal steering committee. It met for prayer every Friday morning. Every week, nearly every member told stories of non-Christians they were bringing to Redeemer or meeting at Redeemer. By January 1990, attendance averaged over 200. In the Spring we began a 4:00 PM service which was identical to the AM service. By June the overall attendance was nearly 300, and during July and August the numbers actually grew toward 400. …

During those first three years, there was the same feeling of 'inevitability' that comes during times of awakening. The gospel seemed brand new, sleepy/nominal Christians awoke with a start, and people got converted every week. The air was charged with a kind of electricity. Every decision turned out to be wise. Everyone performed above and beyond their gifts and abilities. …

By the end of 1992 Redeemer had grown to approximately 1000 people in Sunday attendance across four services—two morning and two evening—with roughly 25 - 30 percent of that attendance being non-Christians. In the midst of this astonishing growth, Redeemer saw more clearly that it needed to begin grappling with the very forces outlined above that were shaping the inhabitants of a secular city—the world divided into public and private, the fragmented life and compartmentalized faith, and the problem of pace and transience for genuine belonging. The decade that would follow would be marked by several attempts to address these challenges within the life of the church. It would begin with a small group ministry followed by the creation of Hope For New York and then formation of the Center for Faith and Work.

**Community Groups: Belonging and the Transient Self**

The first major effort to address these issues was the adoption of the cell church model in 1991 as found in Carl George’s pioneering work *Prepare Your Church for the*

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Within a year, Redeemer had twenty-three small groups, then called Fellowship Groups, that were meant to create both a deeper sense of belonging within the church as well as communities of active ministry. It was in these Fellowship Groups that individuals would begin to care for one another and support each other through various moral, psychological, and personal issues. Keller explains:

Many in the church recognize how mobile our society has become. Fewer and fewer places are filled with people who have been born and raised in a region that is filled with networks of family, relatives, and long-time friends. But both church leaders and church members expect that care and nurture will happen through informal, word-of-mouth communication and unplanned relationships between (usually) pastors and parishioners. It took us nearly two years to realize that the traditional approach can’t work in a city. It is through a network of ‘cells’--small group fellowships--that we can nurture and care for one another. Here was the beginnings of a community that would not only offer a greater sense of permanence, but it would also serve as incubators in which people would be formed out of a “community for myself” mentality towards “myself for the community” mentality.

Today, twenty-five years later, Redeemer has grown to more than 300 Community Groups (the name was changed in the late 2000s) that meet all across Manhattan and into the boroughs. Its mission continues to be to provide a place where people are known and cared for in a very transient and fast-paced city.

Hope For New York: Social Concern and the Fragmented Life

Yet, from its start, Redeemer also understood that it needed to be a church that would not just meet the needs of its attendees. It desired to be a church that would be a public good to the city as a whole. Keller reflects on those early convictions: “I found …

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14 Ibid., 24.
three statements repeatedly scribbled down as notes I wrote to myself before talking to people about the church. This is the closest thing to an early 'vision' presentation that we had … [One of them was this:] We want to be not just a ministry for ourselves, but also for the peace and benefit of the entire city. Our aim is not just a greater church, but a greater city.” 

It was in 1991 again, the same year that the Fellowship Group system was being incorporated, that Redeemer felt that it was time to begin ministries that would take their congregants outside of their own personalized faith and into the more public realm of care for the poor:

As we addressed our continuing growth and the building of the congregation through cell groups, we also wanted to embody our commitment to serve the city, especially the poor. I had done my doctoral work on how the church can be involved in not just ‘word’ ministry (evangelism, teaching, discipling) but also ‘deed ministry’ (helping the sick, the troubled, the elderly, the poor). Redeemer’s diaconate had been active in such ministry from the beginning, but their work was focused on our own congregation. Then Yvonne Dodd, our first staff member, began a ministry called ‘Hope for New York’ that sought to marshal the resources of Redeemer members for deed ministry out in the neighborhoods of New York City.

With this decision, Redeemer found itself going down a road that would continue to push the envelope about the role of the Christian faith in the public square, as well as helping Christians to resist the compartmentalization of their faith. For so many people at Redeemer, Hope For New York was effectively bringing the Christian faith out of the realm of personal beliefs and into the realm of shared social issues. The gospel was beginning to holistically inform more and more areas of their life. The invisible walls that divided both the private/public realms of society and the fragmentation of the spheres of

\[15\] Ibid. 10-11.

\[16\] Ibid., 16.
their lives were slowly beginning to be breached in the minds of Redeemer congregants with the beginnings of Hope For New York.

**The Center for Faith and Work: Public Faith and the Divided World**

It would take Redeemer another decade or so to mobilize the resources that would eventually lead to the establishment of the Center for Faith and Work in 2003. Right from the start, Keller knew that perhaps more than any other place in the world, work was a major topic for New Yorkers. Not only was it the place where people spent most of their waking hours, it was also the primary place that people were looking for a sense of identity, worth, and significance. So, right from the beginning, it was clear that a robust theology of work would be necessary to help form people as disciples of Christ. What is more, it also very quickly became apparent that one of the primary ways that the gospel could impact a city was through the renewal of its industries that could come only through the daily work of Christian believers in every sector. It was this holistic desire to see the entire city renewed by the gospel—and not just souls saved within the city—that led to deeper theological and ministry reflection on the nature of the mission of God in redeeming the entire created world through Jesus Christ. Keller writes: “Redeemer’s core values had always spoken of changing the city through 'Marketplace' ministries. We had taught that the world cannot be changed only through Christians becoming ministers. What is needed is lay-Christians finding creative ways to reach others for Christ in their workplace and through the distinctiveness and excellence of their work.”

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17 Ibid., 19.
Though no one at the time had a clear understanding what was happening, the birth of the Center for Faith and Work was the start of a much more concerted effort to breach the private/public divide that so fundamentally shaped the secular city.

Christianity was not a public faith simply because it insisted on conversions and the absolute nature of its truth claims (though it certainly did that). Christianity was a public faith because it had something to say about all of the public institutions and industries of our common life together. The God of the Bible is the Creator of the material world and, in his providence, actively cares for and sustains every aspect of his creation.

Furthermore, the resurrection of Jesus Christ means that this Creator God so loved his material world that he gave his only Son to die to redeem his fallen creation. The resurrection is God’s refusal to give up on the whole of his material creation. For the Christian who believes these things, it is simply impossible to ignore one’s faith when engaging with the public life of the city. Redeemer realized that it needed to educate its people on engaging with and positively contributing to the public culture of the city, primarily through their work. And so, in January 2003, Redeemer hired a full-time director, Katherine Leary, a former CEO of several Silicon Valley startups who was converted at Redeemer in the early 1990s, to launch the Center for Faith and Work. Now in its thirteenth year of existence, the Center equips Redeemer congregants to integrate their faith and work through events, conferences, vocational intensives, and a nine-month, cohort-based learning experience called The Gotham Fellowship. It was this fellowship in particular that taught us several critical lessons about how to more effectively disciple urban professionals.
The Gotham Fellowship: Forming, Integrating, and Rooting Lives

After many years of mobilizing Redeemer members to engage the poor through Hope For New York and to participate in events and training through the Center for Faith and Work, Redeemer leaders began to realize that the key to sustaining this holistic vision for ministry was to disciple people more deeply so that they could engage in the city more effectively. To that end, the Gotham Fellowship was launched in the fall of 2008 as an experimental approach to providing in-depth Christian formation to young urban professionals at Redeemer. In the past, Redeemer had found it difficult to get busy New Yorkers to commit the time and effort required for meaningful formation. While Sunday worship was continuing to play a critical role in Christian discipleship and Community Groups were flourishing as a place to belong as well as to study Scripture and share one’s own personal struggles and concern, other attempts to provide deeper formation were floundering. The School of Gospel Foundations, which offered four- to six-week classes usually on Sundays but also throughout the week, was getting minimal engagement and traction. Weekend retreats and getaways were also under-subscribed. Previous attempts to get broader engagement largely involved reducing commitment requirements and offering a greater variety of learning options. These attempts seemed to do little in increasing engagement. So the Gotham Fellowship was an attempt in the reverse: demanding greater commitment from those being engaged with the commitment communicated up front as a challenge rather than an obligation. The Fellowship experimented with a vetting process, a more-than-nominal fee, and a cohort-based learning community to further convey the commitment that would be required to benefit from the significant investment the Fellowship would receive from Redeemer. All of
these questions shaped the program design of Gotham—and it proved to be far more successful than anyone would have anticipated. The program currently has to turn away more than 50 percent of applicants, and some of Redeemer’s strongest, most mature leaders (both within the church but also in the culture at large) have come out of this program. The increased commitment, clearly conveyed, challenged Redeemer congregants to take ownership of their own Christian formation and, as New Yorkers will, people rose to that challenge. A secondary outcome of this learning experience was the depth of relationship and a sense of belonging that was forged in the relatively short time of nine months. Most Gotham Fellows would say that their closest friends in the city grew out of this learning experience. There was something about the shared experience of significant growth and challenge that had bonded them in deeper, more meaningful relationships. They were not only being formed, they were also being rooted.

The current program description and high-commitment requirement for The Gotham Fellowship reads as follows:

The Gotham Fellowship is a nine-month program (similar to an Executive Education program) for 42 adults who are employed full-time in New York City and have at least two years of working experience. Our typical class comprises 50% men and 50% women between the ages of 25-35 working in fields including law, finance, education, government, non-profit, design, medicine, and the arts.

The Fellowship begins Labor Day Weekend and finishes Memorial Day Weekend. During these nine months, the Fellows meet two hours a week to discuss the extensive weekly reading of major texts from various eras of church history. Daily devotionals unite the group through guided scriptural and devotional readings. Monthly Saturday gatherings provide in-depth training and city excursions. Three retreats (Labor Day, mid-winter and Memorial Day weekends) focus on personal reflection and spiritual formation.\(^\text{18}\)

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After seven years, the Gotham Fellowship continues to be Redeemer’s most effective program for discipling Christians in the city. Four major lessons were learned from Gotham that were indispensable for public discipleship.

First, we realized that while we were moving the needle with regard to forming Christians for discipleship in their work, there were several other areas of formation that were not adequately being addressed. The success of Gotham and the Center for Faith and Work accentuated the ways in which we needed to disciple people to integrate their faith in their neighborhoods, in their marriages and family, in areas of justice and compassion, to name of few. We saw that the sphere of work was a major area for discipleship, but we also saw that it was not the only one. We knew that we needed to apply the approach we took to the sphere of work to the other critical spheres of life as well.

Second, we learned that it was not only possible but desirable to expect a high level of commitment from those we were seeking to form. Our previous attempts at adult education through classes and retreats simply did not ask enough of our congregation and also did not deliver enough quality formation for busy New Yorkers to consider them to be worth the investment. We learned that higher-commitment, cohort-based learning communities with clear parameters and expectations could be an extremely effective way to disciple urban professionals. We now had to adjust our pedagogical approach from traditional lower-commitment classes to higher-commitment learning cohorts in order to effectively apply this new approach.
Third, we came to see how critical it was to seek not merely the transfer of information but the formation of the entire person. While we understood that information and content would constitute an important core, we came to see that learning through practices, experiences, and community would be just as important as having really good content, if not more so. Our pedagogical approach to adult learning would need to undergo a radical shift—away from a content-centered approach to a more whole-person-formation approach. Whatever our approach in public discipleship would be, it would need to be multi-faceted in order to engage the entire person.

Finally, we came to realize the importance of peer-driven learning. While Gotham certainly has elements that incorporate expert knowledge and teaching, the consistent feedback we have heard from participants was how powerful it was to learn in the context of a community of peers and also to learn from one another, particularly the insights others would bring from their fields. It was the processing and discussion of readings and teachings that individuals found to be the most impactful. This was also a key insight from a sustainability perspective. For many years, Redeemer wrestled with how costly this program was for a relatively small number of participants. But as the years have gone on, we have been able to incorporate Gotham Alumni as Teaching Assistants which not only creates more lay leadership opportunities, but also deepens peer learning and instruction while bringing costs down. We came to see that peer-driven, cohort-based learning could be the most strategic and also the most cost-effective way to disciple people in the city in the long run.
Public Discipleship: The Gospel in Every Sphere of Life

Drawing many of these themes together, then, public discipleship is something of a culmination of the various efforts at Redeemer Presbyterian Church to address the challenges that a secular city poses for a truly flourishing human life. From the issues of transience and belonging that birthed the Community Group system, to the refusal to compartmentalize Christian faith from social concern that created Hope For New York, to the emphasis on integrating faith with the decidedly public world of work in the Center for Faith and Work, Redeemer has responded to the need for transformative Christian discipleship in a secular city for decades. public discipleship, then, seeks to provide a systemizing framework that incorporates the insights, experiences, and values that have been growing over the years. As such, the goal of public discipleship at Redeemer is to form disciples of Christ who are public with their faith and equipped to live with Christian distinctiveness in every sphere of life.

As noted above, rather than starting in the abstract with the realms of beliefs, practices, or ethics, public discipleship begins in the spheres of the concrete, workaday world of everyday life. It identifies five primary spheres that a Christian living in the city already necessarily inhabits—Christian Identity, Church and Mission, Family and Relationships, Neighborhood and Justice, Work and Rest—and seeks to form Christians in those spheres so that they might inhabit them with Christian distinctiveness.\(^{19}\) Very often, this might mean that it is the pain or deficit that an individual is experiencing in one of these spheres (e.g. stress at work, crisis in a marriage, wrestling with an injustice) that would lead them to realize they need deeper formation and guidance in this particular

\(^{19}\) See Appendix A for visual representation of the spheres.
area. By beginning with the experienced deficit, public discipleship puts the impetus for seeking out formation deeply within the experience of the individual. In doing so, public discipleship provides a biblical alternative to the three main themes that mark life in a secular city: a world divided into public and private, a life fragmented into compartmentalized spheres and an uprooted self seeking belonging and meaning in a hyper-mobile, hyper-transient world.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Both the broader approach of public discipleship as a whole as well as the specific focus of this paper—public discipleship in the sphere of neighborhood and justice—grow out of decades of theological reflection forged between an engagement with published literature and on-the-ground ministry praxis in Manhattan. This chapter will engage with five published works, each of which has served as a critical conversation partner along the way in helping us think through five key theological building blocks that would ultimately lay the foundation for our approach to public discipleship in the neighborhood and justice sphere. Beginning with Lesslie Newbigin, his critical insights into the nature of the gospel as public truth has served as the bedrock for framing our reflections. The important work of Dutch Reformed theologian Abraham Kuyper will be considered next, particularly his use of the concepts of creational spheres and sphere sovereignty to frame his public theology gives insight into how an approach to discipleship might be reframed to retain its public quality. James Davison Hunter then helps shift attention to the nature of Christian cultural engagement within each of these spheres by articulating a vision for faithful presence within.1 His work considers how the

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local church might be uniquely positioned to serve as an incubator to form the kinds of
virtues in citizens that are required for society in the late modern world. Fourthly, Paul
Sparks, Tim Soerens and Dwight J. Friesen are practitioners who have reflected deeply
on the specific call of the church to engage locally in the sphere of the neighborhood.
Their on-the-ground ministry reflections provide steps to thinking practically about what
Christian discipleship could look like in real neighborhoods. Then finally, this chapter
engages James K.A. Smith and his work on the nature of Christian formation from an
Augustinian standpoint. Smith, more than anyone else, has helped to shape Redeemer’s
overall pedagogical approach which, ideally, will permeate every aspect of public
discipleship at Redeemer.

**The Gospel as Public Truth: Lesslie Newbigin’s *Foolishness to the Greeks***

Missionary theologian Lesslie Newbigin, upon his return to England after several
decades of missionary work in India, famously called for an articulation of a distinctly
missionary encounter with the Western culture. He opens his seminal book *Foolishness
to the Greeks* by stating: “My purpose in these chapters is to consider what would be
involved in a genuinely missionary encounter between the gospel and the culture that is
shared by the peoples of Europe and North America, their colonial and cultural offshoots,
and the growing company of educated leaders in the cities of the world … I shall simply
refer to it as ‘modern Western culture.’”\(^2\) While his entire discussion continues to be
indispensable reading for contextual ministry in the Western context, what is particularly
telling (and especially relevant to this discussion) is how central the public/private

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distinction is to his understanding of the modern Western culture. He writes: “… this
dichotomy between the private and the public worlds is fundamental to modern Western
culture, and that if there is to be an effective missionary encounter of the gospel with this
culture, the understanding of this dichotomy is a prime requirement.”³ He then goes on to
show how this public/private dichotomy entails an important second dichotomy between:
what are commonly called ‘facts’ and what are called ‘values.’ The public world
is a world of facts that are the same for everyone, whatever his values may be; the
private world is a world of values where all are free to choose … they are
personal opinions, and those who hold them can do so, provided they do not
interfere with the freedom of others to hold different opinions. But they can claim
no universal authority; they belong to the private world.⁴

For Newbigin, a genuinely missionary encounter of the gospel with the West requires
nothing less than an intentional engagement with this fundamental divide. To put it
perhaps even more starkly: “to accept this dichotomy is to abandon the gospel and
surrender to the pressure of our pagan culture … To accept it is to make the surrender of
the early church refused to make—at the cost of the blood of countless martyrs.”⁵ The
gospel itself is here at stake.

In the remainder of his book, Newbigin proceeds to trace the pervasiveness of this
fundamental divide in our thinking as it pertains to key features of the Western
plausibility structure. First, he explores the problem of ultimate authority in reasoning by
exploring the different ways modern Christians have attempted to explain the nature of
the Bible. From fundamentalist literalism to Scriptures as witness to authentic personal
experience to a book of timeless morals, he shows how all of these approaches actually

³ Ibid., 15.
⁴ Ibid., 36-37.
⁵ Ibid., 132.
reason within the primary plausibility structure of the West rather than challenging it. He then explores the other major questions that essentially comprise a worldview: what can we know (a dialogue with science) and what must be done (a dialogue with politics). He then concludes with a series of seven suggestions on what the church must now be in order to embody this genuine missionary encounter with the Western culture. While each of his seven suggestions are well worth deep and extended reflection, the one most relevant for this project is the need for what he calls a declericalized theology—a returning of the task of theology to the hands of lay people:

We need a multitude of places where this kind of lay theology can be nourished. We need much better provision … [for] a theology that has been wrought out at the coal face, at the place where faith wrestles at personal cost with the hard issues of public life. And we need to create, above all, possibilities in every congregation for laypeople to share with one another the actual experience of their weekday work and seek illumination from the gospel for their daily secular duty. Only thus shall we begin to bring together what our culture has divided—the private and the public. Only thus will the church fulfill its proper missionary role.6

This, in large measure, is the driving impetus behind public discipleship.

While Newbigin has clearly played a foundational role for Redeemer as a conversation partner, some limitations remain. Most relevant for our purposes is that in most of his work, Newbigin seems to single out work as the means by which Christian disciples can refuse to function within the public/private divide. While he certainly acknowledges and interacts with the importance of politics and economics, he rarely speaks of these engagements in more on-the-ground terms. What seems to be lacking is a deeper engagement with the public nature of all spheres of human life. In public

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6 Ibid., 143. Intriguingly, Newbigin at this point refers to the importance of the work of Dutch theologians Abraham Kuyper and Herman Dooyeweerd, which he bemoans has gone largely unnoticed by Anglo-Saxon theology.
discipleship, Redeemer is seeking to rectify, however modestly, that lacuna in part. While the public engagement of a disciple with our culture certainly includes one’s work as perhaps the most obviously public of our spheres, it also requires a fundamental recasting of our understanding of our others spheres, like that of the church, the family, and the neighborhood. These spheres, perhaps, may sound private or domestic, which is precisely the point. This instinctive categorization of these spheres as private reveals the extent to which this public/private dichotomy pervades modern thought. Public discipleship must recast an understanding of the family from being a domestic good to a public one, envision neighborhoods not as the locus of our private consumption and escape but as a primary arena of our public engagement with others, and view the church not as essentially a private club comprised individuals with a shared interest (which happens to be religious) but a public institution that bears witness to the kingdom in the world. It is when all of these spheres are seen with the same passion and sincerity displayed in Newbigin’s quote above with regard to work that the prevailing plausibility structure of the secular West can be challenged and a new way of inhabiting these spheres recast.

**The Spheres of Life: Abraham Kuyper’s “Sphere Sovereignty”**

On October 20, 1880, Dutch theologian and statesman Abraham Kuyper delivered the inaugural address for the opening of the Free University of Amsterdam—the first independent orthodox Protestant university in the Netherlands. For Kuyper, it represented a critical institutional victory for sustaining a particular vision of a genuinely pluralistic society from a Reformed perspective. For many of his political opponents, however, it represented an unwelcome intrusion of religious belief into the public life of an
enlightened, secular nation. Kuyper took the occasion to deliver what is widely regarded as the clearest articulation of the public theology that had guided his work as pastor, scholar, theologian, political leader, and Prime Minister.\(^7\) His thesis in this landmark address is that the explicitly religious principle of sphere sovereignty is essential for the establishment and preservation of a genuinely pluralistic society for all. To make his case, he argues that sphere sovereignty is essential to the national life of modern democracies as a whole and that in order to serve that national life, it must retain its specifically religious and Reformed character.

Kuyper begins his address with the provocative assertion that modern disputes over statecraft ought to be understood as a dispute over the claims to sovereignty of a single, living person—Jesus Christ. He argues that those who have come to believe Jesus’ claims of absolute sovereignty believe that this sovereignty has been given to him alone by God as the only sinless king. Therefore, any claims to absolute sovereignty made by any human institution, not least the state, has been decisively and finally delegitimized. Instead, Jesus Christ as the perfect king, distributes his sovereignty to the separate sphere of creation to flourish as the God of the Bible intended under his rule. The spheres of the state, the family, the church, the university, the market, for example, all have been given an internal creational logic in the wisdom of God and therefore must be allowed to develop according to their own sovereign principles. Thus Kuyper argues that only when one acknowledges Christ’s subversive claim to absolute lordship (contra the claims of Rome at the time) can there be a foundation that is strong enough to ensure genuine

freedom in every sphere of human society. Without that conviction, that sovereignty ends up being given to the state as the only remaining alternative. He argues that one need only to look at human history to confirm that claim. Thus, for Kuyper, the history of statecraft is a struggle between sphere sovereignty under the reign of Christ and state sovereignty.

But he does not stop there. Critical to his overall argument is that sphere sovereignty cannot be stripped of its explicitly religious and Reformed character because its very efficacy depends on the dual assertions that Christ alone has absolute sovereignty over human life and that faith alone is the foundation of human knowledge. He goes on to show that the Reformed faith is what he calls a root principle in that it is itself an entirely distinct starting point for understanding all of life. Therefore, the Reformed faith in general and sphere sovereignty in particular cannot simply be grafted into or subsumed under another system of thought or worldview (i.e. Dutch secularism) without ultimately destroying its essential character. What is more, as a root principle the Reformed faith cannot be limited to the field of theology or religion; instead it has much to say about all fields, including science, sociology, mathematics and the like and must be granted freedom to enquire according to its own principles and on its own terms. If a genuinely pluralistic society is desired (and not merely the veneer of diversity subjected to a secularity as enforced by the state), all competing root principles must be allowed the freedom to robustly cultivate their own intellectual and social lives (through the creation of institutions, like universities) for the good of all.

It is sphere sovereignty, the framework for Kuyper’s public theology, that constitutes his obvious contribution to Redeemer’s approach in public discipleship. It
deeply informed the decision to use the spheres of life as a primary organizing rubric for reframing discipleship in our context. But, his contribution goes deeper. For one, Kuyper’s sphere sovereignty is a public theology that effectively resists the public/private divide that implicitly shapes so much shared experience in a secular city. In doing so, it serves to fundamentally reframe the conversation about the nature and tasks of Christian discipleship in a way that resists the privatization of discipleship that is quietly occurring in the church today. What is more, it also explicitly states that the Christian faith, particularly in its Reformed expression, constitutes a radically distinct way of being in the world and therefore cannot be hermetically sealed off from one’s understanding of the rest of one’s life. Its conceptual and theological robustness allows for the reflection on what a distinctively Christian way to inhabit every sphere of life might look like. His conviction that Christianity is a root principle for all of life provides the theological resources to resist the fragmentation and compartmentalization that is often characteristic of Christian discipleship in today’s context.

But Kuyper is not without his limitations. Perhaps the most damning of his limitations is the complicity of his theology in the construction of an apartheid state in South Africa. While it ought to be stated that the apartheid state is best seen as a fundamental misappropriation of Kuyperian theology, the historical reality is that his work did provide the theological rationale for its construction and justification. The damage to his legitimacy and legacy is profound and understandable. A second important limitation to note is that sphere sovereignty (and Kuyperian theology since Kuyper) lends

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itself primarily to more conceptual and theoretical reflection on society as an abstracted whole. While this kind of deliberation is necessary and valuable, public discipleship at Redeemer is concerned more with the concrete workaday lives of individual Christians who are inhabiting not the sphere of home but physical neighborhoods with real, breathing neighbors and are working not in an abstract economy but within concrete industries in physical workplaces. As such, Redeemer has had to re-appropriate the concept of spheres and take it out of the realm of the abstract and societal and translate it into the on-the-ground spheres of life that an ordinary individual might recognize as being true to their life.

**Faithful Presence Within: James Davison Hunter’s *To Change the World***

James Davison Hunter in *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* argues that Christians in the West need to rethink how they are called to engage and influence the culture for the good of the world. His main argument is that, based on mistaken notions about how cultures change and about the nature of power, Christians in America have largely sought to change the world through individual transformation and by seizing power within a democratic system of government through political coercion. In the three essays that comprise his book, Hunter offers us an alternative understanding of culture change, of power, and how to engage the late modern world. His thesis is that it is only when Christians, in response to God’s own faithful presence, seek to sacrificially embody

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9 Hunter, *To Change the World*, 3-5.
faithful presence to others, our tasks, and within our spheres of influence that we will begin to engage culture in a way that brings life-giving change to all.

In his first essay entitled “Christianity and World-Changing,” Hunter shows that the common view Christians hold on the nature of culture and culture change is largely individualistic and populist. He writes that “the substance of this view can be summarized something like this: The essence of culture is found in the hearts and minds of individuals—in what we typically called ‘values.’ … By this view, a culture is made up of the accumulation of values held by the majority of people and the choices made on the basis of those values.”

Thus, the way to change a culture is through tactics such as evangelism, political responsibility, and individual civic engagement. Culture change, according to this view, occurs bottom-up through a grassroots sea change of individuals making new decisions, engaging new habits, and embracing new values. The trouble with this view, according to Hunter, is that it is wrong. Instead, Hunter makes the compelling case that when one looks closely at actual instances of cultural change, they almost invariably do so through top-down transformation, usually initiated by overlapping networks of elites and institutions that are just outside of the centermost positions of prestige.

Institutions and tightly-networked cultural influencers, it turns out, are critical elements of any world-changing.

In his second essay, “Rethinking Power,” Hunter sets out to address the second mistaken view held by Christians that has shaped their approach to engaging culture, namely their view of power. Power, according to Hunter, has been understood in the

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{10}}\] Ibid., 6.

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{11}}\] Ibid., 40-44.
American religious experience almost exclusively in terms of political power. In fact, Hunter astutely points out that the fact that entire Christian traditions can speak of “abdicating power” or “accepting powerlessness” as a mark of true discipleship “presupposes a truncated theory of power. Only by narrowing an understanding of power to political or economic power can one imagine giving up power and becoming ‘powerless’.” Indeed, it is this truncated view of power that pervades the various paradigms of engagement that different traditions have taken. Hunter describes these paradigms as Defensive Against, Relevance To, and Purity From. Each of these paradigms or postures assumes that one can stand outside of power and decide how one will engage. The result of this view of power is that the church becomes politicized and the public gets conflated with the political. Hunter, however, proposes that power is best understood as a pervasive social reality that cannot be reduced to political power. The nature of power, then, is “its ubiquity, its inherent relationality, its inherent asymmetry, and the unintended consequences that nearly always follow its exercise.” This truer understanding of the nature of power raises the question of a “Postpolitical Witness in the World” which leads him to his third and final essay.

It this final essay that has the most immediate relevance to the task of public discipleship at Redeemer. As noted above, Hunter’s suggested paradigm for engagement is Faithful Presence Within. This approach integrates both the ubiquity and ambiguity of

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12 Ibid., 181. Italics original.
13 Ibid., 213-19.
14 Ibid, 180.
15 Ibid., 184.
power from his second essay as well as the importance of institutions and networks of elites from his first essay. It sees as the goal of Christian engagement not the seizing of power (as if power were a discreet resource that could be seized in the first place), but rather an intentional awareness and faithful stewardship of power within relationships, callings, institutions, and spheres of influence. Thus our calling as Christians is not to be defensive against, relevant to, or pure from, the culture and uses of power. Rather, we are called to be faithfully present within it. And the theological and spiritual grounding of this posture is found precisely in the faithful presence of God to us in Jesus Christ.

Hunter writes:

_Pursuit, identification, the offer of life through sacrificial love_—this is what God’s faithful presence means. It is a quality of commitment that is active, not passive; intentional, not accidental; covenantal, not contractual. In the life of Christ we see how it entailed his complete attention. It is whole-hearted, not half-hearted; focused and purposeful, nothing desultory about it. His very name, Immanuel, signifies all of this—“God with us”—in our presence (Matt 1:23).  

To be faithfully present within one’s sphere of influence therefore requires an ongoing experience of the incarnational love of Christ for us, and constant spiritual formation to cultivate the virtues and habits needed to remain present in the name of Christ. It is this vision of faithful presence within one’s spheres of life that breathed life into the skeletal structure of Kuyperian spheres and animate the approach to public discipleship at Redeemer.

Yet here, as with other conversation partners, we run into limitations. Perhaps the most significant limitation is the danger of elitism in our understanding of Christian faithfulness. Throughout the Scriptures, there certainly is a preferential option for the

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16 Ibid., 243. Italics original.
poor and even more pointed, warnings issued to the rich and influential about the spiritual dangers of wealth, privilege, and power. After all, it is not the tightly-networked cultural elites who Jesus blesses in the Beatitudes. Even while agreeing with Hunter’s insights into the dynamics of cultural change, a question is raised of whether, in the economy of God’s kingdom, the cultural influencers will be able to discern to what end the culture ought to change without the voice of the poor. It is no surprise that in the kingdom of God, all are all made to need one another. This is particularly important to keep in mind in the context of Manhattan. While public discipleship seeks to form congregants at Redeemer, which tends to be comprised of the educated class, Redeemer must seek intentional ways to cultivate this profound sense of interdependence with those who are different. Without bringing all voices to the table, all cultural change—to use Andrew Delbanco’s apt phrase—may “amount to nothing more than fidgeting while we wait for death.”

Place, Neighborhood and Justice: Paul Sparks, et.al., The New Parish

Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight Friesen offer a theologically rich yet profoundly practical sketch of what faithful presence in the sphere of Neighborhood and Justice could look like for a public disciple in the neighborhoods of Manhattan. In their book The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community, they propose a retrieval of the parish concept as providing a powerful opportunity for the church, not only as a new way to engage in mission, but also as a means by which to restore and reintegrate its calling to be the worshiping

community of God.\textsuperscript{18} They structure their argument around three central questions: Why do we need a new parish?, What is the new parish?, and How do we practice the new parish?

In the first section, the authors argue that culture (and churches) have been fragmented by two central myths—the myth of individualism and the myth of living above place. These two forces lend themselves to two pitfalls that tend to further fragment life. The first is the avoidance of responsibility for neighbor, which grows out of the myth of individualism. The second is the very modern desire to transcend limitations. This pitfall grows out of the myth of the ability to live above place—that is not fully rooted or deeply embedded. It speaks to the challenges of mobility and pace that erode any sense of belonging and integration. These forces are why a new parish is needed. For the authors, rooting oneself and the church within a concrete local neighborhood is the most powerful way to engage this fragmenting culture.

In the second section, the authors seek to answer the question “What is the new parish?” In its essence, it is a call to “reconfigure the contemporary meaning of church by incorporating the relational life within a particular place into the definition.”\textsuperscript{19} It is going from being a worship program or event that draws a particular demographic, to being the ecclesial center of a geographic neighborhood that participates in the collective life—what the authors call the new commons—of that neighborhood. They put it this way:

By crafting a life together in a definable place, the parish becomes a platform for a whole new way of being the church. When the word parish is used in this book

\textsuperscript{18} Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Friesen, The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches are Transforming Mission, Discipleship, and Community (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014).

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 84.
it refers to *all the relationships (including the land) where the local church lives out its faith together*. It is a unique word that recalls a geography large enough to live life together (live, work, play, etc.) and small enough to be known as a character within it.\(^{20}\)

Instead of moving along the tendency of the church which has gone from being in a city (during the New Testament era), to being of a nation (in the era of Christendom), to being for a people (in the missionary movement), the authors call the church to be “with” and “in” a concrete neighborhood and the people who live therein. They explain further what they mean by this:

By *within* we mean standing in solidarity with your neighbors who have a shared desire to see your place be a good place to live. … By *within* we also mean to underscore that the only way to become faithfully present is to intentionally narrow the footprint of your life together … *Within* implies that you are rooting deeply in the place God has planted you and expecting that your sense of community, your formation and your participation in God’s renewing mission will integrate right where you live your everyday life.\(^{21}\)

It is, in the minds of the authors, a practical, concrete, and institutional way that the church can practice James Davison Hunter’s ethic of faithful presence within discussed above as a way of working against a cycle of fragmentation they see playing out in our culture today.\(^{22}\)

Thus, the third and final section argues that the practice of this new parish requires three things. The first is the active practice of rooting oneself and one’s church in the defined place of a neighborhood and into the networks of relationships that constitute the shared life of that place. It also requires linking—connecting with others in the neighborhood as well as with other communities and like-minded churches from different

\(^{20}\) Ibid., 23. Italics original.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 47.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., 53-74.
neighborhoods. It requires an intentional linking across all kinds of difference. Finally, the authors argue that the practice of the new parish requires a different view of leadership. They define it as “the capacity to mobilize desires for reconciliation and renewal through collective action, while paying ongoing attention to God’s story, to the fidelity of the group within its place and to the leader’s own transformation.”

It is first and foremost a leader embodying faithful presence.

The contributions of this work to Redeemer’s approach to public discipleship in the sphere of Neighborhood and Justice are important and profound. Yet in Redeemer’s context, one major limitation presents itself. Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen seem to envision smaller communities entering into neighborhoods with the express vision of living together along the lines of a new parish. Many of their insights apply perhaps most directly to a new, local church plant. Redeemer’s context, however, is that of a large mega church that has historically tended to live above place and yet is attempting a slow but decisive transition to be a tightly-networked family of neighborhood churches. Thus, the direct application of some of these insights into a public discipleship initiative will likely be limited—or at minimum will have to be modified. Redeemer’s desire with public discipleship is to begin to give individuals a vision for this kind of faithful presence, to connect them to one another in local community within their neighborhood, and to form habits that will lead to the virtues of faithful presence. With no on-the-ground church planter or pastoral leadership directly leading the way at this point, Redeemer is looking much more to seed the environment with the concepts, habits, and postures that will lend itself to the establishing of vibrant new parish types of churches. In a sense,

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23 Ibid., 179. Italics original.
Redeemer is seeking to apply these insights into individual discipleship rather than the planting of a neighborhood church just yet.

**Augustinian Spiritual Formation: James K.A. Smith’s You Are What You Love**

A final yet critically important conversation partner in the development of public discipleship has been the work of James K.A. Smith as represented most succinctly in *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*. Smith’s primary contribution to Redeemer’s thinking around public discipleship is his thesis that the nature of Christian discipleship is not primarily the conveying of information to change the beliefs of an individual; it is instead the re-formation of the loves and desires of their hearts through imagination, habit, and virtue formation. Smith taps into the ancient practices of the church and an Augustinian understanding of spiritual formation to show that, contra the modern Cartesian impulse, actually you are what you worship, not what you think.

Therefore, the task of Christian discipleship goes well beyond teaching of right doctrine to the mind. Smith goes on to show in the rest of his book how discipleship is nothing less than the task of reorienting the disordered loves within the (idolatrous) human heart. To do that, the heart must be reoriented through imagination and story and then recalibrated through habit and practice until disciples are formed with Christian virtues. “We learn to love, then, not primarily by acquiring information about what we should love but rather through practices that form the habits of how we love. These sorts of practices are ‘pedagogies’ of desires, not because they are like lectures that inform us,
but because they are rituals that form and direct our affections.”

Central to this task of reordering loves is the liturgical worship of the church. Smith puts it this way:

Discipleship is a kind of immigration, from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Col. 1:13). In Christ we are given a heavenly passport; in his body we learn how to live like “locals” of his kingdom. Such an immigration to a new kingdom isn’t just a matter of being teleported to a different realm; we need to be acclimated to a new way of life, learn a new language, acquire new habits—and unlearn the habits of that rival dominion. Christian worship is our enculturation as citizens of heaven, subject of kingdom come (Phil. 3:20).

Thus, the goal of discipleship is nothing less than whole-person formation. It is both a de-
culturation of the heart from the secular liturgies that have already shaped people in profound ways and an enculturation of the heart into the reality of the kingdom of God as made visible in the communal life and worship of the church.

The relevance of Smith’s work to public discipleship is not so much on the conceptual framework or the theological content of the approach, but in the pedagogy that will guide how the task is implemented. Two immediate examples come to mind. First is the role that practices will play in each sphere. One of the primary outcomes, which will be considered in greater depth below, for each sphere is that people will be nurtured to incorporate a historic Christian practice into their lives as a result of their learning experiences. For example, in the sphere of neighborhood and justice, practices of hospitality will be incorporated through teaching, communal experiences, and reflection. In the sphere of Work and Rest, individuals will be asked to incorporate the practice of

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25 Ibid., 66.
Sabbath-keeping as part of their exploration of that sphere. Each of the five spheres will highlight a practice like this.  

A second example of Smith’s relevance to our pedagogical approach is the commitment to deeply embed all of the theological concepts and learning experiences that will comprise public discipleship into the regular life of the church. For example, a major feature of public discipleship will be the creation and introduction of essentially a new kind of Book of Common Prayer that will provide the shape of the shared prayer life that Redeemer seeks to establish. It will draw heavily from historic prayers like the collects of Thomas Cranmer and the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. This foundational element of public discipleship seeks to embed an approach to formation deep in the prayer and worshipping life of the church. Another, perhaps less concrete example, is that the vast majority of the learning experiences in public discipleship are meant to be done in the context of community, most frequently through our Community Groups. Thus the community and friendship in which that process of enculturation has already begun is the same community where deepening formation takes place to reorder the loves that dominate public life to the kingdom of God.  

While Smith’s insights into the nature of the task of discipleship have been transformative in our thinking about public discipleship, the greatest limitation in his work thus far is the lack of clear practical applications of his vision beyond the liturgies of the church and the family. While his case for the central importance of the liturgies and rituals of these spheres is compelling, one must believe that, particularly as a college professor, his insights would impact how he would think about the important role that

26 See Appendix A.
institutions of higher learning might have in reordering loves. In our development of public discipleship, we found ourselves wrestling with how a church might extend these critical insights into a classroom setting (as opposed to in the liturgical setting of corporate worship). We have asked ourselves how these insights might impact the way a church thinks about small groups or other forms of learning, both for adults and children. The lack of clear practical application, however, can be understood. This, after all, is perhaps the work that the church needs to take up in its commission to form disciples in the contemporary world.
CHAPTER 3
THEOLOGY OF PUBLIC DISCIPLESHIP AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND JUSTICE SPHERE

The theological foundations of public discipleship and the Neighborhood and Justice sphere are rooted in four anchoring truths. The first anchor is the one that frames the entire discussion of discipleship in this project—the nature of the gospel as public truth. It will be argued that this conviction profoundly shaped the early church in its identity and mission and therefore needs to inform any modern practice of discipleship. The second anchoring conviction is that the mission of the kingdom, which is the goal of discipleship, is comprised of both the cultural mandate and the missionary mandate. In order for discipleship to be as public as the gospel, both of these mandates must be taken seriously. The third anchor reassesses what is often assumed to be the locus of discipleship. Rather than approaching discipleship as something that happens primarily within the walls of the church, a theology of creative exile helps show that discipleship happens in every sphere of life, for the flourishing of every sphere. Finally, the theological anchor that grounds the neighborhood and justice sphere is found in a more robust theology of place, treating place as a theological category can lead one to embrace embodiedness and embeddedness as part of one’s call. This is particularly important in the mobile and consumer-minded cultures of center cities.
Theological Anchor #1: The Gospel as Public Truth

Despite its birth in the religiously relativistic culture of the Roman Empire, the early church insisted that Christianity could not be understood as a private spirituality, one of many that were thriving in the Roman culture of the time. As historian Edward Gibbon famously put it, “the various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher as equally false; and by the magistrate as equally useful.”¹ The early church, however, insisted that because the Christian faith was built upon a historical event that occurred not in the private spiritual experience of the founders, but on the public stage of human history, it was in its very nature public truth for all. As Lesslie Newbigin puts it, it was part of the realm of secular news, not religious instruction and therefore to treat Christianity as a private spirituality was to make a category mistake.² The importance of this most foundational of convictions is clearly demonstrated by examining the key terms the early church selected to express to define itself.

The Gospel as Evangelion

The early church’s choice of the term gospel (euangelion in Greek) to communicate the good news of Christ’s victory over sin and death was a decidedly public word borrowed from the realm of military conquest. For example, the Priene calendar inscription in honor of Caesar Augustus dated 9 B.C. reads as follows:

… since Providence, which has ordered all things and is deeply interested in our life, has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus, whom she filled with


virtue that he might benefit humankind, sending him as a savior, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things, and since he, Caesar, by his appearance … since the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the good news for the world that came by reason of him…”

The parallels are striking particularly when compared to the opening words of Mark’s Gospel: “The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1, NIV). Thus, the early church’s choice of the word euangelion to refer to the work of Jesus Christ was a deliberate appropriation of Roman public discourse. It was language used to communicate the secular news of an emperor conquering a territory to establish his political reign. Therefore, to call the work of Jesus Christ a euangelion was to present Jesus as an alternate king who was establishing an alternate kingdom. It is no wonder that, unlike other protected faiths like Gnosticisim, it was treated as a political threat. As N.T. Wright notes:

Those who were thrown to the lions were not reading ‘Thomas’ or Q or the ‘Gospel of Mary.’ They were reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the rest, and being sustained thereby in a subversive mode of faith and life which, growing out of apocalyptic Judaism, posed a far greater threat to Roman empire and pagan worldviews than Cynic philosophy or Gnostic spirituality ever could. Why would Caesar worry about people rearranging their private spiritualities?

Christ’s saving work for the early church was to be public truth for all or no truth at all.

The Church as Ekklesia

It is not surprising, then, that the early church would choose the political term ekklesia to describe the new people that had been constituted by this proclamation. The

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Dictionary of the Later New Testament states that “... *ekklesia* is primarily a political term and refers to any assembly of citizens duly summoned by the herald.”

Biblical scholar K.L. Schmidt, in his entry on *ekklesia* in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, offers an extensive treatment of the deliberate appropriation of this unambiguously secular term:

But this … raises the question of the special term which the NT community had for itself. Why did it avoid a cultic term and choose instead a secular one? … although ἐκκλησία is from the very first a secular and worldly expression, it expresses the supreme claim of the Christian community in face of the world. Intrinsically a Christian cultic society—and many Gentile Christians must have regarded themselves as such, like many modern students of the history of religion—might well have selected various other words to describe themselves. The world of societies and mystery groups offered a wealth of such terms. … The distinctive element in Christianity is much better expressed, however, by the emphasising of ἐκκλησία (τοῦ θεοῦ) than by the selection of a cultic word which might then be individualised by a personal name. The so-called Christ cult neither was nor desired to be one cult among others. It stood out against all cults in the sense that it stood out against the whole world, even the whole of the so-called religious world. This is all guaranteed by the choice of the self-designation ἐκκλησία.⁶

At stake for the early church in determining how it would designate itself was precisely the public nature of the truth claims that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was demanding of the world. To be treated merely as a religious gathering of individuals that shared the same private spirituality was to lose a key element of the Christian faith.

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Worship as *Leitourgeo*

Not only was the public proclamation of Jesus Christ a *euangelion* and the people assembled an *ekklesia*, the very purpose of that people was also public and secular in nature. In describing the primary action of the church, the New Testament writers used the word *leitourgeo*, where we get the English word liturgy. According to *A Greek-English of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* the verb *leitourgeo* means to “perform a public service, [or] serve in a public office.” The entry goes on to explain that:

> in the Gr[eco]-Rom[an] world distinguished citizens were expected to serve in a variety of offices, including esp. as high priests, with all costs that such service involved, or to assume the costs of construction or maintenance of public buildings and production of dramas and games; for their services they would be recognized as people of exceptional merit or benefactors.⁷

What is remarkable is that the early church chose a word that referred to acts of public benefaction—acts done by private citizens for the benefit of the public good—to describe their gathered worship. The worship of the early church was not primarily a place for personal experiences with God. It was an act of public service done by the *ekklesia* to benefit the entire society because the *euangelion* of Jesus Christ was true.

**The Confession that “Jesus is Lord”**

All of these insights perhaps find their most succinct and climactic expression in the early creedal affirmation of the church: “Jesus is Lord.” To affirm publicly that “Jesus is Lord” would have been interpreted as an implicit rejection of the imperial claim that “Caesar is Lord.” Christianity was an object of persecution in the Roman Empire.

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precisely because it refused to be relegated to the realm of private spirituality, even with all of the state protections and privileges that would ensue with such a categorization. Instead, it proclaimed that because Jesus Christ was raised from the dead in history, there was now an alternate euangelion that constituted an alternate ekklesia that had as its mission an alternate leitourgeo. It was, in short, the subversive inauguration of a rival kingdom that was unmasking any rival claims to ultimate authority. The power of empire was broken not by private spirituality, but by the public, kingdom-establishing intervention of God. This is what it meant to proclaim “Jesus is Lord.”

In light of the priority of the public nature of the gospel for the early church, even in the face of opposition and persecution, a non-negotiable feature of Christian discipleship in any age must be the insistence upon this public character. As N.T. Wright has noted, today’s context bears striking similarities with the context of the early church. But the similarity that is perhaps most pressing is the way in which all faiths can be tolerated and even embraced in an empire, provided they remain private. Privatized faith, after all, cannot challenge the legitimacy of an empire. Wright argues:

Gnosticism [i.e. privatized forms of Christianity] flourishes in a world of empire. Each sustains the other. The empire encourages Gnosticism by creating a world where, for most people, there seems no possibility of escape from its all-conquering power, and by encouraging types of religion which offer an otherworldly escape, and therefore see no need to offer a critique of empire, still less an alternative to it … Gnosticism then at least tacitly encourages empire, by leading its devotees into that escapist spirituality, leaving the kingdoms of the world to be divided up by others. The serious gnostic may well regard the follies and wickedness of empire as tell-tale signs of the wickedness of the created order. But such hand-wringing, while it may assuage the feelings of sorrow or even guilt at collusion, will not generate critique or revolution.  

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Empires and the cultures that sustain them will seek to relegate faiths to the realm of private spirituality under the guise of being religiously tolerant. Biblical Christianity however, refuses such relegation by its very nature and therefore provides an enduring critique of the impulses of empire. In order to retain this essential feature of Christian discipleship, a primary calling of the church in every culture and age must seek to reframe its discipling mandate to reassert the public nature of the gospel for its age.

**Theological Anchor #2: The Cultural and Missionary Mandates**

The second theological anchor that informs public discipleship is the conviction that the mission given to every Christian disciple is the call to pursue both the cultural mandate of Genesis 1 and 2 as well as the missionary mandate of Matthew 28 in every sphere of life. It is only when these two mandates are held together as being of highest importance in the life of the disciple that the holistic, creation-renewing mission of the kingdom is realized. This section will consider each of these mandates in turn.

**The Cultural Mandate**

The biblical foundation for the cultural mandate can be found in the first chapters of Genesis. Three important observations can be drawn from those chapters. The first is that the God of the Bible is first revealed as a creator and a worker. This is in stark contrast to notions of the gods in pagan creation accounts. For example, in the *Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian creation myth, the material world comes into being as the result of cosmic violence. Marduk defeats Tiamat in battle and tears her corpse into two. These pieces, in turn, become the earth and the skies. Thus, the material universe is seen as the
result of violence—the spoils of war.\(^9\) Or in a different way, the deities of the Greek pantheon were often portrayed as enjoying lives of endless leisure with the occasional sexual escapade. Greek creation myths feature Gaia, the personification of the earth, who is said to be the result of sexual intercourse and birth.\(^10\) In contrast to these stories, the biblical faith begins with God as a creative worker and asserts that the material world owes its existence to the creative labor of this God.

The second observation is that to bear the image of God is, therefore, to be made for creative work. The inference that follows from the Babylonian and Greek creation myths is that the apex of what it means to be human is to be like the gods: a warrior in the Babylonian worldview, and a pleasure-seeking aristocrat in the Greek. However, to be made in the image of the biblical God is to be a worker and a creator. Humans find their greatest dignity and satisfaction not in the conquests of war, nor in the comforts of leisure, but in the act of creation. This, in fact, is precisely what is stated in Genesis 2:15 “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” In the biblical faith, to be made in the image of God is to be invited to participate in the work of God in the unfurling of his creation.

The third observation is that the work of humanity is presented in the Genesis accounts as a continuation of the work of God. There is a sense in which God hands over the further development of his creation to his image-bearers in order to draw out the burgeoning potential God folded into it. This perhaps becomes most clear because of how God creates. A close reading of Genesis 1 reveals that God creates the world, but creates

it initially to be formless and empty (Gn 1:2). The rest of the narrative of Genesis 1 is the story of how God then proceeds to form and to fill that creation. He forms day and night, sky and sea, dry land, etc. and then he fills those forms with burgeoning life. It is then no coincidence that God then commands Adam and Eve to first “rule and subdue” the earth and then to “be fruitful and multiply and fill” it. He was commanding the human race to continue the task of forming and filling, respectively. It was God’s work alone to create ex nihilo. But he invites us into the ongoing work of forming and filling. Al Wolters puts it this way:

The earth had been completely unformed and empty; in the six-day process of development God had formed and filled it—but not completely. People must now carry on the work of development: by being fruitful they fill it even more; by subduing it they must form it even more … From now on the development of the created earth will be societal and cultural in nature.\footnote{Al Wolters, \textit{Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview} (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2005), 36.}

The development and care of human societies and culture are not a result of the fall. It is, instead, the fulfillment of the commissioning of the human race to extend the creative work of God as part of their image-bearing calling. Indeed, this co-participation in the work of the Creator God—and the dignity, meaning, and satisfaction that comes along with such participation—was an integral part of what it meant for Eden to be a paradise. Thus, though the frequent toil, fruitlessness, and frustration of human work and culture-making are a result of the fall the mandate itself is not (Gn 3:17-19). What this means, then, is that the distinction that is often made between nature and culture is real insofar as nature refers to the forming and filling of creation by God himself and culture refers to the forming and filling of creation by those made in the image of God. Rightly
understood, they are not opposed to one another in any way. Nature and culture are part of the continuum of God’s fullest intention for a flourishing creation.

For our purposes, it is important to note that because this cultural mandate was the original mandate given to the human race, it reflects God’s prior intention for the human race. To be sure, the devastation of the fall and the decisiveness of God’s redemption surely will take on central importance both in the narrative of the Scriptures and therefore also in the life of the disciple. It is critical to keep in mind, however, that the fall was the ruination of God’s original cultural intention with humanity and, therefore, redemption is properly understood not as the salvation of souls away from an evil material world, but as the means by which God restores a rebellious humanity and a fallen creation to its primary intention of God-honoring material and cultural flourishing.

The Missionary Mandate

As critical as it is to resuscitate this theology of creation and culture today, the pendulum can swing too far. It is difficult to dispute the primary importance that Jesus placed on the so-called missionary mandate. After all, the final commission he left with his disciples was the command to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Mt 28:18-20). This missionary mandate is not a command that was given to only a particular class of Christians—as though only the truly committed disciple would be willing to go into all the nations to make disciples. Instead, the evangelical church has rightly understood this command to be one that bears on every disciple and therefore any approach to discipleship that neglects this central commission runs the risk of forming disciples in a way that is inconsistent with Scripture.
Biblical scholars and missiologists alike have noted that, in fact, there is not a single Great Commission, there are four—one at the end of each gospel. In Matthew, we have the most famous articulation of that commission:

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Mt 28:18-20)

Here the emphasis is clearly on evangelism and the making of disciples, along with the sacramental life of the church in baptism, and the importance of personal obedience to Christ as the one who has all authority and who remains near to the end. Similar themes emerge in Luke’s account of the Great Commission:

Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high. (Lk 24:46-49)

In Luke’s account, Christ’s primary concern in this commission is with repentance and forgiveness for all nations, with a particular emphasis on the empowering ministry of the Spirit, which will find its fulfillment at Pentecost in Acts 2.

The Gospel of John probably has the most extensive account of Christ’s commissioning of the disciples. John 20:21-23 is seen as John’s version of the Great Commission. It reads:

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.” And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.
Similar themes of being sent, empowering by God’s presence in the Spirit, and the emphasis on evangelism and the forgiveness of sins are all present here as well. However, it may be more accurate to treat the entire upper room discourse as the substance of Christ’s commission to all who would be his disciple (Jn 13-17). His emphases in those chapters are similar to the ones found in the other Great Commissions: the need for the Holy Spirit, the necessity of faith in Christ, and the global scope of his mission. It includes additional themes such as the posture of servanthood, the weakness of the disciples, the fundamental hostility of the world, and the central importance of Christian unity for mission. However, what is emphasized again and again is the importance of the evangelistic nature of Christian discipleship. There is clearly a need in Jesus’ mind for personal repentance and faith for salvation, and those who are disciples of Christ are called to bear witness to the whole world such that the Spirit leads others to faith in Christ.

A look at the Markan version of this final commission both reaffirms the central importance of the missionary mandate, but also intriguingly suggests possibilities of integration between the missionary and cultural mandates. It reads:

He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well. (Mark 16:15-18)

Here, again, it is clear that the primary emphasis of Christ’s commission is global and evangelistic in nature. What is different in the Markan account is the notion that all creation is in view here, an expansion of the focus on all nations that is typically found in
the other gospels. While creation and nations are by no means mutually exclusive, the
Markan text does seem to have a slightly broader purview in mind. When one considers
the additional difference of the emphasis on the miraculous in the Markan account, it
seems as though the broader emphasis on the restoration of the entire material creation
seems to be in mind. This Great Commission for Mark includes the healing of the sick
and the holistic liberation of individuals as evidenced in the expulsion of demons. In fact,
even the reversal of the hostility and inhospitality of other aspects of creation to the
human race—the deadliness snakes and poison—is reversed and an Edenic shalom is
restored in this commission. It is intriguing to think that the Markan Great Commission,
though not found in the earliest and most reliable manuscripts of the New Testament,
offers a glimpse of the ways in which the cultural mandate and the missionary mandate
are, at its root, not at all in tension or opposition but are, instead, deeply integrated.

If that deep integration of the cultural and missionary mandates is, in fact, what
the Scriptures present, then it follows that one of the goals of Christian discipleship must
be to help reintegrate these dual mandates in the ordinary, day-to-day life of a Christian
disciple. This is, in large degree, the aspiration of public discipleship at Redeemer. To
take the neighborhood and justice sphere as an example, proper theological formation
around this dual mandate should begin to integrate how one inhabits one’s neighborhood.
Without an emphasis on the cultural mandate, a Christian disciple might think that the
main purpose for her living in a neighborhood is solely evangelistic. Her presence in that
neighborhood, then, would be experienced as fragmented or, perhaps, inauthentic by her
neighbors who might not share her faith. If, however, she understands her calling in that
particular sphere to be the integration of both the cultural and the missionary mandate,
she would be present seeking the holistic flourishing of the neighborhood in economic, ethnic, aesthetic, and cultural terms (as a way to carry out the cultural mandate), while at the same time sharing her faith with the neighbors she co-labors with about the hope she has within because of Jesus Christ. Far from being at odds with one another, the cultural and missionary mandates suggest, enhance, and require the other.

**Theological Anchor #3: Creative Exiles**

Thus far, this section has considered the two main anchors that ground and guide the theological content of public discipleship. While those elements are, of course, foundational, strong theological substance alone does not adequately capture the whole of Christian discipleship. To that end, the third theological anchor presented in this section speaks more to the posture, attitude, or mindset of a disciple that public discipleship will seek to cultivate. It is the posture of a creative exile—a posture that has become all the more relevant in the post-Christian, secular realities of today’s world.

The former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has developed this theme more robustly than anyone. In his Erasmus Lectures entitled “On Creative Minorities,” Sacks issues a compelling call to religious communities in a secular society to learn how to engage the surrounding culture without the triumphalism of those in power, but also without the defensiveness of a beleaguered minority. Instead, he calls them to engage with the constructiveness of a creative minority. Drawing from a critical passage in Jeremiah, he claims that:

> it would be no exaggeration to say that [Jeremiah 29] changed the course of Jewish history, perhaps even, in an indirect way, that of Western civilization as a whole. This is what [Jeremiah] wrote:
Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper. (Jer. 29:5–7)

What Jeremiah was saying was that it is possible to survive in exile with your identity intact, your appetite for life undiminished, while contributing to the wider society and praying to God on its behalf. Jeremiah was introducing into history a highly consequential idea: the idea of a creative minority.  

Sacks goes on to show how utterly revolutionary this posture was and how Israel could make sense of such a revolutionary idea:

Only a unique configuration of ideas made Jeremiah’s vision possible. The first idea was monotheism. If God was everywhere, then he could be accessed anywhere, even by the waters of Babylon.

The second was belief in the sovereignty of the God of history over all other powers. Until then, if a people were conquered, it meant the defeat of a nation and its god. For the first time, in Jeremiah’s telling of the Babylonian conquest of Israel, the defeat of a nation is understood as being accomplished by its God. God was still supreme. Babylon was merely the instrument of his wrath. A people could suffer defeat and keep its faith intact.

The third was the belief that God kept his faith intact. He would not break his word, his covenant with Israel, however many times Israel broke its covenant with God … So Jeremiah, like all the prophets, was ultimately a voice of hope.  

The singularity, sovereignty, and covenantal faithfulness of God provided the theological materials with which Israel was able to develop the unique posture of a creative minority even in a situation of violent exile. Because it was born in exile, their vision lacked triumphalism—there is no precursor to Christendom here. But because of this unique configuration of their faith, neither was their vision apocalyptic—as though the gods of

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13 Ibid.
Babylon could pose a genuine threat to the one true and living God. Instead, they were able to keep their identity intact while contributing to the common good of a pagan empire. Sacks concludes:

> So you can be a minority, living in a country whose religion, culture, and legal system are not your own, and yet sustain your identity, live your faith, and contribute to the common good, exactly as Jeremiah said. It isn’t easy. It demands a complex finessing of identities. It involves a willingness to live in a state of cognitive dissonance. It isn’t for the fainthearted. But it is creative.

As American evangelicals find themselves in an increasingly secular environment, the two most obvious reactions might be to either desperately grasp at whatever levers of political and institutional power remain within reach, or to withdraw into the defensive posture of a beleaguered minority. But what Sacks shows us, and what the prophet Jeremiah prophesied to Israel in exile, that the third option of a creative exile may be what faithfulness entails today.

In fact, there are indications that this posture of a creative exile was exactly the posture adopted by the early church in the Roman Empire. This is nowhere more clear than in the epistle of 1 Peter. There, right from the opening verse, the Apostle Peter addresses the early church explicitly as “exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1 Pt 1:1). Then, in 1 Peter 1:17 he exhorts the first century Christians to “live out your time as foreigner [i.e. exiles] here in reverent fear.” The clear implication of this verse is that in the mind of Peter, the entirety of a Christian’s life in this world is the life of an exile. This world is not our home. We are pilgrims and sojourners. Perhaps most explicitly he writes in 1 Peter 2:11-17:

> Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that,
though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.

Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves. Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor.

What is remarkable is that Peter appeals to their condition as exiles as the premise of his argument to live with radical distinctiveness from the world, and also to live in submission and in support of all that is good and right in the world. Their exile status is the rationale for both countercultural distinctiveness and commitment to a common good. It is noteworthy, too, that Peter speaks of all of this without a trace of bitterness or disillusionment. The Christian’s status as an exile in this world is simply matter-of-fact because it is by God’s good design. It is this posture of a creative exile that public discipleship seeks to cultivate in the Christian disciple. In a cultural moment where categories to make sense of religions are limited to either private spirituality or political theocracy, the notion of Christian disciples seeking to live as creative exiles in a pluralistic context would simultaneously resist the privatization that would threaten the gospel itself while refusing the triumphalism of Christendom and empire.

Theological Anchor #4: Incarnation, Resurrection, and Place

A fourth theological anchor that grounds specifically the neighborhood and justice sphere of public discipleship is a theology of place. Walter Brueggemann in *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* has sketched a compelling biblical theology of place that highlights the central role that place plays in the entire
redemptive-historical narrative. From the Garden of Eden to the Promised Land to the Kingdom of Israel to the devastation of exile, Brueggemann convincingly argues that place features centrally through the entire narrative of salvation. In turning to the New Testament, however, it is easy to think that place gets something of a demotion. After all, the promise of salvation is no longer tied to the geographical location of the Promised Land and is instead universalized, with its reach now extending to all peoples to the ends of the earth. But far from reducing the role of physical place, the key doctrines of the New Testament—namely the doctrines of incarnation and resurrection—work powerfully to reinforce the importance of place in both God’s creational intent and in his plan to redeem not just disembodied souls, but all of the material creation. This emphatic affirmation of all of God’s material creation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ reinforces the fundamental dignity of human embeddedness in creation.

Place and the Incarnation

John Perkins signals the importance of the incarnation when thinking about Christian discipleship when he says “Jesus … didn’t commute to Earth one day a week and shoot back up to heaven. He left His throne and became one of us so that we might see the life of God revealed in Him … The incarnation is the ultimate relocation.” Perkins points out that when God came to rescue us, he did not do it from the comforts of home. Instead, he came to us by becoming an embodied being, and made his home among us by becoming embedded in his own creation. In order to redeem us, he had to


become one of us, limited to a single place and time. In order to make us his brothers and sisters, he first had to make us his neighbors by drawing near to us. *The Message* paraphrases John 1:14 like this: “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” The implications of the doctrine of the incarnation for discipleship and urban ministry are vast and profound. The incarnation provides the theological grounds for the manner in which we are called to inhabit the sphere of neighborhood and justice in at least two ways.

First, it means that Christian disciples have rich resources for seeking solidarity with our neighbors, regardless of who they are. In the incarnation, God was voluntarily throwing his future in with the human race. He did not redeem humanity from the outside; He took up humanity so that salvation would come from within and we would share a common destiny with Him. Christian discipleship is the call to embody and extend that same invitation no matter the location. In the city, then, it means placing ourselves in solidarity with our neighbors so that their concerns become our concerns, their needs our needs, their fears our fears. We live rooted in our places such that our neighbors see Christians as one of us, someone who has thrown in their lot with ours. Solidarity with our neighbors means that we seek their good because we know that our good is intertwined with their good simply by virtue of the fact that we inhabit the same place (Jeremiah 29).

A second implication of the doctrine of the incarnation as it pertains to a theology of place, is that it calls Christians to local particularity in their mission. In the Incarnation, God did not take upon himself humanity in general. He did not become a universal, generic human for all people in all times. He did not come and visit the whole world. He
became a particular person, at a particular time, in a particular place, with a particular language and a particular history. Yet the purpose of this particularity was salvation for all. What this means is that while it is easy to speak of loving and renewing the city as a generality, the actual outworking of this goal begins in the concrete particularities of where one lives and moves and has their being. Apart from this, loving the city quickly becomes an unactionable abstraction—safe because it is vague. The incarnation warns against this by saying that the omni-present God so loved the world, he sent his only Son to become one particular person who could only be in one place, in one time. If God had to become embodied and embedded in order to accomplish salvation for us, surely his disciples would have to do at least that. After all, no servant is greater than his master.

Place and the Resurrection

If the incarnation is God taking on a fleshly body, then the Resurrection is God restoring fleshly bodies for eternity. In the Resurrection, God did not discard the human body after enduring it for a while to redeem disembodied human souls. It states quite the opposite: that God’s salvation is nothing other than the redemption of bodily existence and the whole of human life together. Salvation is not a flight from this material world; it is the restoring of this material world as it was meant to be—a renewed heaven and a renewed earth. The resurrection of Christ presses the affirmation of our human physicality quite literally to infinity. But to be physical, material beings also necessarily means we must be placed and embedded beings. The doctrine of the resurrection has several implications for what it means to be a Christian disciple in the realm of neighborhood and justice.
First, it means paying attention to those who are physically near; meeting the physical needs of neighbors is important. As long as salvation is seen as merely a matter of the disembodied soul, the material needs of neighbors and a city will always be secondary. But if the business of redemption is the renewal of the material world, then any act that brings order where there was chaos, healing where there was brokenness, truth where there was falsehood, flourishing where there was impoverishment, life and dignity where there was death and decay—all of this is part of the renewing work of the kingdom.

Second, it is the ultimate affirmation that place matters to human identity. If the final destination of humanity is a renewed material creation, then place does not fade away in eternity. Instead eternity is where place is finally and gloriously restored. John Inge writes:

there has been what might be termed a ‘loss of place’ in human experience for very many people in the recent past. My research—and my experience—led me to believe that this [loss] is dehumanizing. … This is an important insight in a world in which the effects of globalization continue to erode people’s rootedness and experience of place. Attention given by the Christian community to place … will not only therefore afford nourishment to the community itself, but will be a powerful prophetic action.¹⁶

Re-orienting to place means it is impossible to reside in a neighborhood as mere consumers of a certain lifestyle or simply because the rent is affordable. Understanding that God’s work is to renew all of creation demonstrates that God has providentially sent humans to places where they can be agents of his work. And it is in valuing the places we live and caring deeply about the future of our neighborhoods that we find ourselves in solidarity with our other neighbors who live there. The resurrection not only brings

wholeness and integration to individual persons, but it brings the same wholeness and integration to entire communities. Place is to a community as a body is to an individual. It is the physical locus of our humanness.

Place and the Neighbor

A third theological theme that gives us a glimpse into the biblical importance of place is the New Testament emphasis on love of neighbor. The English word neighbor comes from the Old English “neigh” and “bauer” meaning near-builder. The idea is that neighbors are those who have built their livelihoods so close together that they share a common destiny and fate by virtue of their shared place. A neighbor in the Bible is, at times, distinguished from those who are brothers or family. In the Old Testament, the neighbor was often the foreigner who lived in Israel’s midst—not Israel and yet among Israel. By the first century A.D., the concept of a neighbor in the New Testament context seems to have been contracted to refer primarily to other Israelites. Jesus’ teachings about what it means to be a neighbor, however, directly challenged this cultural assumption, as will be seen below, particularly in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Scripturally speaking, a neighbor might be defined as the who is near yet different.

Two New Testament texts demonstrate the heightened focus on the neighbor. The first is in Luke 10 when Jesus asks an expert in the law how he sums up the Old Testament law. The young ruler replies that it is to love God and love neighbor. Jesus’ response is as simple as it is clear: “You are correct” (Lk 10:28). Likewise, in Mark 12, Jesus is asked what the greatest commandment in all the Old Testament is, and he says that it is to love God and to love neighbor—the so-called Great Commandment (Mk
The command to love one’s neighbor is second only to loving God as the most succinct summary of the law.

The second example is in the famous parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37). Here it is most clearly seen what Jesus meant when he called us to be neighbors. Three things are worth noting with regard to the sphere of neighborhood and justice. First, being a neighbor means paying attention to the needs of those who are near. All three characters in the parable were made aware of the need of the man on the street by means of his nearness. It was this nearness that put them in a position of moral responsibility. While the men of religious repute sought to avoid this responsibility by putting distance between them and the man in need—the text says they “passed by on the other side”—the Samaritan did the opposite. He went to him and in so doing acted as a neighbor. While nearness is a necessary condition for being a neighbor, it is not sufficient. It is an attentiveness to the needs of those who are near that makes a true neighbor.

Second, being a neighbor means going beyond the mere meeting of needs. What is remarkable about the Good Samaritan is that he did not help the man only insofar as it was convenient to him. His concern was not to do enough in order to appease his conscience and maintain a particular moral self-image. Instead, his primary concern was the genuine welfare of this man. So, he takes him to an inn on his own donkey and makes provision for him to ensure his recovery. His approach to the care of the injured man is profoundly relational. He treats him not as a charity case, but as a person. There is something profoundly humanizing and dignifying about the manner of his care. Thus, the re-placing and re-rooting of our selves in the physical places has the effect of humanizing
interactions with others, because the others to whom we relate are not just needs—they are our neighbors. As Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen argue in *The New Parish*, adopting a local neighborhood mindset causes one to have in view “all the relationships (including the land) where the local church lives out its faith together. It [situates us in] a geography large enough to live life together (live, work, play, etc.) and small enough to be known as a character within it.”\(^{17}\) It is interacting as known characters within a shared place that enables a more humanizing and relational approach to meeting peoples’ needs.

Third, the parable of the Good Samaritan shows that being a neighbor involves embracing the racial and socio-economic difference of those who are near. Though Samaritans were despised as racial inferiors, this Samaritan sees a man (presumably a Jew) dying on the street and sees not an enemy, but a fellow human. His act was more than mercy; it was an act of reconciliation. This was the great scandal of the parable. Remember the expert of the law was asking Jesus to define who his neighbor was expecting Jesus to narrow it to his fellow Jew. Instead, Jesus says we are called to be neighbors to anyone in need. In today’s context, that means being a neighbor is more than showing kindness to those who can afford to live in the same neighborhood. It means intentionally advocating for racial and socio-economic difference within our neighborhoods. Mark Gornik notes that “A relationship with Christ, as the parable of the Good Samaritan expresses, is defined not by being a neighbor in the passive sense but by finding ways to cross boundaries and to be a neighbor to the afflicted in ways that

\(^{17}\) Sparks, *The New Parish*, 22.
advance their flourishing.”¹⁸ Christians responding to the call to re-root themselves in place may be the first step to seeing holistic flourishing in our neighborhoods.

¹⁸ Mark Gornik, *To Live in Peace*, 118.
PART THREE

MINISTRY PRACTICE
CHAPTER 4

MINISTRY PLAN FOR PUBLIC DISCIPLESHIP
IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND JUSTICE SPHERE

Having situated this project within the contextual, literature, and theological landscapes, this chapter will outline the ministry plan for public discipleship at Redeemer. The first section will provide an overview of the overall goals and outcomes for public discipleship in general. This first section will also include a discussion of a critical insight that emerged in the course of our planning—the key distinction between a discipleship framework and a discipleship process at the church. The second section will unpack the three-fold strategy that has informed the initial development of this project in the life of the church. The third section will then provide a high level overview of the design of the program elements of public discipleship as it has been informed by Redeemer’s outcomes and strategy. Finally, the fourth section will speak briefly to the initial target audience and the ultimate scope of those Redeemer hopes to reach with this new approach.

Outcomes

Public discipleship grew out of a vision for a future at Redeemer in which church attendees were being more intentionally led into greater Christian maturity such that they could sustainably inhabit every sphere of their life with Christian distinctiveness. Because
of this whole-life focus, the public discipleship team began identifying program goals and outcomes with a commitment to define Christian discipleship in holistic terms. The three-fold rubric of know, be, and do provided a simple yet comprehensive way to think about discipleship in this holistic way. Having agreed upon these three categories, we worked to develop two outcomes within each category—for a total of six—that would guide an approach to public discipleship.

Know (growing in biblical wisdom)
- Locate key concepts in the Bible and identify the Bible’s five major storylines
- Synthesize biblical concepts to inform behaviors in the five spheres of life

Be (becoming a person of love)
- Experience personal gospel renewal in the five spheres of life
- Inhabit every sphere of life as one sent by Christ

Do (Engaging in disciple-making and spiritual practices)
- Engage in five key spiritual practices with regularity
- Pursue others to draw them into and deepen their relationship with Christ.

This section will unpack each of these three pairs of outcomes.

Know: Growing in Biblical Wisdom

The outcome priority in the category of knowing is the practical nature of biblical knowledge. As Augustine put it: “anyone who thinks that he has understood the divine Scriptures or any part of them, but cannot by his understanding build up this double love of God and neighbor, has not yet succeeded in understanding them.” In light of this emphasis, the first outcome is for people to be able to “locate key concepts in the Bible and identify the Bible’s five major storylines.” This outcome seeks a measurable way to

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1 See Appendix B below, which also includes outcomes for each sphere.

address the basic need for biblical literacy in the church today. Moreover, the emphasis on biblical storylines represents the push for practical knowledge. Biblical knowledge becomes transformative when Christians realize that the Bible is not just a book of morals or a collection of spiritual aphorisms; neither is it a book of stories of far-away cultures in far-off times. Instead, the Bible becomes transformative when Christians discover that it is their story—the story that makes sense of their world and brings meaning to their contemporary lives. Thus, familiarity with the five storylines of the Bible enables the disciple to situate themselves within that story.

A bit more about the five storylines may be helpful. Over the years, Redeemer noticed that a lot of the preaching and teaching that so many have found to be transformative have tended to fall along particular narrative arcs in the Bible. Looking more closely, these narrative arcs can be combined into five intertwined but distinct storylines. While space does not permit a fuller exposition of these five storylines, they are as follows: 1) law, transgression, and justification, 2) covenant, unfaithfulness, and the true covenant Lord, 3) home, exile, and home-coming 4) kingdom, rebellion, and shalom, and 5) creation, fall, and new creation. Each of these storylines can be very meaningfully tied with one of the five spheres of public discipleship. The storyline of law and justification speaks powerfully to the sphere of gospel identity; a Christian is fundamentally one who is *simul iustus et peccator*. The covenant and lord storyline relates to the sphere of church and mission; to be a Christian is to be a part of God’s covenant people. Home and exile speaks of family and relationship; it was the storyline of estrangement, alienation, and forgiveness. The narrative of kingdom and shalom situate neighborhood and justice into a biblical storyline in which the exercise of power is
meant to be used in the service of full human flourishing. Finally, the story of creation and new creation provide the narrative arc in which people can make sense of their work, as those invited into the creative and caring work of God. So the five storylines aligned elegantly with the five spheres of life. This meant that equipping for life in these spheres would not have to be limited to propositional truths. Instead, thoughtful teaching and preaching can re-narrate the baseline narratives that a Christian uses to inhabit a particular sphere of life with a biblical narrative. It was profoundly practical knowledge.

The second outcome under the knowing category is to “synthesize biblical concepts to inform behaviors in the five spheres of life.” Here again, the emphasis is on the practical and missional nature of knowledge; the effectiveness of public discipleship is not based on an individual’s ability to, say, pass a test on content. Instead, the goal was to see people synthesize biblical concepts and storylines for themselves in such a way that it begins to affect their on-the-ground decision-making in every sphere of their life and not just in the so-called spiritual or ethical realms of their life. Essential in this is a change in concrete behaviors in all the spheres of their lives—family, church, neighborhood, work, etc. Even outcomes of knowing needed to be pushing toward the public nature of discipleship.

Be: Becoming a Person of Love

The second pair of outcomes focuses on the experience and posture of the disciple Redeemer seeks to form. The first outcome is to “experience personal gospel renewal in every sphere of life.” Behind this outcome is a theological and spiritual conviction that has been at the heart of Redeemer’s approach to ministry from its inception. It is the
belief that the gospel is not just something that non-Christians need in order to get right with God so that they can move on to other, more advanced things. Instead, the gospel is what the Christian needs too in order to grow as a healthy disciple and avoid the twin pitfalls of legalism and licentiousness. What this outcome adds to that basic conviction is that the experience of being renewed by the gospel is not limited to listening to a sermon at church, or having one’s personal devotional time. Instead, the process of gospel formation is happening at all times, in all places because of the pervasive work of the Holy Spirit. The challenge for the Christian disciple is whether they are cultivating the eyes to see and experience the innumerable ways that the Spirit is constantly at work around them. For example, the challenges one faces in work—from needing to prove your value-add for your organization to searching for an identity through career accomplishments to quantifying your worth through your bonus—are opportunities that the Spirit can use to spark personal gospel renewal, provided one learns how to pay attention to him. Apart from that attentiveness, these experiences can be malformative moments that lead a person to need to earn a sense of worth and value through personal effort. It is all simply a matter of who or what one is paying attention to in every sphere of life.

The second outcome listed under the be category is that Christian disciples are formed to “inhabit every sphere of life as one sent by Christ.” This outcome is the other side of the coin of the first outcome of this pair. They, together, are attempting to capture what Nicolas Wolterstorff has referred to as the “systolic-diastolic beat” of the Christian
life.³ If the first outcome of experiencing gospel renewal in every sphere is the breathing in of God’s unconditional love for us in Christ, then this second outcome is the breathing out of knowing that one has been commissioned and sent by that same God to be a witness to the world and to seek its flourishing. These two outcomes together capture the two things that the Spirit is doing constantly, at all place and all times, in the life of the Christian: reminding them they are loved in Christ and sending them to love others in the name of Christ. Thus, part of the goal of public discipleship is to cultivate a moment-by-moment attentiveness to God in the Christian disciple such that they are aware both of his love for them and of his sending them out to love.

Do: Engaging in Spiritual Practices and Disciple-Making

The final pair of outcomes has to do with concrete behaviors Redeemer wants to see congregants engaging in as a result of public discipleship. The first of these outcomes, which is to equip people to “engage in five key spiritual practices with regularity,” focuses on the critical importance of spiritual practices in Christian formation. To go along with the five spheres of life and the five storylines of the Bible, five aligning key spiritual practices have been identified. The practice associated with the gospel identify sphere is a devotional life—a daily rhythm of Scripture and prayer. In the church and mission sphere, it is participating in the liturgy and sacraments of the church. For family and relationships, the practice is accountability. For neighborhood and justice, it is the practice of hospitality. In work and rest, it is Sabbath-keeping. These five

practices developed and sustained in the disciple’s life over time will be the key to long-term Christian formation. At Redeemer, this has been simplified in the way that our understanding of discipleship is communicated: “five storylines and five practices for five spheres.” The regularity with which a Redeemer attendee engages in these five spiritual practices will serve as a primary measure of the effectiveness of the approach.

In addition to these practices, the second do outcome is essentially that the Christian disciple will, in all areas of their life, seek to draw others into a deeper relationship with Christ. They will “pursue others to draw them into and deepen their relationship with Christ.” This disciple-making disciple mentality is meant to permeate every aspect of public discipleship. Too often in the experience of a large church, the greatest barrier to spiritual growth and evangelistic fruit is the assumption that church is something that is done to an attendee. Large churches can tend to breed a passivity and a consumer mindset when it comes to one’s spiritual life. As a result of public discipleship, it is hoped that Redeemer will begin to see people push back against that tendency and start to take ownership of their own spiritual growth while also taking it upon themselves to make disciples of other Christians.

**Strategy**

Our strategy for implementing public discipleship is guided by three strategic values. In every major decision, our team has come back to these values to ask ourselves whether the decisions we are making are consistent with them. They have served as critical guidelines for the trajectory of our work. These three strategic core values can be most succinctly articulated with three simple Es: embed, enter, and equip.
Embed into the Life of the Church

The first strategic value is to embed discipleship deeply into the life and worship of the local church. This has been a top priority from Redeemer’s beginning. There was broad agreement that the last thing Redeemer needed was yet another program or set of offerings that would add to the clutter of everything that was already being done. While it was recognized that at some level, discipleship is going to require learning experiences like classes, retreats, etc., our entire team was highly committed to first asking if there were ways to be more intentional about spiritual formation in the regular and ongoing life of the church. This commitment was an important reflection on the conviction of the public nature of Christian discipleship. While critical aspects of Christian formation of course require individual spirituality, it was important to reframe the discussion of discipleship so as to center it first and foremost on the public life of the visible people of God (i.e., the local church), in the public act worship of God, all for the good of the world and the glory of God. So our first mantra was “embed, embed, embed” and it radically transformed the approach in several ways.

First, it meant that Redeemer’s public discipleship framework (i.e. the five spheres of life) could not be limited to serving as the organizing principle for just a discipleship program. Instead, it needed to begin functioning as the organizing framework for the entire church itself. Thus, what began as a focused framework just for discipleship expanded to become an organizational framework for the church as a whole. The five spheres of life would not just be used to organize the adult education classes that
were being offered, they would also have to reorganize all of Redeemer’s content, from white papers to sermons to small group curriculum. They would also need to inform the organization of the book table, announcements, and lists of events. It would have to function as the primary organizing principle anywhere that anyone would interact with Redeemer content and programming. Part of the goal here was to help people see that everything that the church does is for the purpose of discipling Christians. It also meant that anything that was being done that did not fit into this overall purpose and framework would have to be shut down. This framework began to focus all the work Redeemer was doing.

Second, we began to see that this framework could do more work for us than just organize our programs and content. It had the potential to give shape to our church calendar. As we thought about how public discipleship would be presented to the congregation in the next ministry year, we agreed that the best way to go about it was to introduce one sphere at a time and have a five-week sermon series on that particular sphere. All of our Community Groups would go through a study on that particular sphere while also offering adult classes on the sphere. A key part of our vision, which will be discussed below, was to introduce online independent learning paths. These paths would also be released for the first time during this season. As we began to see the timing of offerings aligning, it then began to make sense to move the Sundays that we have traditionally used to highlight different aspects of our ministries (e.g. Faith and Work Sunday, Hope For New York Sunday, etc.) to align with these new seasons. And finally, we are envisioning even the specific liturgical elements of our worship services to take on emphases that align with the particular season. For example, the call to worship, the
prayer of confession, the prayers of the people, the testimonies, etc. during the neighborhood and justice season would use Scripture or historic prayers that speak to themes of place, neighboring, and the call to justice. This entire process resulted in a church calendar that was significantly shaped by five seasons (See Appendix C). Not only was discipleship being embedded as a program-organizing framework, it was also being embedded into the rhythms and worship of the church.

Third, we soon discovered that even introducing a framework for discipleship that could organize church content and calendar was not enough. Even if all of our programs were clearly organized into the five spheres, the average congregant still would not be sure how to get started or what progress might look like for them. In addition to a clear discipleship framework, we also needed a simple but clear discipleship process. After some discussion, we agreed that the most simple discipleship process that we were constructing was as follows:

**Figure 1: A simple discipleship process at Redeemer**

1. **Attend Sunday worship**
   A
   
2. **Use Redeemer devotional**
   B
   
3. **Join Community Group**
   C
   
4. **Become a member**
   D
   
5. **Discern personal callings**
Having mapped this process out, we saw that the task before us was to clearly define how
a person moves from one step to the next. That is to say, the events listed by the numbers
in Figure 1 were not our primary concern; the arrows marked by letters were. We needed
to clearly define and develop Letter A, the process by which someone goes from
attending Sunday worship to using the Redeemer devotional. Then, we would have to
move on and do the same for Letter B, then Letter C, and finally Letter D. All of this
meant that if we were serious about our mantra “embed, embed, embed” our work would
have to expand and go beyond the creation of specific learning experiences that fell
within a discipleship framework. It would also have to include the creation and
implementation of a clear process for discipleship that would serve as the backbone of
our church experience. This was such a significant expansion of the scope of our work
that we felt the need to bring it to the church’s executive team to ensure that we were the
empowered group to begin to plan and execute these changes. After significant
discussion at that level, we were given the green light to develop and implement this
discipleship process for all of Redeemer. Our commitment to this first strategic core
value was paying off in major ways.

Enter into Their Rhythms

The second E of our strategic values was doing all we could to enter into the
existing rhythms of the lives of busy New Yorkers. The challenge of time was a perennial
issue that seemed to short-circuit our previous attempts at more in-depth discipleship. As
we explored why, we came to the conclusion that we, too often, ask people to leave their
contexts—the spheres of their lives—and devote substantial time based on a schedule and
calendar that worked for the church. This often reinforced the belief that Christian formation happens primarily in the church and its programs. But our theological commitment to form “creative exiles” meant that we needed to figure out new ways that we could enter into the rhythms of our peoples’ lives and do meaningful formation out in the context of their day-to-day experience.

The formation and equipping of business executives provided a key model for us. As we looked at publications like the Harvard Business Review, we saw that one of the primary ways that business executives were being formed and equipped for their roles was through real-time resources that addressed real-time challenges. The Harvard Business Review both in its print and online forms provided high-quality, curated, and easily accessible resources that were available whenever the executive experienced a need for them. These observations led us to consider what it might look like to have high-quality, curated resources that would be available to Christians for them to access on their own terms. Redeemer had plenty of high-quality content that was developed over its twenty-eight year history—sermons, videos, white papers, Bible studies, etc. The problem was that this content was inaccessible to the average person. They remained in stacks in a back room somewhere, which made it impossible to sort through. We saw that if we curated that material, that is to say if we took carefully selected pieces out of storage and created a showroom that provided a guided learning experience, it could prove to be an enormously valuable tool for discipleship. Because of our commitment to entering into peoples’ rhythms, we knew that this would have to be a major part of our strategy. Redeemer City to City and our Center for Faith and Work had already been
experimenting with an online learning platform that was proving to be very effective.⁴ So we adopted the same platform and have begun to prototype online learning paths for both individuals and smaller groups of three or four.⁵

A second approach that grew out of this commitment to enter into peoples’ rhythms was the development of a church-wide, email-based devotional. We started to refer to it on staff as the Redeemer Book of Common Prayer. We felt that the email format was a perfect way to enter into peoples’ daily lives. It would be a five-day-a-week, morning and evening devotional built around Scripture. The morning devotional would feature a Psalm and a New Testament reading while the evening devotional would feature a Psalm and an Old Testament reading. The devotional would also feature common prayer that utilized both the historic prayers of the church as well as providing guided prayer points for free prayer that were organized around the five spheres, one for each weekday.⁶ This devotional would enter into the rhythms of peoples’ lives and serve not only to assist people in their devotional lives; it would also unite the entire church in a shared life of common prayer. It was both individual and corporate at the same time.

Between the devotional and the curated online learning paths, we sensed that we could provide very meaningful spiritual formation for people without ever having to ask them to join a program and change the rhythms of their week.

⁴ See https://learn.redeemercitytocity.com/ and https://equip.faithandwork.com/
⁵ See https://learn.redeemer.com/
⁶ For further explanation of these devotionals go to www.redeemer.com/daily.
Equip through Special Seasons of Intensive Learning

While we came to see how important it would be to enter into the regular rhythms of a persons’ life, we also felt that deeper Christian formation does require special seasons of focused learning. We captured this third strategic value with our final E, to equip. Going back to the best practices involved in developing an effective business executive, while resources like the Harvard Business Review played a critical role, that form of learning alone was not enough to fully equip some for that role. The majority of business executives at some point had to create the time to enroll in a two-year MBA program, for example, and many continue to engage in active learning through seminars, workshops, retreats, and other learning experiences with their peers. These insights, along with our experience with the Gotham Fellowship discussed above, showed that we could challenge our congregation to engage in a clearly defined season of purposeful and intensive learning. So, in addition to embedding discipleship into the life of the church, and entering into the peoples’ rhythms through devotionals and curated, online learning paths, we would offer shorter four- to six-week classes, weekend conferences and retreats, and three-month intensive cohorts in each of the five spheres. While these elements might be the most visible and easily recognizable pieces of public discipleship, they really are just the beginning. Because of Redeemer’s prior commitments to embedding and entering, a large portion of the formation and discipleship envisioned will occur outside of these more visible programs of the church. So, a fuller picture of our approach with public discipleship mapped along these three strategic values might look something like the following:
Figure 2: Embed, Enter, Equip

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Embed in life of the church</th>
<th>Enter into their rhythms</th>
<th>Equip through special seasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizing framework (content &amp; programs)</td>
<td>Devotional</td>
<td>Four to six week classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday liturgy and seasons of church calendar</td>
<td>Curated online paths (individuals &amp; triads)</td>
<td>Weekend conferences/retreats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A clearer discipleship process</td>
<td>CG studies</td>
<td>Three-month cohorts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It has been gratifying to see how these three strategic values have effectively guided our decision-making, resulting in an approach to discipleship consistent with our values.

**Program Design**

This section will provide a brief overview of the program design of public discipleship. It is important to keep in mind the priority our team gave to the strategic value of embedding discipleship into the life of the church as discussed above. While this section will provide an orientation to the more visible and programmatic elements of public discipleship, the foundational conviction of our approach is the belief that the invisible, non-programmatic elements will be the locus of most substantial and sustained formation of disciples in the long run. Said another way, the bulk of the iceberg of our approach to discipleship is intentionally submerged in the rhythms and structures of the church; the tip of that iceberg is important for its visibility and warrants specific treatment here, but it is just the tip.
Five Storylines and Five Practices for the Five Spheres

At the highest level, the framework for public discipleship is organized around the five spheres of life: gospel identity, church and mission, family and relationships, neighborhood and justice, and work and rest. This framework serves to organize all of our content and offerings at Redeemer. Within these five spheres, our focus is on equipping people with five storylines of Scripture and five historic practices that correspond to the five spheres. The table below summarizes these key elements:

Figure 3: Five Storylines and Five Practices for the Five Spheres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Storyline</th>
<th>Gospel Identity</th>
<th>Church + Mission</th>
<th>Family + Relationships</th>
<th>N’hood + Justice</th>
<th>Work + Rest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Storyline</strong></td>
<td><strong>Law, sin, justification</strong></td>
<td><strong>Covenant, unfaithfulness, Lord</strong></td>
<td><strong>Home, exile, return</strong></td>
<td><strong>Kingdom, rebellion, shalom</strong></td>
<td><strong>Creation, fall, new creation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Practice</strong></td>
<td><strong>Devotional Life (prayer + Scripture)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Worship (liturgy + sacrament)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Accountability</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hospitality</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sabbath keeping</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To equip people with the storylines and practices for the five spheres, we are preparing to use five key delivery methods (in addition to the ways this will inform the liturgy and seasons of the church as a whole) within each of the five spheres. Each of these formats will involve creating curriculum and designing learning experiences including curated online learning paths, five-week community group studies, four- to six-week classes, three-session weekend retreats, and twelve-week intensives. Eventually, the goal will be to offer a suite of learning experiences for each of the five spheres that will

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7 See Appendix A below for a visual representation
include these five formats. For a visual representation of this see Appendix D below. Each of these learning formats will emphasize teaching on the corresponding biblical storyline as well as other related theological topics and will teach and reinforce practical ways people can incorporate the historic practice associated with each sphere. Classes, cohorts, and conferences will be strategically offered at various times of the ministry year, particularly during the season of our new church calendar where the entire church will be focusing on that theme.

Discipleship, Everywhere

Our ultimate goal is that as people engage in these more visible learning experiences, they will begin to notice the less visible ways that Redeemer is reinforcing and deepening the reach of public discipleship in peoples’ lives. One more programmatic example of this is that each delivery format mentioned above will intentionally point people to both the online, curated paths and the email devotional as two ways for people to continue to pursue their own spiritual formation within the rhythms of their life long after the class is done. The intention here is for people to see that the class or cohort or conference is a supplement to their own ongoing spiritual formation which is happening all the time. Another example is that, after taking some of the classes, we believe that people will begin to notice how the email devotion is leading them to pray for renewal in each of the spheres of life. Now their personal prayer life is being shaped by public discipleship. They will also begin to notice how the liturgical elements of our Sunday worship services help to reinforce and deepen their experience formation around these spheres. Our goal is that peoples’ experience in these more programmatic elements of
public discipleship will begin to help them to see that discipleship is happening to them everywhere.

**Target Population**

Our eventual target population for participation in public discipleship is the roughly 5,500 regular attenders of the three Redeemer churches (East Side, West Side, and Downtown). Our goal is, within a year of launch, to have more than 2,500 people subscribed to our daily devotional emails, with average open rates of 60 percent. We will be hosting an inaugural fall gospel identity conference, where we hope to see 1,000 Redeemer congregants in attendance. There we will introduce both the devotional and our online learning paths. Our goal is to have 1,000 people progressing through in an online path by the end of the ministry year (June 2018). We will also be launching five classes, one for each sphere, in each of the three congregations over the course of the ministry year. Our goal is to engage 750 people in these classes and using the classes to direct people to continued learning through the online paths. While we will be prototyping retreats and cohorts in the first year, we will not be launching them formally until the fall of 2018 where we hope to engage those who have completed specific classes or online paths to deepen their formation.

Currently, our primary target audience in our prototyping phase have either been lay leaders or individuals who have indicated an interested in helping us develop these materials. A group of more than 100 lay leaders in our East Side congregation is currently prototyping the email devotional and has already provided us feedback that led to changes in design and approach. Each of the three Redeemer congregations and our
Center for Faith and Work has been assigned to develop materials for one of the five spheres. As part of that development, classes and community group studies are being prototyped with leaders in their ministries. Our online paths are currently in development and will be prototyped a group of individuals who, in response to a church-wide survey, indicated their interest in helping us. And finally, our Center for Faith and Work will be bringing their twelve years of experience with classes, cohorts, and retreats to help us develop and refine these delivery methods.

Our ultimate hope, however, is that the making of disciples will lead to a tangible impact in the entire city as Christians learn to more faithfully inhabit every sphere of life with Christian distinctiveness. In that sense, our target population is much broader. Our hope is that those who live in the same neighborhoods as our congregants would experience a tangible benefit because of Christian neighbors who are more rooted and present where God has placed them. We hope that families, relationships and friendships—across differences in faith, race, class, and gender—will be meaningfully strengthened and renewed all throughout the city. We hope that workplace and industries will begin to see signs of renewal, in part due to Christians who have been formed to inhabit their daily work as a sacred calling from God to love our neighbors as ourselves. The true target population, at the risk of sounding grandiose, is actually the entire city of New York.
CHAPTER 5
IMPLEMENTATION, PROCESS, AND EVALUATION

This chapter outlines the tactics of implementation that will be used for the neighborhood and justice sphere of public discipleship. This implementation will follow four broad phases. The first phase will be prototyping. This section will include initial feedback received and course changes that had to be made in response. The second phase will be a broad launch at the Redeemer churches in September 2017. The primary components of this launch will be discipleship as the stated church-wide goal, a year-long sermon series on discipleship at Redeemer, and the inaugural run of an annual discipleship conference in the fall. The third phase will be ongoing implementation of various elements of public discipleship throughout the year. This will include online paths, community group studies, classes, and retreats. The final phase will be ongoing evaluation and optimization.

Phase 1 (Fall 2016 – Summer 2017): Prototyping

In the summer of 2016, the senior leadership empowered a group of representative staff from each of the three Redeemer congregations and the Center for Faith and Work to serve as the public discipleship team. This group began meeting
weekly with periodic full- and half-day offsite meetings. The initial three months were dedicated to achieving alignment and agreement on what we mean by discipleship and our overall approach, much of which has been outlined above. While we knew we had much work to do to continue to build clarity and consensus, by the fall of 2016, we were committed to spending the upcoming ministry year developing and prototyping key delivery formats of our approach.

The first step was to find someone to catalogue all of Redeemer’s materials and tag them with the five spheres for internal purposes. With that work done at the end of the summer 2016, we were able to assign specific spheres to different Redeemer departments (i.e. the three congregations or CFW) and sought to empower each group to take ownership of the development of their entire sphere to ensure continuity and consistency. The first two projects that were assigned were the development of a six-week class that we could offer in the 2016-17 ministry year as a prototype, and an initial resources list for our online paths. With this approach, we were able to develop a high quality first version of four of the five classes, and were able to test them several times throughout the year as part of our regular class offerings.

The feedback we received on the six-week Neighborhood and Justice class was overwhelmingly positive. Participants particularly appreciated the practical and local nature of the topics that were covered, which included issues of race, gentrification, privilege, and reconciliation. The early versions of this class were heavier on content, but user feedback revealed that nearly all the participants wanted more question and answer time to process the topics in community. This led to a substantial adjustment of our approach resulting in equal time given to content delivery and peer discussion.
The online reading paths proved to be more difficult to develop than anticipated. First, staff had to become familiar with a new online platform (Pathwright). We had to conduct basic training on how to build a class through Pathwright. Then we discovered that we needed to obtain copyright permission for the use of certain resources, even those developed by Redeemer. Finally, scouring through the plethora of resources at Redeemer in order to curate them has proven to be challenging. The main way we were able to test the usefulness of this online platform this past year was creating supplemental enrichment experiences that went along with the Neighborhood and Justice class. This included audio and video resources that engaged with current issues of local justice, as well as articles and book chapters for further study.

Our participant surveys revealed that for many, the flexibility of the online enrichment experiences proved to be very effective. Some even stated that the effectiveness of online experience exceeded that of the in-class component. What remains to be seen, however, is whether the effectiveness of the online format is dependent on an in-class element to help provide context and structure for the learner. In fact, our Center for Faith and Work reported that their previous attempts at offering online learning experiences independent of in-class learning were not particularly effective. If this proves to be the case in the upcoming year, it may mean that we will need to focus our online learning strategy to supplement and deepen in-class learning.

As the year moved on, we turned our attention to developing formative retreat and weekend experiences. The West Side congregation ran a test retreat for its community group leaders on the topic of “A Countercultural Community: Sex, Money, and Power” as part of the church and mission sphere. We learned that our previous concerns about
peoples’ willingness to pay a registration fee and commit an entire weekend away were not as significant as we feared. Though, as expected, families with young children were underrepresented. Our Center for Faith and Work successfully executed a retreat on the practice of Sabbath-keeping for the work and rest sphere. They offered the retreat as an optional culminating weekend to their regular classes and found that bundling the retreat with a class was an effective approach. The Downtown congregation experimented with a weekend in-city seminar rather than a sleep away retreat. They prototyped a three-session seminar on the importance of accountability for the family and relationships sphere.

Overall, we learned that there is a stronger willingness to commit to a weekend of formation than we had previously assumed. However, we also learned that the single most important component to its effectiveness was previous relationships. For many, one of the main reasons they attended was because they personally knew several people (whether other Community Group leaders, or Center for Faith and Work classmates) who would be there. We also heard from participants that the retreat setting was an excellent way to handle more sensitive topics (like sexuality), spiritual topics (like Sabbath), and relational topics (like accountability). The high-relationship context of a retreat created an environment of trust and safety that allowed for more freedom to explore more personal topics.

Meanwhile, each department was also working on developing a five-week study for our community groups. These studies will be used by the entire church in the next ministry year (2017-18) and will form the backbone of the broader sermon series for that year. They would need to be textually driven, and would have to include a weekly exercise focused on equipping people to begin integrating the relevant spiritual practice
into their lives in the context of their community group. Eventually, the plan will be to include at the end of each study a note directing people to the related online path for further, individualized learning.

Through the prototyping of these studies, we heard from both leaders and participants that many of the studies did not generate a robust discussion in their groups. The questions were often too academic or content-driven. They were asking questions that, apart from a commentary or deeper theological education, simply could not be generated in the course of a discussion. This feedback led to a revisiting of the kinds of questions we ask in our community group studies, not just for our public discipleship studies but in general. The community group team is currently working through how to ask more unsettling questions in the course of a study.

Finally, the public discipleship team also developed a Redeemer email devotional. We decided on a five-day-a-week Bible reading plan, with a review email on Saturdays to allow people to catch up on anything they may have missed during the week. The Bible-reading portion takes people through the Psalms three times in one year, the New Testament once a year, and the Old Testament once every three years. The morning prayer email included a collect from historic prayer resources (like the Book of Common Prayer), a section on praying the Psalms, a New Testament reading, public discipleship themed prayer points for suggested prayer, all concluding with the Lord’s Prayer. In the evening, the format was similar, but an Old Testament reading replaced the New Testament reading, and the prayers of intercession were changed to prayers of thanksgiving.
The initial feedback from surveys has been overwhelmingly positive. Having a guide to both prayer and Scripture readily available proved to be enough of a prompt that it resulted in people spending much more time in prayer and Scripture than they otherwise would have. People also appreciated the ways in which the devotional gave users permission to only use parts of it and not to feel pressure to get through all of it, all the time. That was critical in helping people not to feel overwhelmed. For many, having the full text of Scripture in the body of the email was helpful but also felt overwhelming. This was particularly true for newer Christians. Many of these same users, however, admitted that if they needed to click through to get to the text, they probably would end up skipping much of the Scripture reading. In response to this feedback, our team developed a short and a long version of the email. The short version included only the Psalm for the day and may be more helpful to newer Christians or those newer to daily Scripture reading. The long version retained the New and Old Testament readings. Our plan is to offer this more broadly starting on the first Sunday of Advent 2017.

**Phase 2 (Fall 2017): Initial Launch**

As our development and prototype phase nears its close, we are beginning to prepare for our fall public launch to the three Redeemer congregations. There are essentially five elements to a successful initial launch. The first is making discipleship our church-wide ministry theme. This enables us to focus the attention and energy of our entire staff as well as our congregants to emphasize discipleship this coming year. That decision was made earlier this year and the process of communicating that emphasis to all of our departments and staff is already underway. The initial response of the staff has
been overwhelmingly positive, with groups of staff members wanting to see how this new emphasis on discipleship should impact our church’s core values, staff onboarding, and even performance evaluations. Along with this general communication, we have also been intentionally keeping the staff up to date the some of the specific of our work so that people can begin to think through how their particular departments and areas of influence can support and extend its impact.

Related closely to this, the second element is planning the sermon series for the entire ministry year to align with public discipleship. Historically, the senior pastor made decisions around the preaching for the year during his summer study leave. However, the public discipleship team was given the authority to develop the sermon series for the year in order to ensure the most effective launch possible. This decision will also help ensure that its beginning would be deeply embedded in the life of the church. For 2017-18, then, there will be five five-week sermon series (with breaks during Advent, Easter, and the summer as has been customary), one devoted to each of the five spheres of public discipleship. The entire year will kick off with a two-week series introducing public discipleship as a whole, and will end with a two-week series recapping and synthesizing the themes from the entire year. Having a public discipleship sermon series also means that more than 300 community groups across the three Redeemer churches will be using the companion community group studies, deepening the impact even further. A more specific overview of the sermon series can be found below in Appendix E.

The third element is the successful execution of a large discipleship conference in the fall. This event may be the signal event that communicates to the congregation a renewed emphasis on discipleship at Redeemer. It has been nearly fifteen years since the
last time Redeemer put on a church-wide discipleship conference. This conference will be particularly timely given that Tim Keller, our senior pastor, will have transitioned out of the pulpit on July 1, 2017, making this the next time a congregant hears Keller. It will signal the new relationship Keller will have with the congregation—not as preacher, but as trainer and equiper. The two-day conference will explore the differences between how the gospel forms an identity in a person and how our culture today understands identity formation. The dates for the conference have been set and the search for a venue that can accommodate 1,000 people in both plenary and breakout formats is currently ongoing. This conference is also where we will publicly launch our Redeemer devotional along with a breakout orienting people to the thinking behind the devotional and practical training how to get the most out of them.

The fourth element to this public launch is a timed roll-out of our online paths and adult classes. During each of the five-week sermon series, we will be releasing the related online path for broad use at the church. Our hope is that in timing this roll-out, it will garner more focused engagement from the church at large, while also giving us time to adjust to any feedback or user behaviors in order to optimize this platform as a means for formation. The greatest concern with the online paths will be whether the congregation is ready to adopt a new technology platform for these purposes. Along with the timed roll-out of our online paths, we would also be scheduling our offerings of our public discipleship classes to coincide with the sermon series.

The fifth element is, at this point, the least clear. As discussed in Chapter 4 above, the value of having discipleship deeply embedded into the life of the church has opened up conversations around clarifying our discipleship process at Redeemer, making it the
backbone of everything we are doing as a church, and clearly communicating it to congregation at large. Recognizing that the identification and development of this discipleship process seemed to go beyond the original scope of the charter of this team, the group went back to the senior leadership of the church and presented the importance of a clearly defined discipleship process. The result of that meeting was an expansion of the charter of this team not only to identify but also to implement this clear discipleship process. Our goal is to have something ready for the fall as part of this initial launch, but as of today, the team is in only early stages of consensus building and development.

**Phase 3 (Spring 2018 – Ongoing): Level Two Implementation**

Once these major elements of public discipleship have been launched, the public discipleship team will then turn its efforts towards the development and launch of the 200-level offerings of public discipleship. The initial launch introduces people to a sermon series, a community group study, a conference, a devotional, online paths, and a suite of introductory classes. But as we consider where someone might go to explore any of these themes more deeply, we have recognized a need to develop that next level. So Phase 3 of our implementation will be to design, develop, and test a three-month intensive cohort-based learning experience for each of the five spheres that will take participant deeper into these topics. These three-month intensive may never be announced to the general public and will likely only be available to those who have completed a class or perhaps made a certain amount of progress on the online path. These three-month intensives would be much more like a graduate-level seminar, driven by peer discussion and hands-on learning. It will likely include practical elements like a group
project or ministry proposal as part of the experience. These intensives will eventually be led by trained lay leaders who have gone through all the materials in this particular sphere. Alumni of our Gotham Fellowship program are prime candidates for these leadership roles. These cohorts would also continue to reinforce the basic practices associated with the sphere only challenging participants to go deeper in those practices.

In addition to the intensives, the implementation of Level Two learning experiences will include an intermediate and advanced level online learning path. These paths might take people into more advanced articles, book chapters, or lectures on important topics within each sphere. Learners at this level may be invited to invite-only equipping events put on by expert lecturers that explore more advanced topics. They might also be trained and sent out to start triads using the more introductory level online paths so that they begin to serve as disciple-making disciples in our congregations. They may also be asked to lead workshops at future conferences, or start teaching some of the introductory classes. As we track those learning at the 200-level, they will become key leaders not only to serve within public discipleship, but in the church and out in the world as well.

In addition to these primary elements, there may be interest in developing a Level Two community group study, or 200-level Sunday classes as well. At this time, our emphasis is to bring fewer focused offerings rather than inundating our congregation with multiple options. But it may be the case that in two or three years, there may be a desire and capacity for higher-level offerings. But a key element in this Level Two Implementation will be to have the goal of activating learners at this level to be leaders and disciplers in their areas of gifts and passions.
Phase 4 (Spring 2018 – Ongoing): Evaluation and Optimization

While this phase of evaluation and optimization is listed here as Phase 4, the reality is that this process of feedback and improvement will be an ongoing part of every phase of this work, both in its implementation and in its ongoing use. For example, one of the first things the public discipleship team decided to do back in summer 2016 was to engage the Barna Group and ask them to do an initial study of the state of discipleship at Redeemer to ensure that we were addressing real gaps and needs. Barna hosted several key focus groups comprised of a cross-section of our congregation and created a report that has informed our process from the beginning. Then, in March 2017, we commissioned Barna to conduct a congregation-wide survey to give us broader sense of the needs out there. We also asked Barna to create this church-wide survey in such a way that it would serve as a baseline benchmark to help us measure whether our efforts with public discipleship were making a tangible difference in the spiritual growth of our congregants. We were able to get about 2,000 survey responses, giving us a very strong sample size for our congregation.

Another example of the importance of evaluation and feedback is that, through the prototyping process, we have begun to develop assessment surveys of everything that we are doing. Our Center for Faith and Work, because of their twelve years of experience in creating learning experiences for New Yorkers, led the way in creating surveys that help us get a sense for whether our offerings are achieving their desires goals. As we continue to prototype classes, we are in the process of standardizing these surveys so that we can compare results across different formats to help us see what is working, what is
not, and what needs to change. This process of actively seeking out the input of the congregation is a new competency that the public discipleship team has begun to establish as part of a new culture at Redeemer.

All of this feedback is critical because one of the things that we have been saying as a team is that whatever curriculum we produce in this first version of public discipleship will almost certainly not be what ends up being the most effective. We have adopted a posture from the tech industry, the posture of seeking to produce a minimum viable product at launch. What this means is that what we launch with must be a viable product, or else we risk losing credibility with the people we are trying to engage. And yet, at the same time, we need to remind ourselves that we are producing a minimum viable product. This mindset encourages realistic expectations of what can be produced in a first version. It also creates a situation in which user feedback is sought out and valued, rather than received as criticism or with defensiveness. To create a minimum viable product is to invite the user to be a part of the development process. As such, while the initial launch and the level two implementation are daunting tasks in themselves, our team recognizes that these phases are just the beginning. A commitment to feedback and optimization means that we are going to have to commit going resources to constantly improve every aspect of public discipleship—from the online paths to retreat experiences to the devotional.

A final aspect of evaluation will also have to include evaluation of the effectiveness of public discipleship by the senior leaders of the three Redeemer churches. This process is particularly important during this season of transition at Redeemer, as we go from one large institution, to a tightly-knit network of independent churches.
discipleship was always seen as the software that would integrate peoples’ experience at Redeemer, even as it transitions to multiple churches. But in a more diffuse leadership model, commitment to public discipleship cannot be mandated in the same way that it could in a more institutional leadership model. As such, it has been a high priority of the entire team to actively communicate and demonstrate the value of this shared approach to discipleship. These changes were also a part of the desire to ensure that discipleship would be embedded in the congregations and not a program that could be used or ignored. But the point here is that the process for evaluation by the senior leaders of this approach will be critical to its long-term success. If evaluated positively, a potential Phase 5 of our implementation could be to translate this approach into easily reproducible products and resources that could be widely disseminated in the New York City context and beyond.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This project began with a discussion of three primary contextual challenges to discipleship that the urban church faces today. The first was the challenge of a divided world—one that, in effect, sealed off the private world from the public. The second was the challenge of a fragmented life. This was the idea that coherent identity formation becomes problematic in a pluralistic world—a world of no meaning and many meanings at the same time. The third was the challenge of transience and permanence in the city. Modern urban people experience a rootlessness that can leave their lives unmoored. This project has sought to make the case that discipleship in urban churches today must address these three foundational challenges in order to form Christian disciples that are biblically faithful and contextually sound. Furthermore, this project has presented an approach to discipleship that suggests a potential solution to these contemporary challenges—public discipleship at Redeemer Presbyterian Church. This final section concludes by summarizing the main features of public discipleship with an eye toward reflecting on how they address the primary challenges of our modern context.

The simplest way to capture the essence of public discipleship would be to describe it as an approach to discipleship that is built around five storylines and five practices for five spheres of life. Those three elements in that basic description directly address the three primary challenges we face in our current context today. First, the starting point for public discipleship was traditional starting points of doctrines, spiritual disciplines, or ethics. Instead, an initial key insight was to start out in the contemporary workaday world of an average person’s life. Public discipleship begins in the various spheres of one’s ordinary life. This starting point grew out of the conviction that an
approach to discipleship that addressed the challenges of the modern world could not begin in areas that the culture had already deemed as matters of private opinion. Thus, the conviction that a new approach to discipleship had to be situated first and foremost within the spheres of a person’s life was a direct attempt to breach the sacred wall that divides public and private in our culture today. If Christian discipleship were to be resituated in the shared public spheres of neighborhood, work, and social relationships, then it would be difficult to relegate the significance of the Christian faith to a private spirituality. Christians would believe that to trust in Jesus Christ as savior was not just the secret knowledge that earned you a pass into a disembodied afterlife. They would know that it meant that there was now a new euangelion, a new ekklesia, a new leitourgeo, and a new proclamation to our culture that, indeed, “Jesus is Lord.” Thus, identifying the five spheres of shared life as the primary locus of discipleship bears witness to an alternative way to inhabit the world in a culture that is divided into public and private.

The second main feature of public discipleship is its focus on the five biblical storylines—storyline that re-narrate the Christian’s purpose and calling in each sphere of life. This narrative emphasis, far from being academic or theoretical in nature, serves the profoundly practical function of bringing integration and coherence to a person’s sense of purpose and identity. No matter what sphere an individual inhabits, the story of God’s redemption of the world found in Scripture provides the integrating narrative that makes sense of every aspect of a Christian’s life. This, far more than propositional teaching or doctrinal clarity, equips the Christian to maintain a stable identity no matter who they are with or what role they are inhabiting. This approach offers an attractive alternative to the second foundational challenge that our context presents: the challenge of a fragmented
self in a pluralistic world. While the difference one encounters in a city as diverse as New York can certainly be experienced as richness in a secular view of the world, that richness often leads to a bewildering relativism that can render the various aspects of a fragmented life in coherent and fractured. In contrast, the five biblical storylines offer a nuanced and complex, but integrated and coherent story that makes sense of a complex world. After all, the difference one encounters is all a part of the burgeoning difference created by the God of Genesis 1 and 2 and then subsequently cultivated and developed by his image-bearers. The richness of difference, then, draws us towards interdependent integration rather than independent fragmentation. The five biblical storylines offer a compelling alternative to this second contextual challenge.

Finally, the five spheres of public discipleship are informed not only by the five biblical storylines, but by five Christian practices that shape and form a Christian over time. This practice-driven approach to Christian formation existentially resituates the Christian into the tradition and history of the church of all places and all times. The ancient practices of reading Scripture, prayer, liturgy, sacrament, hospitality, accountability and Sabbath-keeping create habits that daily re-place us in the family tree of the history of the people of God. Therefore, the Christian does not belong primarily to the culture around us nor to a racial or ethnic group. Instead, we find our deepest and most satisfying form of belonging as the transcultural people of God who have been formed as a united people by the work of the Holy Spirit. These otherworldly practices and rituals remind us that our citizenship is of this world. We belong, instead, to another kingdom with its own mores and that while remaining on this earth we remain as creative exiles—resident aliens seeking the common good. As the author of Hebrews so
eloquently put it: “For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come” (Heb 13:14). The Christian’s belonging and rootedness in that city that is to come is utterly unshakeable because it is given to us as a gift. It thereby serves as a compelling alternative to the third foundational challenge of our modern context: transience and permanence. In a city that is constantly changing and can, at times, seem utterly indifferent, the gift of permanent belonging can be a powerful witness. The emphasis in public discipleship on the historic practices of the church forms disciples over time who come to embody this eternal belonging. In embodying that permanence faithfully, they offer it to the world.
APPENDIX A: THE SPHERES OF PUBLIC DISCIPLESHIP

Spheres of Life

_The Gospel Changes …_

1. Gospel Identity

2. Church - Mission
   The search for MEANING: WHAT IS MY PURPOSE?

3. Family - Relationships
   The search for BELONGING: AM I LOVED?

4. N’hood - Justice
   The search for IDENTITY: WHO AM I?
   The search for JUSTICE: HOW DO WE LIVE TOGETHER?

5. Work - Rest
   The search for SIGNIFICANCE: CAN I MAKE A DIFFERENCE?
APPENDIX B: THE OUTCOMES OF PUBLIC DISCIPLESHIP

Overall Outcomes:

Know (growing in biblical wisdom)
- Locate key concepts in the Bible and identify the Bible’s (5) major storylines
- Synthesize biblical concepts to inform behaviors in the five spheres of life

Be (becoming a person of love)
- Experience personal gospel renewal in every sphere of life
- Inhabit every sphere of life as one sent by Christ

Do (engaging in spiritual practices)
- Engage in 5 key spiritual practices with regularity
- Pursue others to draw them into and deepen their relationship with Christ.

Gospel Identity:

Know
- Articulate basic doctrines and locate them in the Bible (Apostles Creed, 5 Solas, Scripture, God, Humanity, Christ)
- Explain the storyline of the Bible through the lens of Justification
- Synthesize biblical concepts to form the foundation of one’s sense of identity and worth

Be
- Experience gospel renewal dynamics (dismantling idols, mortifying sin, experiencing Christ’s beauty)
- Display the Fruit of the Spirit with increasing measure in any circumstance
- Submit every sphere of life to the absolute Lordship of Christ

Do
- Engage daily in the practice of Scripture reading and prayer
- Pursue others to draw them into and deepen their identity in Christ

Church and Mission:

Know
- Articulate a basic theology of church, sacraments, generosity, and mission and locate them in the Biblical narrative
- Explain the storyline of the Bible through the lens of Covenant and Lord
- Synthesize biblical concepts to develop a generous and missional mindset in the Church and beyond

Be
- Experience the power of the gospel through covenantal belonging in the local church
- Embody and contribute to the ethical counterculture of the church (sex, money, power)
• Be the church both in its gathered and scattered forms

Do
• Engage weekly in the public worship and community of the church as a member
• Tithe to the local church and give generously beyond the tithe
• Pursue others to draw them into the life and mission of the church

Neighborhood and Justice:

Know
• Articulate a basic theology of the city, justice, power, and neighbor and locate them in the Biblical narrative
• Explain the storyline of the Bible through the lens of shalom and kingdom
• Synthesize biblical concepts to cultivate a lifestyle of presence, compassion and justice

Be
• Experience the solidarity, compassion, and justice of God in the gospel
• Move from indifference to concern at the injustice both within and around us
• Move from consuming one’s neighborhood to a ministry of presence and rootedness within it
• Inhabit power as a resource to be stewarded for the good of others

Do
• Engage regularly in the practices of fasting and hospitality
• Participate regularly in ministries of compassion and justice (e.g. Hope For New York)
• Pursue others to draw them into a biblical approach in neighborhood and justice

Family and Relationships:

Know
• Articulate God’s basic purpose and design for family and relationships and locate them in the Biblical narrative
• Explain the storyline of the Bible through the lens of Exile and Homecoming
• Synthesize biblical concepts to cultivate relationships of covenantal faithfulness

Be
• Experience the love of God as Father, Friend, and Beloved
• Trust God’s purpose and design for all relationships
• Cultivate relational health in marriage, parenting, family, and friendships

Do
• Engage regularly in relationships of accountability
• Seek out interdependent relationships across difference
• Pursue family and friends to invite them into or deepen their relationship with Christ

Work and Rest:

Know
• Articulate a basic theology of calling, creation, work, and sabbath and locate them in the Biblical narrative
• Explain the storyline of the Bible through the lens of Creation and New Creation
• Synthesize biblical concepts to inhabit work with Christian distinctiveness in motivations, relationships, and goals

Be
• Experience gospel rest as Sabbath moves from duty to delight (by Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting)
• Move from a posture of work as career to work as sacred calling
• Move from finding one’s identity in work to seeing work as an expression of our humanity rooted in Christ’s love

Do
• Engage in sustainable practices and rhythms of Sabbath-keeping and rest
• Engage in the substance of one’s work with Christian distinctiveness
• Pursue others to draw them deeper into a biblical approach to work, rest, and generosity
APPENDIX C: PUBLIC DISCIPLESHIP AND THE 2017-18 CHURCH CALENDAR
Formation: In Christ, with others, for the city

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Sub-Series</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/3</td>
<td>Labor Day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>The Priority of Spiritual Formation</td>
<td>Acts 2:42-47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/17</td>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>The Purpose of Spiritual Formation</td>
<td>Jeremiah 29:4-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/24</td>
<td>Formed in a New Community</td>
<td>The Foundation of the Church</td>
<td>Matthew 16:13-20</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/1</td>
<td>Formed in a New Community</td>
<td>The Purpose of the Church</td>
<td>1 Peter 2:4-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/8</td>
<td>Gifts to Serve the Church</td>
<td>1 Peter 2:4-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/15</td>
<td>The Mission of the Church</td>
<td>1 Peter 2:4-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/22</td>
<td>The Worship of the Church</td>
<td>1 Peter 2:4-12</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/29</td>
<td>Formed with a New Identity</td>
<td>Forgiven</td>
<td>1 John 1:1-2:1</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beloved</td>
<td>1 John 3:1-10</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/12</td>
<td>Christian spiritual formation is not merely changing behavior, or taking on a new set of beliefs. It is the result of a radically new identity that comes as a free gift.</td>
<td>At Peace</td>
<td>1 John 3:16-24</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/19</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sent</td>
<td>1 John 4:7-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/26</td>
<td>Thanksgiving</td>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>1 John 5:9-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/3</td>
<td>Advent 1</td>
<td>Advent: He Dwelt Among Us</td>
<td>Isaiah 40:1-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/10</td>
<td>Advent 2</td>
<td>In Advent, Christ came to dwell among us, in time and space, as a neighbor. This Advent series in Isaiah will lead us to explore how we are called to embody Christ's incarnation right where God has placed us.</td>
<td>With Us in our Need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/17</td>
<td>Advent 3</td>
<td>With Us in our Sin</td>
<td>Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/24</td>
<td>Christmas Eve</td>
<td>With Us in our Suffering</td>
<td>Isaiah 9:1-6</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/31</td>
<td>Christmas Eve</td>
<td>With Us To Make A Way</td>
<td>Isaiah 43:16-21</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/7</td>
<td>Formed for Authentic Justice</td>
<td>Love and Restoration</td>
<td>Luke 4:14-21</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Scripture</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/28</td>
<td>Love and Sharing</td>
<td>They are formed to fulfill the cultural and missional mandate in their neighborhoods.</td>
<td>Acts 4:32-37</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/4</td>
<td>Love and Difference</td>
<td>ünstig ution orts. Following the mandate in their neighborhoods.</td>
<td>Acts 8:26-40 or 17:22-34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/11</td>
<td>Formed for Authentic Relationships</td>
<td>The community that Jesus forms.</td>
<td>Ephesians 2:11-22</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/18</td>
<td>Lent</td>
<td>Christians are formed spiritually to bear witness to the Kingdom in all of life. One way Christians do that is to foster authentic relationships of all kinds. They are formed to fulfill the cultural and missional mandates in every relationship.</td>
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<td>2/25</td>
<td>Lent</td>
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<td>3/4</td>
<td>Lent</td>
<td>Christians are formed spiritually to bear witness to the Kingdom in all of life. One way Christians do that is to foster authentic relationships of all kinds. They are formed to fulfill the cultural and missional mandates in every relationship.</td>
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<td>3/25</td>
<td>Palm Sunday</td>
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<td>4/1</td>
<td>Easter: Lifted Up For All to See</td>
<td>ünstig ution orts. Following the mandate in their neighborhoods.</td>
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<td>4/8</td>
<td>Formed for Authentic Work</td>
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<td>5/6</td>
<td>Formed for Authentic Work</td>
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<td>5/13</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
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<td>5/20</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>5/27</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>ünstig ution orts. Following the mandate in their neighborhoods.</td>
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


