Teleology and Narrative: Assessing Spiritual Growth at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

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Training Manual Approval Sheet

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AT ST. ANDREW'S PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this project is to develop a tool that invites members of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church of Newport Beach to examine their lives in light of the congregation’s mission measures and help them to determine both areas of growth and deficiency. The tool’s narrative structure provides a framework to process the circumstances of life and the variety responses to those events that move one closer to or further from one’s destination. Once participants see the narrative arc of their lives, they will be able to make distinctions between the parts of life that are in continuity or discontinuity with the aims of the Kingdom.

The opening part of this project explores the congregation of St. Andrew’s and the unique setting of Newport Beach from the perspective of the broader cultural story and highlights the ways in which this story collides with the gospel narrative. Particular attention is given to the development of the “vision frame.” This section highlights the role of mission measures in framing a functional description of a mature Christian disciple and the role small group communities play in helping disciples flourish.

The second part examines relevant literature regarding the relationship between the narrative and teleology. Focus is given to the classical virtues and the role of story in the formation of the Christian community as well as the ways communities of interpretation recount and embody narrative as a means of shaping identity. Additionally, the role of spiritual disciplines as a necessary means for transformation along the journey are addressed. The final part presents the goals and plans for the curriculum. Following a presentation of the completed curriculum, the project concludes with an analysis of the timeline, resources needed, and plans for evaluation.

Content Reader: Richard Peace

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To Jill: for your patience and encouragement throughout the writing process and for all the unseen ways you minister to me every day.

To Graham and MacKenzie whose curiosity and joy serve as constant reminders that if my work doesn’t draw you closer to the Living God, then it is simply not worth pursuing.
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I would like to thank the congregation of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church for their support and encouragement throughout the process of exploring, designing, and developing this project. Your contributions and feedback has been invaluable and so has your generosity in both the time and resources necessary to complete this work. I’ve appreciated your prayers and your genuine interest in what I’ve been up to. I pray that the finished product helps cultivate a greater desire for the Kingdom of God and assists you in locating yourself in the story of its coming.
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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

“Good luck with that.” In one form or another, such is the standard response given by pastors and ministry practitioners upon describing my desire to create a diagnostic tool that will allow its users to determine whether and how they are progressing in the spiritual life. On the surface, one can sympathize with their skepticism. While we live in an age of “fitness tracking” and analytic tools that provide us with the ability to monitor and chart things like our fiscal and physical health, the life of the spirit (if one considers such a life) is still believed to be shrouded in mystery, impenetrable by the powers of observation and assessment. To some, the notion of reliably measuring one’s spiritual condition reaches the height of absurdity. Nevertheless, precisely because a great amount of time and resources are poured into pursuing health and investing in personal growth in other areas of life and because the available technology allows for accurate measurement of vitality in those areas, is it not well worth the investment to be similarly attentive to the progress of the inner person?

There are numerous obstacles to such a pursuit. North American Christians live in a culture that encourages them to orient their lives toward a vision of success measured by career advancement and which views economic and social elevation as supreme goods. In his book, The Road To Character, journalist David Brooks observes that these pursuits leave one bereft of a lexicon with which to articulate or even acknowledge the

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1 Diogenes Allen, Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today. (Boston: Cowley Publications, 1997), 1. Allen describes a dinner party in which the guests (himself included) erupted in laughter at the notion that he should offer an assessment of one’s spiritual condition as a silent auction prize.
dimension of the soul. The drive to perform by these standards and to win admiration and respect in doing so becomes constitutive of our person in such a way that little time and energy are left for weighing and considering moral and spiritual concepts such as virtue and character. Moreover, this orientation toward material success guides behavior and shapes desire at both conscious and subconscious levels. As a result, we are simply not accustomed to paying much attention to our interior lives or to assessing the kinds of persons we are becoming, much less to intentionally building strategies to grow and develop a robust spiritual life that is oriented instead by a vision of the nearness and availability of the Kingdom of God. Caught up in the force of a cultural tide that trains people’s loves to aim their desires and aspirations toward a rival vision of “the good,” disciples of Jesus need to be immersed in counter-formational practices that will retrain their hearts to love rightly so that their lives begin to mirror the one they are following.

Developing a solution to the pervasive inattention toward spiritual health must, however, go beyond simply directing believers to engage in a higher frequency of church activity. The church’s complicity in this epidemic of neglect only adds to the complexity. In his book, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, Dallas Willard offers a withering critique of the current formational practices of the North American Church, observing that they “neither individually nor collectively…reliably produce large numbers of people who really are

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3 Ibid.


like Christ and his closest followers throughout history. That is statistically verifiable fact."\(^6\) This is because churches and ministry practitioners have “failed to take human transformation seriously as a real, practical issue to be dealt with in realistic terms.”\(^7\) Disregard of the interior life may not be due to the lack of church involvement but instead may be the direct result of the kinds of formational efforts that churches have provided; particularly those that have prioritized making Christianity an intellectually defensible system in which the Gospel is reduced to a matter of one’s personal salvation.\(^8\) James K. A. Smith captures this recent theological impulse well when he writes,

“No often we imagine that the goal of Christian discipleship is to train us to think the right way, to believe the right things. But the ultimate goal of sanctification and discipleship is to shape us into a certain kind of person: one who is like Jesus, exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22–23), loving God and neighbor, caring for the orphan, the widow, and the stranger (Jer. 22: 3; James 1: 27). He has shown us what is good and what the Lord requires of us: to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God (Mic. 6: 8). These are all just translations of the broader human vocation, which is to bear the image of Christ as renewed image bearers of God. The primary aim of discipleship is to create a certain kind of person who acts in a certain way, not someone who simply thinks in a certain way.”\(^9\)

If, indeed, the concept of spiritual health can be boiled down to whether or not one believes the right things so that they will “go to heaven” upon death, then the pursuit of growth or progress becomes not only unnecessary but nearly unintelligible. How, after all, can one become more saved? The natural byproduct of such a transactional view of


\(^7\) Ibid, Kindle Location 83.


\(^9\) Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 106.
salvation will be the de-emphasis of ongoing spiritual formation. The result, according to Willard, is a situation in which “[t]he fundamental negative reality among Christian believers… is their failure to be constantly learning how to live their lives in The Kingdom Among Us.” To begin mapping a way forward, churches and ministry practitioners will need to recover the theological concept of sanctification and a formational ministry that places Christ-likeness and discipleship as central pursuits for the life of faith. Conversion is not the end of the story, but the bare beginning of a long and windy journey.

The great Reformer, John Calvin described justification as a *duplex gratia*; twin graces that were distinct works of Christ. Justification describes the forensic action in which those who trust in Christ are pardoned by God and imputed the righteousness of Christ, apart from the works of the law. But God’s grace does not stop at a mere transaction. Sanctification describes the profound process whereby those pardoned continue to grow in grace and love, gradually becoming free from the effects of sin and leading lives that reveal God’s goodness as their lives come to look more and more like the one they are following. Justification is the starting line of the journey; sanctification is the lifelong pursuit. Both are acts of divine grace and works of the Holy Spirit and yet each require human participation. This work is an attempt to provide some direction so


that life is not perceived to be merely an interlude between conversion and death, but as an active pursuit of the Kingdom that is available here and now.

While its ambition remains lofty, the plan for this project is relatively simple. The goal is to describe and present a tool that enables its users to actively reflect upon their personal histories as a means of determining the health of their spiritual lives, measured by relative growth in six areas (Grace, Peace, Faith, Friendship, Joy, Generosity). Once areas of health/deficiency are determined, participants are guided in the creation of a personal rule that employs spiritual disciplines aimed toward addressing perceived areas of improvement. The tool combines personal reflection with small group discussion to help participants craft a spiritual autobiography that serves as a touchstone for growth.

The first chapters describe the particular challenges of discipleship in the context of Newport Beach, California (and Orange County, more broadly). Following Brooks’ observation above, the desire to construct an identity and find meaning in external measurements such as wealth, status, and reputation possess a particularly strong gravitational pull in the setting in which St. Andrew’s is embedded. It will then turn to an orientation of the congregational “vision frame” and how the mission measures (or “Life Marks”) of the vision frame function as a creative response to the needs of the community and serve as a means by which to determine the efficacy of St. Andrew’s practices of disciple making.13 Finally, the project describes the whole congregational strategy for disciple making before briefly introducing the concept of “spiritual theology”

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13 The “vision frame” as a tool for strategic planning is described in Will Mancini, Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).
as a disciplined approach of reflecting on God’s presence in one’s personal narrative, and the role of Life Groups in helping construct those narratives.

With the context firmly in mind, chapter two examines the role that narrative and the virtues play in understanding the goals and aims of the Christian story. Conceiving of life as a spiritual journey places one’s personal history and aspirations within a narrative framework. This journey describes the processes and passages individuals experience throughout their lives in response to God's movement. This is vital for one’s knowledge and experience of God precisely because the way one is able to apprehend the particularities of one’s life has everything to do with the story through which one comes to know the world. Without a clear vision of the purpose and meaning of life the individual is bereft of the evaluative criteria necessary to determine growth. A journey—by its very nature—has a beginning that is tied to its end, a path, and clearly defined obstacles and aids to the goal. Furthermore, the act of recounting personal narratives within a community helps test whether the story one tells about one’s life is true, as it is only through others that one is able to see key aspects of his or her life in new, and hopefully liberating ways. Accordingly, chapter two also examines the relevant literature where narrative theology and small group ministry intersect.

Chapter three builds on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and discusses how the virtues function as objective indicators of spiritual maturity. This section seeks to reimagine St. Andrew’s mission measures in light of MacIntyre’s insights. The work then engages the thought of Dallas Willard and James K. A. Smith by turning to the role that

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spiritual disciplines play in the cultivation of virtue and in producing personal transformation. Finally, the chapter turns toward the teleological impulse behind spiritual growth: to produce followers whose lives reveal the goodness of the kingdom by actively engaging in Christ’s mission of reconciliation and restoration.

Chapter four provides a description of the recruiting and training process for Life Group Leaders who will pilot this curriculum and provide suggestions for revisions before launching to the congregation. This section describes an overview of how the curriculum will be rolled out to the congregation and a timeline containing the necessary steps for launch. The chapter concludes with a rubric for evaluation and a description of plans to analyze participant feedback.

The final chapter presents the completed tool. After the introductory material and instructions for use, participants are directed in constructing a “Life Map” that creates a visual representation of the high and low points of their journey with God. From there, each Life Mark will proceed in the same way. The chapter begins with a brief story and Scripture passage that highlights how the life mark operates within the life of an individual or community. This is key because, as Brooks notes, “example is the best teacher. Moral improvement occurs most reliably when the heart is warmed, when we come into contact with people we admire and love and we consciously and unconsciously bend our lives to mimic theirs.”15 Narrative questions follow, allowing the participant to reflect on the past and gauge progress. The participants are then guided through a process of distilling their observations into a coherent personal narrative. Finally, each section

15 Brooks, The Road to Character, xv.
concludes with a set of Likert scale questions through which participants assess their spiritual condition. Each week, participants share their stories and the results of their scale questions with the Life Group in order to test their own self-understanding against the community’s experience of each participant. The final section contains descriptions of various spiritual disciplines meant to serve as aids to growth in deficient areas as well as some guidance on how to craft a plan to incorporate these disciplines into one’s life.

My interest in this project has been building for some time. In 2012 I was called to serve as the Pastor for Disciple-Making at St. Andrew’s, primarily responsible for stewarding the congregation’s mission measures. In a sense, my ministry was to determine whether or not the program ministry was producing people whose lives abound in grace, peace, faith, friendship, joy, and generosity. Shortly after my arrival, I realized that St. Andrew’s had no reliable mechanism in place to evaluate this beyond the merely subjective feeling that the current offerings were either hitting the mark or not. I think it is a worthwhile endeavor and have pursued studies in the doctoral program with this question in mind. While I doubt that the resulting work will provide a definitive answer, I am confident that it will help us move a few steps further along the road.
CHAPTER 1
COMMUNITY AND MINISTRY CONTEXT

I grew up in a small city of California’s central valley called Bakersfield. In many ways, the central valley stands unique in the Golden State. I often describe it as the part of California that wishes it was Texas. Perhaps not difficult, then, to imagine how someone whose experience of the land was shaped more by oilfields and cow pastures than by beaches and palm trees would have a slightly different take on reality than the typical Hollywood gloss. I am from a California that exists apart from the popular imagination. Although I grew up within relative driving distance of Orange County and had visited upon occasion, I did not know much about the area prior to relocating to its cultural epicenter. When my wife and I began to consider that God was calling us to Newport Beach, I conducted empirical research on the area which consisted of watching a single episode of the Real Housewives of Orange County. Approximately five minutes into my research, I closed my laptop and determined that there was no way God was calling me to St. Andrew’s because I simply would not fit in. Upon accepting the call, my wife and I promised to each other that we would not allow Newport to change us. We did not want the gravity of wealth and luxury to begin to pull us into their orbit and weigh
our hearts down. We simply had no desire to begin caring about things like clothes and cars—things about which we did not previously care. There was a healthy amount of pride mixed with folly in our promise. Of course, things are seldom so simple. One can only see so many Ferraris without beginning to imagine what it feels like to be behind the wheel. Six years later the question remains: how does one reconcile “having it all” with the downward mobility of *kenosis*? Such is the challenge of discipleship in my context.

**Chasing the Good Life**

As early as 1935, following an endorsement from the Army Corps of Engineering that would bolster the natural harbor of the Balboa Peninsula, *The Balboa Times* declared Newport Beach the “Yacht Harbor Capitol of the World.”¹ What had, up until that point, been a shipping wharf and vacation spot for Angelinos was soon to be reimagined as a new Riviera. In 1938 the actor James Cagney came into possession of Collins Island and initiated a wave of migration for Hollywood’s elite.² At the end of the Second World War, Newport Beach experienced period of tremendous growth. The housing market began to boom with returning soldiers anxious to find positions in Southern California’s burgeoning aerospace industry.³ By 1975 the land near Newport Center, north of Balboa Island and the Pacific Coast Highway was being described as another “Beverly Hills” with high-end retail stores and haute cuisine establishments capitalizing not only on the thriving tourism industry but also on the wealthy investors who increasingly began to buy


² Local legend has it that Cagney won the Island in a poker game.

up old vacation cottages and renovate them as secondary residences.\(^4\) From its earliest days, the community’s consistent growth and improvement has contributed to a sense of unbridled optimism and endless possibility.

Flanked by the Pacific Ocean and the Santa Ana River, Newport Beach remains a largely affluent community with some of the most sought-after properties in the state of California.\(^5\) Three of its neighborhoods rank among the ten wealthiest in the United States.\(^6\) The natural beauty of the area with its Mediterranean climate and coastal plains dropping into sandy, palm-tree-lined beaches make it a desirable place to live that has become synonymous with a sophisticated, high-class lifestyle. As a result, the surrounding community tends to be well-educated and privileged. Of the adults within a three-mile radius of St. Andrew’s aged twenty-five or older, 72 percent have obtained a bachelor’s degree or higher, a figure that is 72 percent higher than the U.S. total.\(^7\) The presence of major corporate offices of tech companies such as Google, Microsoft and Ingram Micro as well as those of future oriented start-ups such as Fisker, Faraday Future, and SpaceX infuse a robust entrepreneurial spirit to the area. Additionally, the numerous wealth management and real-estate development companies based in Newport, ensure a

\(^4\) Ibid, 79.


steady rate of high wage-earning professionals. According to U.S. Census data, the median income in Newport Beach is $115,845, more than 60 percent higher than the national average. Accordingly, it is often difficult for less-established young professionals to break-in to the housing market. Adults between the ages of twenty-five and forty comprise only 20 percent of Newport’s demographic makeup and report “finding affordable housing” to be among the primary social concerns.

At the same time, Newport Beach has emerged as a significant culture producing center. Action Sport companies such as Quicksilver, Volcom, Vans, Hurley, Rip Curl, Billabong, and Oakley emerged from the local surf-scene and have gone on to become major players in the lifestyle-wear industry. Additionally, three reality television programs and one weekly television drama chronicling the adventures and exploits of South County residents have helped solidify the image of Newport Beach in the popular imagination—a feat somewhat remarkable for a town that boasts a population of only 87,000. Now, home to multi-million dollar homes, trillion dollar investment corporations, famous housewives, a robust surf culture, Italian sports cars, trust-fund

8 Ibid.


11 Fox Network launched the teen-drama television series The OC in 2003. Set in Newport Beach, The OC often portrayed the small community as shallow, parochial and materialistic. Yet the show garnered quite a following and was initially well received by critics. MTV’s Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County debuted the following year and was succeeded by Newport Harbor: The Real Orange County in 2007. The Real Housewives of Orange County, set in Newport Beach, is now in its twelfth season. These shows have helped frame an image of Newport in the public consciousness.
beneficiaries, and high-end boutiques, Newport Beach projects an image of “the good life” defined by youthfulness, beauty, money, status, and possessions, all of which is bolstered by laid-back resort-style, sun-soaked outdoor living.

Amid such realities, it is not altogether surprising to find the presence of what Charles Taylor describes as “the immanent frame.” That is, an understanding of life as taking place within a self-sufficient order “which can be understood in its own terms, without reference to interventions from the outside.”12 When a recent gathering of pastors and elders from ECO’s Presbytery of Southern California came together for a ministry retreat at the Balboa Bay Resort in Newport (approximately one mile from St. Andrew’s), one of the members quipped as he drew attention to the surroundings, “we all have challenges within our ministry contexts. For those of you at St. Andrew’s it’s got to be trying to convince your members that the Kingdom of God is better than this.”

Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart have observed a decline of religiosity in countries with wide social structures that free people from existential concerns over basic needs.13 As social scientists, they hypothesize that affluence mitigates the tendency to look outward for material provision. Their insights, however, underscore a deep theological concern. Reflecting on the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites, Walter Breuggemann notes that the temptation to autonomy was a primary concern for the people entering the promised land. “And the reason they will be tempted… is that the new land will make them

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inordinately prosperous. Moses knows that *prosperity breeds amnesia.*”\(^\text{14}\) For those who have no memories to forget, prosperity can become a formidable god. In a culture that celebrates having it all, it is easy to construct a narrative that attributes one’s possessions to one’s own hard work and determination. Achievement, status, success, image, alma mater: these are the names of the household gods toward which many look for salvation. The church’s declaration of God’s providence appears drastically out of step with the surrounding culture’s efforts toward self-determination.

This perhaps at least partially explain why Newport Beach residents are less likely than the national average to believe in God (79.8 percent as opposed to 84.5 percent of all U.S. Citizens) and nine percent less likely to believe that God intervenes with the created order.\(^\text{15}\) Of those who do profess belief in God, slightly more than half report being “not involved with their faith” (51 percent as opposed to 34.7 percent nationally), and only 16 percent report becoming more involved with their faith in the last ten years as opposed to 22.8 percent who report becoming less involved within the same period.\(^\text{16}\) Accordingly, the number of people who describe themselves as “uninterested” with regard to religious preference is a full seven and a half percentage points higher than the national average (18.7 percent as opposed to 11.1 percent).\(^\text{17}\) While the data suggests a pattern of decline in


\(^{15}\) Percept Group. “Ministry Area Profile 2012 Compass Report” 17. The same report indicated that 54.1 percent of households in the report agreed with the statement “God is actively involved with in the world including nations and their governments” as opposed to 63.8 percent of the U.S. citizens who would answer in the affirmative.

\(^{16}\) Ibid, 15.

\(^{17}\) Ibid.
religiosity among Newport Beach residents, such a concession would fly in the face of conventional wisdom which holds that the churches of Newport Beach continue to be well attended and well-funded. Whether or not Christendom has fully waned in Orange County is a subject for debate, but the evidence for decline is convincing.

St. Andrew’s Origins and History

During the period of growth and development that followed the conclusion of World War II, a group of friends who had graduated from Occidental College and settled in Newport Beach, petitioned the Los Angeles Presbytery to charter a new mission community in the Cliff Haven development just north of the Pacific Coast Highway.\(^\text{18}\) The congregation of fifty held its first services on December 21, 1947 in the “chapel by the sea” of Baltz Mortuary in Corona del Mar.\(^\text{19}\) This bit of folk history become ingrained in congregation’s collective imagination as a tangible reminder that they worship a God who brings new life out of places of death. The congregation quickly outgrew the chapel’s capacity and on March 7, 1948 moved to Newport Harbor High School, across the street from its current address. In that first year, 115 charter members of St. Andrew’s pledged an annual budget of $6,900 and installed a session consisting of seven ruling elders alongside teaching elder and organizing pastor, the Reverend Thomas Gibson.\(^\text{20}\) In 1950 the congregation of more than 200 purchased a parcel of land in between Ensign

\(^{18}\) Web Jones and Eunice Jones, *The First Fifty Years of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church Newport Beach, California 1948-1998* (Self-Published Work, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, 1998), 1.

\(^{19}\) Ibid, 2-3

\(^{20}\) Ibid, 3-4
Junior High School and Newport Harbor High School for $15,000 on what would become 600 St. Andrew’s Road.\textsuperscript{21} Over the next twenty years, the physical plant could expand only through purchasing the surrounding homes and constructing new facilities that extend below ground level.

In 1951, the congregation called James Stewart to serve as the second pastor. Under the eight years of his leadership the congregation grew from 200 to over 1,500 in weekly attendance, with a church school enrollment of 1,200.\textsuperscript{22} Charles Dierenfield was called to succeed him and continued the legacy of strong preaching from the pulpit. As St. Andrew’s marked its thirtieth anniversary, a special emphasis was placed upon evangelism and discipleship. Dierenfield began to produce weekly study guides to his sermons that invited congregation members to probe more deeply into the implications of Jesus’ command to “make disciples of all nations.” In his seventeen years as pastor the congregation continued to grow spiritually and numerically. By 1978, as John Huffman Jr. was called as St. Andrew’s fourth pastor, membership swelled to nearly 4,000 making it the fourth largest Presbyterian congregation in the country.\textsuperscript{23} Membership hit its high-water mark of 4,500 in 1991 and maintained a steady level of involvement until 1998.\textsuperscript{24} Toward the end of Dr. Huffman’s 31-year tenure, St. Andrew’s clarified its mission to “Lead persons to faith in Jesus Christ, nurture them in faith and deploy them in Christian

\textsuperscript{21} St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, \textit{St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church Vision Report, January 27, 2008}, 2.

\textsuperscript{22} Jones and Jones, \textit{The First Fifty Years of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church}, 17.

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid, 82.

\textsuperscript{24} St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, \textit{Vision Report, January 27, 2008}, 10.
service to others.” Accordingly, mission giving became an acute focus, though mission involvement remained relatively low.

As St. Andrew’s grew in size throughout the years, the scope of its ministry expanded. In the process, a distinctive character began to emerge which helped identify and clarify its unique calling and purpose within the community. In keeping with the character of its surroundings, St. Andrew’s possesses a strong sense of entrepreneurial leadership which has led to the development of many lay-led ministry efforts. Its effective Presbyterian governance has created a pattern of stable leadership with only six pastors in its 70-year history. And the commitment to “the priesthood of all believers” has led to a high involvement in community leadership as evidenced by the number of leaders serving on boards in various community and non-profit organizations. All of this is undergirded by strong evangelical commitments to the unique witness of Scripture and Trinitarian teaching.

In many ways the growth of St. Andrew’s throughout the first sixty years of its ministry mirrored the growth of Newport Beach. The congregational history is shot through with an unbridled optimism that the best years are always ahead as the congregation will continue its faithful legacy of dynamic preaching, excellent musical offerings, and attractive programming to continually draw new members and spur growth. Built into this self-understanding was the presumption that the cultural conditions which predisposed Newport Beach residents toward receptivity of the gospel would be supported indefinitely. Indeed, the sense that national identity and civic religion are fused continues to remain high among the (mostly older) membership. In more recent years, with a growing awareness that the civic structures of North American culture no longer
make reference to or reinforce Christian narratives and systems of thought, St. Andrew’s has struggled to effectively engage the surrounding community. When church membership was at its peak in 1991, the congregation more or less mirrored the demographics of the area. However, by 2006 St. Andrew’s witnessed a 30 percent decline among active members. The shifting cultural landscape continues to pose significant challenges and present compelling opportunities that will certainly require St. Andrew’s to imagine new ways of communicating the gospel. The section that follows explores more closely the demographics of St. Andrew’s as a means of elucidating the nature of those challenges.

**Congregational Snapshot of St. Andrew’s: Challenges and Opportunities**

Today, St. Andrew’s is best described as a multi-generational, historically successful Presbyterian Church with roots in the Reformed tradition and in the Western stream of American evangelicalism. The congregation’s success has been bolstered by a legacy of strong preaching from the pulpit, excellence in both traditional and modern expressions of worship music, and a decisive CEO-style pastoral leadership supported by a staff-led ministry model which places heavy emphasis on providing “excellence” in ministry programs that attend to the felt needs of members and regular attenders.

Despite being a large congregation by national standards (3,400 members/ 1,600 in worship), St. Andrew’s is perceived to be a “smaller” large church amid Orange County giants Rock Harbor (Costa Mesa), Saddleback (Lake Forest), Mariner’s (Irvine),

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and Calvary Chapel (Costa Mesa). To some extent this perception regarding the size and scope of St. Andrew’s ministry has bled into the congregation’s consciousness and prompted the staff and session to evaluate the success of ministry efforts on the basis of extensive growth rather than the qualitative dimension of internal transformation. This has led to the redevelopment of the congregational vision frame, described below.

Related to the leadership style that has characterized St. Andrew’s for years, newer attenders often describe St. Andrew’s as having a “corporate” feel to it, noting the appearance of a hierarchical staffing structure, the employment of several different productivity tools and assessments, and the presence of a common lexicon that appears to have been shaped more by trends in leadership literature than by the gospel. As concrete evidence of this, many would point to the facts that congregational ministries are oriented around a BHAG and all staff members have both their top five StrengthsFinder Themes and insights Profile colors displayed prominently near the name plates of their workstations. While there is value in utilizing best practices, the congregation’s public witness will be improved by pursuing a robust vision of the Kingdom which is never in danger of hanging in the balance of the staff’s best efforts.

26 Nancy Beach. Succession Planning Report for St. Andrew’s (Irvine, CA: Slingshot Group, 2016) 4. After one of our “Lead Night” gatherings featured techniques for maximizing involvement gleaned from Charles Duhigg’s leadership book, The Power of Habit, one of our deacons is quoted as saying that St. Andrew’s often “feels more like a business than a church.”


Recently, the executive leadership team has made efforts to position St. Andrew’s within the religious marketplace as “a thinking person’s evangelical church” where theological depth and consistency are expected. Thus congregational outreach efforts rely heavily upon leveraging the church’s reputation for honing a particular brand of thoughtful Christianity in order to draw new attenders to worship. This should prove to be an effective strategy of engagement toward the surrounding neighborhoods in which the church is embedded. According to the Percept study, those within a three-mile radius of St. Andrew’s express a preference for preaching that is emotionally uplifting while also intellectually challenging. Indeed, when Rich Kannwischer was called as St. Andrew’s fifth pastor near the end of 2008, worship attendance experienced an initial bump (rising from 1340 to 1800). However, from 2010 to 2016, growth remained relatively flat. While there has been a steady influx of new people who are initially attracted to the preaching and worship offered at St. Andrew’s, they do not, by large, find a meaningful connection to the life of the community and thus the level of growth has not moved at a pace commensurate with the level of attrition.

A significant challenge facing the future of St. Andrew’s is that the average age of the congregation does not mirror that of the surrounding community. According to a recent congregational survey, 63 percent of St. Andrew’s attendees are age sixty or

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older. This stands in sharp contrast to the surrounding area where only 19 percent are age sixty or older. As of 2016, the number of regular attenders in the “missing generation” category (which spans ages 25-40) is almost 60 percent lower than that for the study area. Conversely, the number of those aged seventy or older is almost quadruple that found in the surrounding area.

Second, between 2006 and 2016, St. Andrew’s has experienced a growth plateau among eighteen to twenty-four-year-olds. In that same decade, the church has declined in members aged thirty to thirty-nine. Not only does the congregation of St. Andrew’s tend to be much older than the surrounding community, but there is now a significant disproportion of generations within the church. For a congregation with a stated value of “All Generations Community” this is deeply problematic. As of 2016, the largest age demographic within the surrounding community (30-39-year-olds) is a full thirty to forty years younger than the largest age band at St. Andrew’s, with nearly 40 percent being seventy or older.

Auxano. “Congregational Survey Summary: St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Newport Beach, CA, Monday, April 4, 2016 (Houston: Auxano, 2016), 4.


2.2 of worship attendance in 2006 as opposed to 3 percent in 2016.

It is difficult to draw an exact number due to differences in the way age distributions were monitored between congregational mission reports in 2006 and 2016. In 2006, 26-45 year olds comprised 22.2 percent of the worshipping community. In 2016, 30-39 year olds made up only 7 percent of St. Andrew’s worshippers. See Appendix A (page 151) for an Age Distribution.
The presence of a robust senior population is, of course, a great strength of St. Andrew’s that must be celebrated. The adaptive challenge is to find a way to live into the vision of being an intentionally intergenerational community as opposed to a multi-generational community. The disproportionate representation of younger generations can be seen as an impediment to the congregation’s ability to effectively reach out to the community or to develop leaders who will effectively help the church navigate adaptive challenges. The presence of “people who look like me” is a factor that individuals consider when choosing a family of faith. Leadership will need to learn how to enlist the help of older members if significant inroads are to be made. As one consultant recently described it, “moving from a multi-generational congregation to an intergenerational faith expression is one of St. Andrew’s most distinct and strategic opportunities in the coming 10-15 years.”

Of greater concern is the potential for the congregation to be polarized into what are effectively four worshipping communities under one roof. Since 2007, a significant number of younger families have migrated toward the modern worship services. The number of children present in traditional services is less than half that of those in modern services, which indicates that the methodology used to facilitate distinct worship styles may prove to have the unintended consequence of further segregating the generations rather than bringing them together.

Lastly, one of the more significant demographic shifts occurring in Newport Beach and the surrounding communities of Costa Mesa and Huntington Beach is that

37 Will Heath, Succession Report, 12.
between 2006-2016, the Hispanic population has grown by approximately twenty five percent.\textsuperscript{38} While the area is predominantly White (66.4 percent) the Hispanic/Latino(a) population composes 27.3 percent with 83 percent of the Hispanic population living in nearby Costa Mesa. The changing ethnic demographics of the area has produced yet another challenge/opportunity for St. Andrew’s to consider new models of ministry. According to a recent congregational survey, St. Andrews is 98.8 percent white, with Hispanic/Latino families accounting for less than one percent of the church’s membership.\textsuperscript{39} Since the completion of a major campus improvement project, more than 200 students from the local high school come on campus each day and the number of students from Hispanic/Latino backgrounds has increased exponentially. Currently there is no plan to integrate these students into the worshipping life of the body. The opportunity to grow as an intergenerational and intercultural community will require nothing less than a rediscovery of the Church’s essentially missionary character.

**Revealing God’s Goodness**

Darrell Guder writes, “There are obvious risks that the church must take in the process of living within and engaging its context. Its visibility and tangibility can make it vulnerable to that conformity to the world against which Paul admonished the Romans.”\textsuperscript{40}


\textsuperscript{39} St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, *Vision Report*, 11.

\textsuperscript{40} Darrell Guder, “Gather, Build, Send: Barth’s Formation of the Missional Community.” 2010 Barth Conference, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, NJ, unpublished manuscript obtained from author, 10.
In light of the congregation’s history and historical emphasis of being an attractional church committed to excellence in music, programming, and preaching, St. Andrew’s has struggled with adaptive issues affecting the congregation’s health and vitality in a post-Christendom world. Over/against the narrative of St. Andrew’s legacy of theologically sound teaching, the 2008 mission study also described the presence of a creeping evangelical reductionism which had couched salvation primarily in terms of the individual believer’s soul and eternal security. This had led the church to organizing itself in terms of its mission and practices around caring for and tending to, in Guder’s phrase, “the savedness of the saved.”\(^{41}\) The reality that this reductionism has birthed is a consumerist approach to faith which does not lead the consumer to a life of discipleship, or in the words of the study, “created a system that has turned inward and...reinforces the very consumer culture.”\(^{42}\) It has been the growing conviction of St. Andrew’s executive leadership team that the current tactical solutions and ministry efforts are failing to produce lives “worthy of the calling [they] have received” (Eph 4:1)\(^{43}\) or those which are distinguishable from the culture in which church members operate. Members increasingly look to the church, not as disciples seeking to be transformed in the image of Christ, but as consumers of religious goods and services. This is because congregational leaders


\(^{42}\) St. Andrew’s, Vision Report 2008, 16.

\(^{43}\)Unless otherwise noted, all Bible verses are from the New International Version.
have struggled to offer clear and consistent training in what it means to pattern one’s life after that of Jesus.44

Consumerism both reinforces and produces adherence to a counterfeit gospel. This is particularly dangerous when combined with a leadership culture that tends to place value upon extrinsic growth. The church’s program ministry becomes focused upon developing and marketing a “product” that increasing numbers people desire to consume instead of subordinating numerical growth to the qualitative dimension of “vertical growth in height and depth.”45 With average household incomes 61 percent higher than those of the national average, the community in which St. Andrew’s is located is a prime case study for an individualistic society under the sway of affluence and acquisitiveness. For the church to foster meaningful connection among members and engage the surrounding neighborhood with the hope of the gospel, it will need to reimagine its mission and strategy in light of these challenges and cast a vision that is less centered upon “chasing the good life” and instead turned outward to reveal the goodness of God.

**Gather, Build, Send: St. Andrew’s Strategic Vision**

In fall of 2010, following the call of Rich Kannwischer, the session of St. Andrew’s called for a recalibration of the congregational mission, vision, and identity and voted to undergo a process of strategic realignment. The result was the adoption of plan that would streamline the ministry of the church and reduce sixteen distinct ministry


areas down to four. A further refinement was completed in 2014 when the four
departments were reduced to three. This latter effort, influenced by Karl Barth’s
ecclesiology, articulated the congregational strategy as three movements: Gather, Build,
Send.\textsuperscript{46} Barth’s rubric draws attention away from the church’s organizing strategies and
toward the work of the Holy Spirit who gathers the community and builds it up in order
to be an agent and instrument of God’s mission in and for the world. Therefore, the
current strategy now raises a self-conscious awareness that everything St. Andrew’s does
should be oriented towards and measured by relevance to its vocation of sentness. Now
three years into this strategic alignment, it is safe to say that current ministries do not yet
reflect this missional thrust—functionally these arms of the strategy exist as descriptions
of the leadership team’s organizational efforts rather than a robust missional identity
among the laity. That said, they are a step toward equipping the community to be the kind
“that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighborhood.”\textsuperscript{47}
Additionally, the process of soul-searching has resulting in an articulation of the
congregational “vision frame,”\textsuperscript{48} each aspect of which is designed to answer a particular
question regarding leadership’s efforts to spur on the spiritual growth of the community.

St. Andrew’s Mission Statement therefore answers the question, “What are we
doing?” Values answer the question, “What characterizes everything we do?” Strategy,

\textsuperscript{46} Karl Barth, \textit{Church Dogmatics vol. IV/1}, trans. G. W. Bromiley, ed. T. F. Torrance, (New York:

\textsuperscript{47} Lesslie Newbigin, \textit{The Gospel in a Pluralist Society}. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing
Company, 1989), 229.

\textsuperscript{48} This “non-traditional” form of strategic planning is described in Will Mancini, \textit{Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture, and Create Movement}, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).
the question “How do we accomplish our mission?” Mission Measures answer the often-neglected question of “How do we know if we are successful in achieving our mission?” And finally, the vision proper answers the question, “Where is God leading us in this unique season of our ministry?” This model is called a “vision frame” precisely because it provides church leadership the freedom and flexibility necessary to adapt vision in response to the church’s needs or those of the surrounding culture without recasting the congregation’s unique sense of purpose. The vision frame remains static, but the vision proper is constantly adapted, changed and recast in light of the Spirit’s leading. The mission measures or “Life Marks” are the primary focus of this project as they represent the “fruit,” whose presence is vital to an assessment of whether the congregational strategy is effective at producing people who “reveal God’s goodness.” The measures themselves, however represent only one part of an integrated whole.49

Within the broad sweep of St. Andrew’s strategy, each department also has a three-fold sub-strategy that provides additional imagery describing the way in which the department will achieve its ministry goals. Thus, the Gather step provides a worshipping environment in which members are able to rest, receive, and rejoice as a means of growing in their experience of grace and peace. The Send department categorizes congregation ministry partnerships by geographic distance, allowing members to discern a call to serve Here (within 3-mile radius), Near (a modest car ride), or Far (a plane flight) and are places where the joy of meeting needs help cultivate a heart for generosity.

49See Appendix B on page 152.
Similarly, the Build step, which houses St. Andrew’s “educational” ministries, endeavors to provide a comprehensive formation program that engages the whole person through ministry environments designed to shape desires (Heart), mold habits (Soul), and refine patterns of thought (Mind). Each of these environments seek to establish in members a common lexicon as they discover together how God transforms lives and thereby become places where faith and friendship intersect. While the Build sub-strategy is classified under the rubric of heart, soul, and mind, this is not done to fragment the person—as though one could aim to teach the heart while leaving the mind unmoved. Transformative learning engages an integrated person. Nevertheless, each of these environments has a different aim and goal. Life Groups are not the primary site for in-depth Bible study within the Build sub-strategy. That end is appropriately pursued through adult education classes. Instead, Life Groups are places in which one engages with friends in “conversation over the written Word,” in an environment designed to provide “a safe space to learn the basic practices of Christian faith.”\(^{50}\) They are the hoped-for pattern by which individuals are integrated into the life of the broader church community.

In keeping with the sub-strategy, Life Groups are places where desires and habits take shape, more than they are places where the mind is expanded and challenged. To be sure, members engage in conversation and study Scripture, but they do so with a bias toward life application rather than deep theological reflection. The sociologist Robert

Wuthnow captures this nicely when he writes, “the key role that small groups can play in bringing people closer to God is in getting them to move beyond theology to real-life issues.” In that sense, Life Groups provide the form and structure for conversation to take place in an atmosphere of compassion. They are a laboratory for members to experiment with providing care and support for one another throughout the changing seasons of life. Members gather in Life Groups as equals who draw each other out of narrow solipsism and assist one another in placing their lives before the light of Scripture.

**Life Groups, Life Marks, and the Process of Transformation**

As stated above, the goal of this project is to effectively measure the spiritual progress of individual lives. This will be accomplished by creating a curriculum for Life Groups that leads its users through an intentional process of annually recording spiritual autobiographies which inventory, evaluate, and help its users reflect upon the work of the Spirit in their lives according to each of the mission measures (Grace, Peace, Faith, Friendship, Joy, Generosity). The goal of the yearly Life Marks inventory is to give Life Group members the opportunity to:

- Reflect upon the ways that God has been active in their lives.
- Tell stories of progress (or regress) in these areas.
- Come to a self-understanding of their needs.
- Identify areas of growth and areas of needed growth.
- Develop a discipleship plan through the pursuit of appropriate spiritual disciplines.
- Form partnerships within the group to engage in accountability and encouragement and to meet quarterly to discuss and celebrate each other’s progress.

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The curriculum is designed to shape each individual’s observations regarding how they are growing (or regressing) in each Life Mark into a coherent narrative that can be shared within the Life Group. Narrative is the appropriate medium for “measuring” spiritual growth as it is through the telling of stories that one publicly self-defines. As Diogenes Allen writes, “we quite naturally express who we are in the form of a story about ourselves… we do this because our identity is achieved slowly, through time, and it cannot be expressed apart from an account of our specific passage through time.” Thus, it is through the process of unpacking of personal histories that Life Group members are afforded the chance to take inventory of the direction their lives are going. One can only know whether any amount of growth has occurred in, say, the ability to extend grace toward others, if one has a concrete story of how he or she has acted differently in a situation and are brought to a conscious awareness of the fact that his or her present actions are different from those of the past.

Life Groups are the best vehicle for sharing these stories because the structure of community affords the individual the kind of critical distance necessary diagnose where one’s life remains in the present. Given the human propensity toward self-deception, Life Group members can help one another know whether the stories they tell are true. To the extent that group members are willing to openly and honestly engage in this process, they will begin to experience transformation. Much of the Life Group’s time together throughout the remainder of the year forms the basis for the kind of trust and vulnerability requisite for this endeavor to flourish. This will provide St. Andrew’s with a

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52 Allen, *Spiritual Theology*, 21
potentially helpful means of beginning to counteract the narratives of the surrounding culture by routinely holding in front of the congregation the pursuit of transformation and progress in the spiritual life.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

In the development of this doctoral project, several resources have provided a framework consonant with both the Reformed and evangelical theological streams of my ministry context. This chapter engages those works in light of the project’s goal of creating a tool that will allow members to evaluate their spiritual growth and apply disciplines to help spur further growth. Each work offers distinctive insights into the role that teleology and narrative play in the work of spiritual formation. They also challenge the pragmatism that would measure the effectiveness of a particular congregational approach toward formation by the number of participants involved or the subjective value that those members place upon the experience.

The works are viewed with critical attention given to their development of the role of narrative in the understanding of the goals and aims of the Christian story. The life of the individual makes sense and achieves meaning through participation and enacting a particular story. The act of recounting personal narratives within a community helps individuals to test whether the stories they tell about their lives are true or, more precisely, whether they correspond to the story God is telling in and through the Church.
Through participating in a common story, individuals learn to see key aspects of their lives in new, and hopefully liberating ways. Accordingly, the literature selected for this project evaluates the intersection of teleology and spiritual formation, narrative and the Christian life (narratives have an embedded teleology—the story is always heading somewhere) and the role that the intimacy of small group community plays in the ongoing process of evaluating spiritual growth.

**Teleology and Spiritual Formation: *Spiritual Theology*, Diogenes Allen**

As an analytic philosopher, Diogenes Allen’s primary concern in *Spiritual Theology* is to develop an account of the spiritual journey by seeking to understand the goal or *telos* of the spiritual life.¹ By recovering the works of classical theologians like Evagrius, Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory of Nyssa, whose writings attend to the interior life and the individual’s “desire for God’s habitual presence,”² Allen seeks to draw attention toward an often neglected tradition that will allow his readers to understand the goal of the spiritual life, chart a path toward that goal, and understand those things which will help make progress in the spiritual life and those things which will hinder progress toward the goal.

Key to the process of growth is the conception of life as a spiritual journey, as this necessarily places one’s histories and endeavors within a narrative framework. The individual’s journey describes the process and liminal passages in response to God's movement when one is able to observe the totality of one’s life. This is vital for one’s

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² Ibid, 2.
personal knowledge and experience of God precisely because the way people make sense of their particular lives has everything to do with how they understand the story through which they comprehend the world. As Allen writes, “When a story or narrative involves human growth and flourishing, it treats life as if it were a journey.” Without a clear vision of the purpose and meaning of life one is bereft of the evaluative criteria necessary to determine growth. Thus, the metaphor of a journey proves to be quite helpful for envisioning the spiritual life. A journey by its very nature has a beginning that is tied to its end (chapters 2 and 3), a path (chapter 2), and clearly defined obstacles (chapter 5) and aids (chapter 6) to the goal.

The life of discipleship is never one of consistent linear ascent. As with any journey there are false starts and detours, numerous stops along the way, and the presence of companions who serve as guides and provide encouragement to help move toward the journey’s completion. In thinking of life as a journey or a quest in which something vital is to be sought, there is a sense of moving toward completion or of arriving at a desired destination that provides the incentive to aim one’s actions and affections. Life has a goal and because there are various paths which lead to that goal, even the prosaic moments are imbued with a great deal of significance.

Allen’s work is important precisely because a good number of people bounce from Sunday to Sunday without making significant progress in the spiritual life. In the particular context of St. Andrew’s as described above, this is often because the assumed telos of the Christian life, personal salvation, is secured at the moment of conversion.

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3 Ibid, 22.
(which Allen describes as only “the entrance to the path we are to follow”) secured by intellectual assent to a series of propositional truths.\textsuperscript{4} This is, of course, problematic. If salvation is reduced to the forensic transaction of justification, to the exclusion of an ongoing process of sanctification, then progress past one’s initial conversion is unnecessary. However, if progress is desired, ministry practitioners are quick to direct congregants toward the likely areas that Allen describes in the first chapter: Bible study (Christian Education) or forms of Social Action (Mission). While Allen in no way diminishes the importance of Christian education (he taught at Princeton Seminary, after all) he notes that the content of these programs, as conceived by most churches is generally lacking. Engagement with the classical spiritual disciplines is almost always relegated to occasional retreats rather than integrated deeply into a given congregation’s formative practices.

In arguing for a more robust presence of the disciplines, Allen makes the comparison of the post-modern spiritual condition to astigmatism which, because of defects within the eye, prevents light rays from meeting at a common focus. As a result, the sufferer cannot see clearly. Spiritual disciplines serve as a kind of corrective lens that “help us to gain sufficient mastery of ourselves so that we can bring our entire self into focus.”\textsuperscript{5} It is only once one sees oneself clearly that one has the capacity to be shaped according to Christian teachings. Moreover, the heart must be taught to love God before the mind can be convinced to pursue him with clarity and devotion. Allen’s insistence

\textsuperscript{4} Ibid, 37.

\textsuperscript{5} Ibid, 81.
that “theological inquiry is possible only for someone who has been converted to a spiritual perspective” (a point made all the more powerfully due to his capacious learning) helps underscore the point that all seeking is an invitation into contact with the Living God who desires to lead those who pursue Him on a journey to greater awareness of His presence.

**Teleology and Formation: Renovation of the Heart, Dallas Willard**

Willard’s central concern in *Renovation of the Heart* is that those who wish to be Jesus’ disciples undertake an orderly process of spiritual formation, the likes of which Jesus himself directs. Following Calvin’s lead in the *Institutes*, Willard begins by diagnosing the human condition as being in dire need of inner repair. Unless one understands the nature of this ruin, he or she will simply not choose to undertake a process of intentional spiritual habilitation. To that end, he explores the work of “pervasive inner transformation” and the cumulative steps that produce such transformation, the goal of which is to have one’s inner character look more like Jesus’ inner person and character.

Throughout his writing, Willard maintains that spiritual formation is an inescapable fact of human existence. Humans are fundamentally spiritual beings and as such are formed by persistent actions—attitudes of the mind and heart, and how these are born out in behaviors. Because this is true, it is essential that the Spirit to shape those

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6 Ibid, 155.


8 Ibid, 45.
actions, attitudes and behaviors in the pattern of Christ-likeness. Willard centers on the formation of the heart as the center of formation, for “What is in our heart matters more than anything else for who we become and what becomes of us.”¹⁹ Indeed, Christ’s work of salvation is none other than the “realistic restoration of our heart to God and then by dwelling there with his Father through the distinctively divine Spirit. The heart thus renovated and inhabited is the only real hope of humanity on earth.”¹⁰

Thus, the renovation Willard describes is a work from the inside out. Whereas much of theological ethics has fixated upon external forms of righteousness as ends in and of themselves—in other words, aiming to transform the will, Willard insists that formation involves the Spirit’s transformation of the whole person. And while it is not a human attainment, the process of transformation requires human agency. Indeed, Willard expresses as the central point of his work:

that spiritual transformation only happens as each essential dimension of the human being is transformed to Christlikeness under the direction of a regenerate will interacting with constant overtures of grace from God. Such transformation is not the result of mere human effort and cannot be accomplished by putting pressure on the will (heart, spirit) alone.¹¹

This transformation occurs in “six aspects of a human life” that together form the whole known as human nature.¹² Chapters 6-10 focus explicitly on the transformation of these

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¹⁹ Ibid, 16.
¹¹ Ibid, 41.
¹² “1. Thought (images, concepts, judgments, inferences) 2. Feeling (sensation, emotion) 3. Choice (will, decision, character) 4. Body (action, interaction with the physical world) 5. Social context (personal and structural relations to others) 6. Soul (the factor that integrates all of the above to form one life)” Ibid, 30.
various aspects of the human person. The properly functioning human person, (in the language of Matthew 5:48), is one in whom all aspects of one’s person are integrated under God. It is a person who embodies his or her telos. Rather than focusing on changing one’s will, Spiritual transformation takes place when all of these aspects are subordinated to God. The image of a properly ordered life emerges according to the following hierarchy: God, Spirit, Mind (Thought/Feeling), Soul, Body.\(^{13}\) Much of contemporary life is organized around one’s subjective impressions. Indeed, in virtually every sphere people are encouraged to do what feels right. The corresponding formational activities of the culture place bodily desires at the center, and this with ruinous consequences.

Willard explores more specifically how transformation takes place through the VIM pattern outlined in chapter five. As he states, “If we are to be spiritually formed in Christ, we must have and must implement the appropriate vision, intention, and means. Not just any path we take will do. If this VIM pattern (Vision, Intention, Means) is not put in place properly and held there, Christ simply will not be formed in us.”\(^{14}\) The vision Willard describes is that of life in the Kingdom of God. Through reliance upon the Spirit, those who follow can choose life in the kingdom by patterning their lives the example and teaching of Jesus. This calls for more than adherence to propositional truths about Jesus, it is an intention that bears itself out in concrete actions. Jesus followers simply are not given the option to read the Sermon on the Mount and decide not to heed its words.

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\(^{13}\) Ibid, 39.

\(^{14}\) Ibid, 85.
With the vision of life in the Kingdom before them and the intention to live in the Kingdom animating actions, followers then must dedicate themselves toward the means of changing their inner character so that they can become the kind of people who are at home in the Kingdom. To continue with the metaphor from Allen’s work, *vision is to behold the journey with a clear sense of the quest, the intention is the decision which leads to the concrete action of undertaking the journey, and the means are the map, lamp, climbing axe, among others that will be used to complete the journey*. If, for instance, one seeks to be rid of lustful thoughts, one must first identify the thoughts, habits, actions, feelings, and circumstances that cause one to objectify others. This requires ongoing partnership with the Holy Spirit. Once these thoughts, feelings, and actions are identified, one must undertake a process of finding the appropriate disciplines through which God re-orients thoughts and desires.

Underscoring the entire work is Willard’s conviction that the mission of the church is none other than the great commission. Yet much of the things that pastors instruct congregants to do, do not, in fact, produce disciples who are able to produce other disciples. In the actual practice of most congregations, formation has become about providing people with facts about God all the while having little to offer in the way of transforming their thoughts, feelings, relationships, character, much less their embodied habits. The call to discipleship is to “teach them to obey everything I command them” (Matt 28:20) and in this way, Willard’s attention to the formational power of the disciplines offers a vital corrective, for it is through sustained attention to these practices that the Spirit begins to transform lives.
Story Formed Faith: After Virtue, Alasdair MacIntyre

While much of the recent work in narrative theology explores the importance of retelling and rehearsing a communally recounted story, MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*, is primarily focused upon a description of the narrative integrity of individual human lives. The intersection of an individual’s story and the narrative histories of the communities to which he or she is part are described in chapter fifteen, “The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life, and the Concept of a Tradition,” a project the author describes as a “contemporary attempt to envisage each human life as a whole.”15 His task is to examine and express the concepts embedded in the concrete practices of human lives to help people move toward living lives of moral worth. As an analytic philosopher, MacIntyre provides a noteworthy voice in this conversation that should be engaged and integrated with the theological considerations regarding teleology.

*After Virtue* contributes to this project in three ways: first by providing a thick description of the incoherent state of contemporary moral discourse which is traced to the Enlightenment’s devaluation of narrative history. By MacIntyre’s account, the modern “self” that has emerged is one which is perceived to have no essential contingencies. As such, moral agency is located autonomously rather than in social roles, practices, traditions, narratives, etc. The self is thus seen to exist apart from and in contrast to the social world. The result is a kind of radical individualism in which all moral statements become expressions of personal values. Accordingly, this modern self is one with “no

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continuities, save those of the body which is its bearer and of the memory which to the best of its ability gathers in its past.”\(^{16}\) It has stripped away essential qualities in a way that would provide continuity between one’s personal history and identity. The self is not conceived within a narrative and is thus free to construct an identity from whatever sources one deems appropriate. Thus, the modern situation is one in which contingencies such as culture, gender, religious upbringing, etc. are perceived to be layers that must be shed if one is to discover the *real* self. With such heavy emphasis upon the individual, “community” is simply the name given any arena in which individuals are free to pursue self-defined notions of the good. When considering the multiplicity of questions regarding identity that bubble up within various cultural outlets, MacIntyre’s insights describe why many retreat from seeking answers from within communities of interpretation or institutions that serve as bearers of tradition or that seek to inculcate a particular moral vision.

After describing the collapse of a shared moral lexicon, MacIntyre’s second contribution is his argument for the recovery of the virtues and moral traditions that initiate persons into particular ways of being. For Christians, discipleship is not merely the transfer of *information* from one autonomous mind to another, but it is also a process of *formation*– the shaping of a kind of people who will inhabit the world in a particular way. Therefore, while it is indeed task of the church to communicate and disseminate the content of faith in terms of its creeds, histories, and doctrine, it is much more the task of shaping a people who are defined by a particular story and a particular *telos* rooted in the

\(^{16}\) Ibid, 33.
reality of God’s in-breaking kingdom. Disciples of Jesus become who they are in large part through participating in embodied practices sustained by story-formed communities who are shaped by particular desires and oriented toward a vision of the purpose and meaning of life. To be a disciple is to become immersed in the particular life of a community that possesses a very particular form and content. It is to be initiated into the character of a community whose moral culture is shaped by the centrality of worship where Scripture and sacrament are cherished.

Thirdly, *After Virtue* points toward the necessity for the church to help others adequately locate themselves within a story that presents an image of the future in the form of an end or a goal “toward which we are either moving or failing to move in the present.” At heart, the church’s teaching about the life of discipleship is like a story about a quest that entails great risk—one must be willing to lose his or her life in order to gain it (Matt 16:25). Story becomes the mode through which one understands his or her own actions and becomes able to give a coherent account of the moral life. Humans naturally crave that the stories they tell make sense. As MacIntyre writes:

> Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part? … Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words.’

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17 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 216.

Individuals gain a sense of where their lives are progressing only once they are able to locate their lives within the plot of a greater story, of which one’s personal narrative is a vital subplot. Furthermore, there is a narrative unity to human life which makes the individual life unintelligible if it becomes divorced it from a personal history. All are born in particular places, to particular parents, raised within particular institutions and commit concrete actions within these settings and among these people.

Therefore, the individual person is, to a very real extent, what others observe him or her to be at any given point in his or her life, no matter how changed he or she may become. There is simply no way to construct a self apart from the person who did certain things at certain times in certain places with certain people. Since a person can never stand apart from his or her history, the story of an individual’s life must always be enfolded in the story of those communities from which he or she came. The past always finds a way of peeking through in the present. For this reason, communal accountability is vital to the assurance that the stories one tells “aspire to truth,” as it is only through confronting the narrative unity of life that one gains the capacity to fully understand one’s actions. In the same way, it is only as the individual comes to recognize some sense of where his or her story is headed that he or she is able to discern what might constitute proper action in the present. Divorced from some sense of the final telos, a story would have no beginning. Without a concept of the “chief end” of the human person is needed to animate one’s actions.

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19 Ibid, 221.

Story-Formed Faith: *A Community of Character*, Stanley Hauerwas

Deeply influenced by MacIntyre, in *A Community of Character*, Hauerwas seeks to build a case that Christian claims are made intelligible only by becoming part of a community that inhabits the Christian narrative. This is because Christians “learn of Jesus . . . through his story as we find it in the Gospel and as we see it in the lives of others.”21 Christian witness is a matter of telling and living the story rightly, and in so doing, the church “serves the world by helping the world to know what it means to be the world.”22 It is only through the presence of a contrast community that the world may know it is different from the people known as church. The narrative of Scripture provides the normative context for how the community is to render its existence. One can therefore only properly be understood to be Christian to the extent that their thoughts, actions, and habits are in continuity with the story that provides the basis for his or her life. This is particularly true in modern liberal democracies that provide scores of counter-narratives, each offering to make sense of one’s social origins.

Like MacIntyre, Hauerwas notes that in a pluralistic culture which rejects the concept of a shared narrative, people with divergent views or moral cultures are bereft of any rational basis for cooperation. To account for the lack of a shared history, liberalism insists that people only need “a system of rules that will constitute procedures for resolving disputes as they pursue their various interests.”23 The situation is thus one such

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22 Ibid, 50.

23 Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 78.
as T. S. Eliot describes in which men, “constantly try to escape / From the darkness outside and within / By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.” Against the determinative story that individuals have no story except for those that are self-constructed, Hauerwas contends that the way forward is for the church to be herself—she does this best by offering the counter-formation necessary to sustain a distinctive witness rooted in the narrative of a God who offers freedom by way of a cross and a community with the audacity to be shaped by that cross.

In considering moral development, Hauerwas makes a helpful distinction between an ethic of duty and an ethic of virtue. The former derives from an awareness of those tasks one feels a certain obligation to perform due to one’s responsibility or role, despite the fact that one may not personally feel inclined to do these things. Thus, the moral weight in an ethic of duty is placed upon the choices and decisions that the individual makes regarding the duties or responsibilities over which he or she has a certain kind of ownership. As Hauerwas notes, “From the perspective of an ethic of duty, we should do what we are obligated to do even though it may not reflect or contribute to our character.” A virtue ethic, by contrast, is predicated upon shaping dispositions that may not necessarily require decisions. Again, narrative is central to this moral framework. This is not to say that a person of virtue does not have to make hard decisions, indeed, they may have to make what appear to others to be tremendous decisions but are

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possessed by an inner sense of there was no choice to be made because to fail to act
would mean a betrayal of one’s character.26

The person of Samwise Gamgee in Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings Trilogy illustrates
this point. Sam did not follow Frodo on the journey because he was possessed by a sense
of obligation to do so—as though failure to act would result in a moral deficiency—
rather, he embarked upon the journey because embodying the qualities of courage and
friendship was the only way to remain faithful to his character. He could have chosen to
stay among the comforts of the Shire, but in a very real sense perceived that he had no
choice. Accordingly, virtuous people do not look at situations as “mud-puddles into
which we have to step”27 but as confrontations that reveal to them the kind of persons
they are. Under this view, individuals can only understand how they are to act if
possessed by a narrative “that places our lives within an adventure. For to be virtuous
necessarily means we take the risk of facing trouble and dangers that might otherwise be
unrecognized.”28 One’s capacity to be virtuous is not self-determined. It depends on being
part of a community “that has been formed by narratives faithful to the character of
reality.”29 Christians are a “storied people” who worship a God they only come to know
as their character is formed in correspondence with His. This is never done in isolation
but requires “the existence of a corresponding society—a ‘storied society’”30 To the

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid, 115.
28 Ibid.
uninitiated, Christian faith only becomes a real option when confronted by a community that bears significant resemblance to God’s character.

Finally, Hauerwas returns to the theme that both MacIntyre and Allen describe regarding the narrative unity of the human life. Rejecting the notion that it is possible to disassociate oneself from past actions, Hauerwas writes:

The unity of the self is more like the unity that is exhibited in a good novel—namely with many subplots and characters that we at times do not closely relate to the primary dramatic action of the novel. But ironically, without such subplots we cannot achieve the kind of unity necessary to claim our actions as our own…Substantive narratives that promise me a way to make myself my own require me to grow into the narrative by constantly challenging my past achievements. That is what I mean by saying that the narrative must provide skills of discernment and distancing. For it is certainly a skill to be able to describe my behavior appropriately and to know how to ‘step back’ from myself so that I might better understand what I am doing. The ability to step back cannot come by trying to discover a moral perspective abstracted from all my endeavors, but rather comes through having a narrative that gives me critical purchase on my own projects.31

Part of the maturation process is the ability to own the implications of one’s own actions and to claim them as integral to one’s own story. This involves resisting the temptation to disassociate the self from committed actions that are incongruent with how one wishes to be perceived by others. To grow in discipleship to Jesus one must be able to evaluate the past by holding the narrative of one’s life up against a preferred vision of the future. This is essentially a teleological enterprise; it is through engaging in practices such as confession and receiving forgiveness that individuals are able to interpret the past in the light of a story that offers grace upon grace. This is crucial if one is to be able to surrender false accounts of the self and move toward the future God desires. The skills of

31 Ibid, 144-145.
discernment and distancing, as Hauerwas calls them, help call into question one’s own subjectivity in the process of placing one’s life before God in the presence of community.

**Story Formed Community: Spiritual Autobiography, Richard Peace**

*Spiritual Autobiography* is a study guide designed to equip users to write an account of the patterns and direction that God has woven into their lives over time. The guide is meant to be used in a group setting because articulating personal stories of God’s interaction in individual lives helps fosters a sense of reality and build community. As Peace notes, “By sharing your story with others, you come to a better understanding of your uniqueness as a child of God.”

Furthermore, chronicling shared experiences together helps draw the disparate threads of individual lives together in a way that reveals their meaning: “It reminds us of where true reality lies in contrast to the illusions of modern life.” In noticing God at work through the lives of others, the individual becomes more open to and aware of the possibility of transformation. This provides the ability to see how the seemingly unrelated subplots of one’s life serve as preparation for the next stage of the journey. Because the unity of the human life is story-like in nature, by understanding the context of one’s past, one can come to a better sense of what God is doing in and through the present that also points toward his ultimate intentions for the future.

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33 Ibid, 58.

34 Ibid, 61.
There are two particularly helpful aspects of Peace’s work for the purposes of this project: the narrative questions contained throughout serve as a model for the kind to be used in the curriculum developed within, and the information regarding the content and process of writing provide a useful template for the curriculum. These sections are referenced extensively throughout the development process. In preparation for writing, Peace recommends a process of segmenting one’s life into time periods based upon age. This is done as a means of focusing one’s memories and thoughts as each stage poses its unique challenges and perspectives. At each stage, the reader is encouraged to remember persons, places and circumstances through which God drew his or her attention toward an awareness of Divine presence as well as the “boundary events” which served as the catalyst for a new phase of life.\(^{35}\) These insights have aided in the development of a tool that participants in the curriculum of this project will utilize called a “life graph.” The purpose of the life graph is to create a visual representation of the high and low points of the individual’s life story as plotted out on an axis throughout time. This simple tool helps underscore the reality that the spiritual journey takes place over the course of an entire life and encompasses various positive events, circumstances and people as well as the negative ones.

After chronicling each period, the next step is to engage in an examination of the events in search of divine encounters, crises of faith, or periods of intense spiritual growth.\(^{36}\) In the midst of the process, a picture begins to emerge. This picture can be

\(^{35}\) Ibid, 67.

\(^{36}\) Ibid, 71.
arranged in various ways—thematically, chronologically, metaphorically. Once an organizing principle is established, the final step is to fill in the details. In each of the moments one either moved toward or withdrew, responded to God’s initiative, or failed to respond. All of these details are part of the story about who one has become and are integrally linked to who one will be in the future.

For the purposes of this project, Peace’s work has proven to be immensely practical. In a section entitled, “Issues in Preparing a Spiritual Autobiography,” he confronts the danger that self-deception poses toward the enterprise of sharing stories within community. While it is often the popular perception that life is at its best if it projects an arc of consistent growth, punctuated by only minor setbacks, the reality is that it is often in the darkest chapters of life that one begins to perceive God’s voice. On this theme, Peace offers tremendous help for small groups which seek to break through the superficial pretense and confront the reality of God’s work. This is a significant contribution for communities with a high degree of image consciousness.

**Story Formed Community: The Church and the Crisis of Community, Theresa Latini**

In the final book under review, *The Church and the Crisis of Community*, Latini offers no less than a practical theology of small group ministry developed from Barth’s ecclesiology. She thus casts the church’s practice of the series of intimate relationships known as *koinonia* in the dynamic modes of gathering, upbuilding, and sending. This is particularly helpful within the context of St. Andrew’s as it is through a critical examination of Barth’s work that the congregational strategy is framed. At heart, Latini seeks to work out a practical theology that will help the church live out its missional
identity more faithfully while simultaneously helping to fill the void for community that is so acutely felt by a culture which increasingly moves others toward isolation. Small groups, according to Latini, are a vital expression of the church’s support and development of authentic community and are a critical means through which the church becomes what God has intended it to be:

as the church practices koinonia in each of these three modes, it serves Christ, itself, and the world. In its gathering, the church most strictly serves God; in its upbuilding, it serves God in its mutual service; and in its sending, it serves God and itself by serving the world. As it practices koinonia in its gathering, upbuilding, and sending and thus serves Christ, itself, and the world, the church becomes a provisional representation of the justification, sanctification, and vocation of all humanity. It witnesses to the completed work of reconciliation in Christ.\(^{37}\)

In a sense, small groups function as a micro-expression of the broader church community. They are never meant to replace church or serve as a substitute for joining others in worship or the celebration of Word and Sacrament but are designed to overlap and help embody the elements of the church’s witness.\(^{38}\)

In the early chapters, Latini echoes MacIntyre and Hauerwas’ descriptions of the fragmentation of society brought on by modernity. Small groups represent, in many ways the search for belonging. In an age marked by individualism, narcissism, and the myth of heroic self-sufficiency, small groups play an important role in restoring a lost sociality to North American culture. With the structures of community continuously shifting in response to the accelerating pace of modernization and globalization, small groups


\(^{38}\) Ibid, Kindle Location 1171.
provide, in Latini’s words, “a social solvent” that creates a stable space for individuals to tend to their own spiritual growth and provide care and support for others. While it is unclear whether small groups have risen to prominence in the American Church as a response to the acute social needs of individuals brought about by rapid social change, or if they are simply yet another expression of the kind of changes brought about by late modernity, there is little dispute that they have become a powerful vehicle for realizing the depth of human relations, despite the fragmentation of society. Furthermore, they provide the space to undo “the late modern religious tendency to believe without belonging” and in this way help communities of faith to claim more robustly the fullness of their baptismal convictions about a God who moves toward his children before they are able to respond in faith.

Of particular use were Latini’s later chapters in which she focused upon developing practical tools for small groups to integrate with congregational ministry design. Things such as mission statements and training documents help explicitly connect small groups with the church’s modes of gathering, upbuilding, and sending. Her tools were developed, in part, by observations from case studies with six congregations that had a well-designed small group ministry. All six of these congregational case studies had developed some form of self-assessments and three had developed tools that were linked to the congregation’s overall ministry design.41 The most helpful, in Latini’s

39 Ibid, Kindle Location 51.

40 Ibid, Kindle Location 1179.

41 Ibid, Kindle Location 2022.
observation, were those that focused on the congregation’s “discipleship marks.” One particular congregation’s approach sounds very similar to the endeavor of this project in that the curriculum encourages small groups “to evaluate themselves formally in light of these six marks of discipleship and subsequently to focus their studies and activities on growth in weak areas.”\(^{42}\) Part of the assessment tool consists of a gap analysis which defines each of the marks along a discipleship continuum from nascent faith to spiritually mature. Perhaps her greatest insight is the need for any spiritual assessment to resist the tendency to focus upon the individual disciple at the expense of the community.\(^{43}\) Any theologically sound assessment must take into account the quality of the communal life itself. Latini’s observations on the process and improvements needed in order to strengthen these assessments has proven invaluable as this project works toward the creation of such a tool for St. Andrew’s.

**Concluding Thoughts**

As stated in the introduction, sanctification is lost when churches and ministry practitioners fail to help Christians locate themselves within a story that presents a compelling vision of the future. Such a vision must demonstrate the distance between where one is in the present and where one is ultimately headed. Taken together each of these works contribute to the necessity of a story that describes the life of discipleship as a quest entailing risk and adventure. In the absence of such a determinative story churches abandon people to the narratives, ritual practices and discipleship paths whose

\(^{42}\) Ibid, Kindle Location 2043.

\(^{43}\) Ibid, Kindle Location 2049.
roads intersect with Pennsylvania Avenue, Wall Street and Madison Avenue. Conceiving of life as a journey helps clarify that spiritual progress can only be measured by means of recounting a narrative that enables us to take inventory of one’s words, thoughts and actions and holding that past story up against a future story in which one is opened to the possibility of behaving differently. The virtues stand as signposts that guide travelers on the destination. It is to a discussion of the virtues and the importance of criteria by which to measure growth that this paper now turns.
CHAPTER 3
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON SPIRITUAL GROWTH

This chapter provides a theological foundation for assessing spiritual transformation through the process of actively crafting personal narratives in small group community and then incorporating into one’s life the spiritual disciplines modeled by Jesus in the Gospels. Following MacIntyre’s work, the content of this chapter describes how the virtues function as indicators of spiritual maturity. It then turns to a discussion of the relationship between the virtues and the mission measures used within the ministry context of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church. From there, this chapter focuses upon the role that the classical spiritual disciplines play in the cultivation of virtue and, in active partnership with the Holy Spirit, lead to personal transformation. Finally, this section describes the teleological impulse behind spiritual growth: to produce followers who live as ambassadors of the Kingdom (2 Cor 5:18).

Spiritual formation is essentially Kingdom formation. As Dallas Willard describes, it is the process through which one develops the kind of “heart that belongs to
those whose life truly flows from the kingdom of God.”\textsuperscript{1} Following the analogy of the
direction to Kingdom and the disciplines serve as heart-calibrating tools that will allow
one’s compass to be oriented and reoriented properly along the journey.

**Life Marks as the Criteria for Growth**

As described above, St. Andrew’s utilizes an organizational clarity tool called the
“vision frame” which serves as a kind of prism through which ministry is given shape.
Mission measures (or Life Marks) describe the successful accomplishment of the
church’s mission as being when the lives of congregants abound in grace, peace, faith,
friendship, joy, and generosity. These measures were chosen for their presence among the
numerous passages and lists in Scripture which describe mature Christian character (Jas
2:13; Gal 5:22-23; Col 3:12-14; 2 Cor 9:6-7; Phil 2:1-4; Prov 13:20, 22:24-25; Rom 12:9-
21; 1 Cor 13:1-13; 2 Pet 1:5-7; Mic 6:8). The presence of a community of believers
whose lives point tangibly to the way of being described by these measures serves as a
powerful counternarrative to the affluence and insularity of this social and cultural
context. The mission measures thus form the basis on which the St. Andrew’s community
brings about the state of flourishing that reveals God’s intent and purposes. If their shared
mission is to be successful, members of the community must actively cultivate these
marks in their lives. Conversely, the good of the community and the world will suffer

when these marks are absent and when the formative actions of the church fail to produce them and/or fail to enshrine them in the stories the community tells.

Before describing the relationship between virtue and the measures thus described, a bit of context and some initial objections are worth considering. Perhaps the most noticeable lacunae of these measures are two of the three cardinal virtues: hope and love. The original iteration of St. Andrew’s vision frame contained eight marks—the six listed above as well as hope, and what the apostle Paul refers to as “the greatest of these,” love. The decision to streamline the mission measures from eight to six was made in effort to connect each strategic department (Gather, Build, Send) with particular discipleship outcomes. Thus, gathering to worship on a regular basis is reasoned to help individuals gain a greater sense of God’s grace extended to them and God’s peace imparted to them. Through Life Groups and other build ministry events participants engage in relational environments where faith and friendship intersect. Finally, in being sent out on mission, members grow in joy through the experience of giving of themselves and their resources generously. Furthermore, hope and love were argued to implicitly undergird all of the other mission measures.

While it may be reasonable to assume love and hope do indeed serve as a basis for the cultivation of the character of a disciple, it can also be argued that given their place in Scripture as the greatest of virtues (1 Cor 13) little is lost by explicitly stating them. Indeed, however else one might describe a disciple, it must be said that mature followers

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2 See Appendix C on page 154.
of Christ are abounding in the kind of hope and love that God makes possible. In future discussion about the congregational mission measures, their omission should be revisited.

A second criticism of these particular marks is that they are focused upon the life of the individual as opposed to the life of the body.3 There is wide latitude in the leadership’s ability to interpret the mission of the church: “following Jesus Christ to lead lives that reveal God’s goodness.” As such, it can mean a variety of different things. In a world in which “the Good Life is often identified with power, wealth, status, and freedom from all authority,”4 this is frequently taken to mean that members carry Christ into the world as individual agents, each dispatched to their own homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces to live out their purpose in whatever way they deem appropriate.

Furthermore, these marks are defined as a measure of the organization’s success explicitly by whether or not individual member’s lives experience growth. A third criticism, which will be taken up later, is the inherent subjectivity of the measures St. Andrew’s has chosen to serve as indicators of congregational success. While it is difficult to determine whether an individual or a body has exhibited significant growth in grace, it does not tax the imagination to discern how a body might determine success in its mission by whether, say, sufficient gains in neighborhood literacy rates have been impacted by the efforts of congregation members who have chosen to volunteer in underserved elementary schools. The latter is easily quantifiable, where the former is not.

Moreover, the latter demands a collective response where the former does not.

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In spite of these shortcomings, the mission measures chosen cast vision for a life of discipleship where the cultivation of virtue is prized. While they may be applied individually, they nevertheless become signposts that shape the community’s identity and purpose. In leaving room for subjectivity, these mission measures allow members to apply a degree of creative agency in the process of their own growth. Though they would be bound to share a number of things in common with others who were similarly in pursuit of virtue, one person’s path to a life of generosity might naturally look quite different from another’s—the vital matter is that one engages in disciplines and practices that will form one’s character. For this reason, it is imperative for the congregation’s formational efforts to draw attention to the virtues and the role they play in the process of spiritual growth.

The Role of the Virtues: A Rubric for Christian Formation

Every human endeavor is directed toward a telos: a particular vision of flourishing, well-being, or “the good,” the pursuit of which becomes the orienting end or purpose around which one builds a life. Thus, the Westminster divines were able to postulate that “Man’s chief end is to glorifie [sic] God, and to enjoy him forever.”5 Such a description names the state of being well and doing well in relation to God and God’s intentions for humanity. This, in turn, serves as the target at which to aim one’s actions and intentions. With such an understanding of life’s purpose, one must then – in active partnership with the Holy Spirit – develop practices that will shape one’s character in

such a way that he or she will be habitually predisposed to bringing God glory and finding enjoyment in God’s goodness, as well as avoiding those practices (or vices) which will produce a habitual deficiency in one’s character and so prohibit him or her from reaching the goal.

In many ways, St. Andrew’s mission statement captures this teleological impulse. The end toward which the community aspires is that of leading “lives that reveal God’s goodness.” The virtues related to this telos are precisely those attributes, the possession of which will enable individuals to move toward demonstrating God’s goodness, mercy, compassion, etc. and the lack of which will frustrate such movement.⁶ The virtues are thus the qualities necessary for well-being and flourishing to come about.

In Greek thought, the term “virtue” (arête) usually refers to moral excellence or goodness. Hauerwas notes that the ancient philosophers used the term to describe “that which causes a thing to perform its function well. Arête was an excellence of any kind that denotes the power of anything to fulfill its function.”⁷ In this sense, the excellence of a shield is its ability to absorb blows; the excellence of a dog is its ability to hunt; the excellence of a swimmer is her speed, and so on. However, in describing the New Testament’s account of the virtues, MacIntyre offers a more nuanced definition in suggesting that they are, “a quality, the exercise of which leads to the achievement of the human telos.”⁸ To phrase it differently, the virtues are internal dispositions toward the

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good that are woven into persons in such a way that they become inclined to act in a way that reflects the good. To become virtuous is to internalize the good in such a way that performing the good becomes habitual—one’s second nature.

Contrary to the Platonic and Aristotelian moral vision which described virtue as a kind of excellence that is the product of human effort, the New Testament traces the source of virtue to the character of God as modeled by Jesus, and the development of virtue in the life of the believer to the ongoing partnership of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, that is the thrust of Paul’s exhortation to the Galatians to “keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). For in so doing, the Spirit produces the kind of fruit which enables believers to “serve one another humbly in love,” (5:13) “carry[ing] each other’s burdens, and in this way fulfill[ing] the law of Christ” (6:2). In Willard’s words, these qualities are called the fruit of the spirit “because they are not direct effects of our efforts but are brought about in us as we admire and emulate Jesus and do whatever is necessary to learn how to obey him.”\(^9\) Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, Paul’s robust exploration of the character of love comes immediately following a discussion of the Spirit’s outpouring of gifts among the people for the purpose of mutually building the community for the sake of its witness. Throughout the New Testament, the growth that leads to flourishing is a product of active engagement with the Holy Spirit.

The virtues serve as a rubric for Christian formation by directing believers to the kinds of internal dispositions of character that would cause them to act in ways consonant with the purpose for which God has created them. As has been mentioned, in the context

of St. Andrew’s this purpose is articulated as “revealing God’s goodness.” In this way, the virtues point to a notion of good which, being rooted in God’s nature and purposes, stands beyond mere human flourishing. Indeed, fulfillment of this mission may require the completion of acts that look like human failure. The self-denial of Matthew 16:24 is undoubtedly a surrender, but it is the surrender of the self for a new creation. It is in this way, as Charles Taylor describes, that Christian faith “redefines our ends so as to take us beyond flourishing.”\(^\text{10}\) The congregation captures this impulse when it exists to be a signpost pointing others toward the kingdom.

A question arises: How does one discover the virtues that will shape the community to function in such a way? This question can only be answered in connection with one’s understanding of the ultimate story regarding what human beings are and what humans are called to be in contrast to the hidden ways in which the cultural logic of late modern capitalism defines the human telos.\(^\text{11}\) This process of definition requires both an awareness of how “disciplinary formation takes place in culture, then second, to recognize the antithesis between the dominant culture’s understanding of the human calling and the biblical understanding of our ultimate vocation.”\(^\text{12}\) The virtues that shape one’s character in such a way as to enable him or her to pursue the disciplines and practices necessary to sustain a life directed toward “revealing God’s goodness” will

\(^{10}\text{Charles Taylor, } A \text{ Secular Age. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2007), 151.}\)

\(^{11}\text{James K. A. Smith, } Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism? (The Church and Postmodern Culture): Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucault to Church. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 102.}\)

\(^{12}\text{Ibid, 106.}\)
require one to pay attention to a culture that is always encouraging the chasing of a rival version of the good life.

Thus, in a culture increasingly marked by antagonisms, a community capable of revealing God’s goodness must be animated by the virtue of graciousness in their interactions. Where those antagonisms bring discord, disunity, and strife, God’s people must possess the virtue of peacefulness and by their non-anxious presence bring healing and unity. As the closed accounts of human existence “leave no place for fullness,” to use Taylor’s phrase, a people whose lives are marked by the virtue of faithfulness to a particular story and who demonstrate the kind of flourishing revealed by that story begins to make adopting that story as one’s own an imaginative possibility. In a culture where social isolation and loneliness are rapidly intensifying, a community marked by the virtue of robust friendship draws hopeful attention to God’s intention for human relationships. As the vacuum created by broken sociality and the threat of immanence become manifest in cultural expressions of dour materialism and consumerism, a community animated by the virtues of joy and generosity stand as hopeful indicators of transcendence. In all of this, the virtues do not exist a priori to an understanding of the ends of human existence, rather they arise precisely from a narrative that frames one’s comprehension of where all of life is heading.

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Quantitative vs. Qualitative Assessment

At first glance, the question of how to measure the growth of one’s inner character as it relates to a particular virtue appears somewhat complicated. Because this is so, congregations and ministry leaders typically choose to apply metrics that are limited to the rules of quantitative analysis. Accordingly, the barometer for congregational health is reduced to things to which one can easily attach a number such as worship attendance, property, and finances. While such metrics can offer insight into the health of an organization, David Fitch rightly observes that “numbers miss measuring how well a church is functioning as the body of Christ. Numbers often miss measuring the progress of discipleship in the church…they say nothing qualitative about what is going on in the church.”  

After all, one’s devotional life can be singularly fixated upon the “proper” amount of time spent reading the Bible, or in prayer, or how regularly one engages in the spiritual disciplines. Time spent is no guarantor of transformation.

Quantitative measurements can be helpful—it is unlikely for one to cultivate the virtues without attending to the disciplines and practices by which God produces them—but they are not sufficient to the task alone. For example, one can approach biblical texts as content to be intellectually mastered and believed rather than as a source of God’s self-revelation which makes a claim on one’s daily actions and habits. In this case, one may take a great amount of time exegeting and applying the insights of historical critical methodology in order to gain an understanding of the text but be left essentially

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 unmotivated to live according to the world that the text describes. One can also spend a
great amount of time in Scripture and not be particularly concerned by the fact that he or
she does not understand what he or she reads. In neither case is virtue cultivated.
Similarly, one can spend much time fasting and praying without displaying mature
character (Matt. 6:1-8; Lk. 18:9-14). As Dallas Willard writes, “To dwell in his word we
must know it: know what it is and what it means. But we really dwell in it by putting it
into practice.”16 For this reason, quantitative measurement alone will not be of much use.

Qualitative analysis is more difficult because it causes one to look beyond the
surface and to measure progress against the ends toward which one is striving. It is
fundamentally a teleological enterprise. Measurement of spiritual growth must be linked
to how well one’s life is being ordered to pursue those practices and disciplines which
produce the kind of character appropriate to the ends of one’s existence. To answer that
question, one must cultivate what Hauerwas calls the “skills of discernment and
distancing” that allow one to step back from oneself in order to better understand one’s
actions.17 This ability isn’t an abstract process but rather comes through identifying and
adhering to a story that allows for reflexivity on one’s endeavors.18 To know whether one
is progressing, one must have a story that helps one make sense of one’s life. Moreover,
one must learn how to locate oneself in the story so that “our story telling is supported by
our story living.”19 Without a firm grasp of the story that gives one’s life meaning, one

16 Willard, The Divine Conspiracy, 296.
17 Hauerwas, A Community of Character, 144.
18 Ibid, 145.
19 Smith, Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?, 80.
will find it difficult to arrange the scattered desires of one’s life into order and desire the
good that God seeks to impart.

The skills of discerning and distancing help one to take stock of one’s actions and
to determine whether those actions are virtuous. As Hauerwas notes, “‘training in virtue’
often requires that we struggle with the moral situations which we have ‘gotten ourselves
into’ in the hope that such a struggle will help us develop the character sufficient to
avoid, or understand differently, such situations in the future.” It is only by evaluating
one’s past actions against the narrative of the biblical story that one is able to check
against self-deception. The only way to know whether one is growing in, say, the virtue
of generosity, is by recounting how one has behaved in the present and holding that story
simultaneously against one’s past and against the preferred future embedded within the
narrative of the Bible. If one’s character begins to more and more resemble the virtue
described by Scripture in such a way that generosity has become habitual, it is reasonable
to conclude that one has progressed. This is the kind of analysis that will be required if
one is to measure growth over time.

**Spiritual Disciplines and Personal Transformation**

Growth does not happen automatically. One must take up new disciplines in order
to train differently if one hopes to make progress. The word “discipline” is derived from
discipulus, the Latin word for student or apprentice, which also provides the source of the
word disciple. In the strictest sense, a discipline is the kind of action appropriate to a

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disciple. Similarly, to be a disciple is to be an active practitioner of the discipline(s) one is learning. In Bonhoeffer’s famous phrase, “Discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and therefore submission to the law of Christ.”

It is worth noting that the word “disciple” appears 269 times in the New Testament. And yet discipleship, as a robust self-understanding of what it means to embody the Christian faith, appears to be diminishing in the context of North American churches, particularly among the Evangelical churches which purport to take the Bible most seriously. A Lois Barrett describes, “faith” has become synonymous in the popular imagination with “thinking the right things about Jesus, or agreeing that what he said and did is true. Once you believe, then discipleship supposedly follows, but acting like Jesus is commonly seen as secondary to believing.”

There appears to be a massive discipleship gap within congregations and yet to follow Christ in any meaningful way requires that persons be radically transformed in their inner being.

Participating in embodied practices or disciplines that habitually predispose the individual to exhibit a certain quality of character is vital to the process of being

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24 Kent Carlson and Mike Lueken offer a sharp critique of the “Seeker Friendly” strategies of contemporary evangelicalism that operate by principles of pragmatism and leave discipleship as an optional course. See their, *Renovation of the Church: What Happens When a Seeker Church Discovers Spiritual Formation*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), Kindle Electronic Version, Locations 862-863.

conformed to Christ’s image. Dallas Willard describes disciplines as “activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order. They enable us more and more to live in a power that is, strictly speaking, beyond us, deriving from the spiritual realm itself.”26 This is not to suggest that the disciplines are a means of producing transformation by one’s effort. It is God who begins the work of sanctification in the life of the believer, and it is God who “will bring it to the day of completion” (Phil 1:6). Disciplines are “habitations of the Spirit”27 that serve as conduits through which Christ brings freedom. Indeed, Richard Foster writes that “the purpose of the Disciplines is liberation from the stifling slavery to self-interest and fear.”28 Discipleship to Jesus is the process of submitting one’s habits to the Spirit so that one is led into a deeper experience of God’s grace and begins to take on the character of Christ. The aim is “to bring every element in our being, working from inside out, into harmony with the will of God and the kingdom of God.”29 Apprenticeship to Jesus is the ongoing process of clothing oneself with the character of Christ (Rom 13:14). In active partnership with the Holy Spirit, this transformation is made effective by engaging in the disciplines that direct one towards God and begin to shape one’s desires, feelings, and actions so that they resemble those of Jesus. This paradigm of transformation is described in Philippians as Paul writes;


28 Foster, Celebration of Discipline, 2.

29 Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 93.
Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Phil 4:4-9)

The dynamism of this passage notes both an active and passive role in the disciple. Paul encourages the Philippians to “put into practice” the habits and patterns he modeled, including sustained thought on the virtues. At the same time, he instructs them to be expectant that God’s peace will supply their need. Spiritual formation is the process in which one’s training in virtue and the effective power of God meet. Key to this process, is sustained attention to spiritual disciplines.

In The Spirit of the Disciplines, Dallas Willard makes the central claim that “we can become like Christ by doing one thing—by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself,” namely, “by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father...such things as solitude and silence, prayer, simple and sacrificial living, intense study and meditation upon God’s Word and God’s ways, and service to others.”30 In this sense, disciplines are those embodied practices that gradually enable the practitioner to accomplish what he or she cannot yet do by direct effort. Willard describes by analogy:

The star performer himself didn’t achieve his excellence by trying to behave in a certain way only during the game. Instead, he chose an overall life of preparation

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of mind and body, pouring all his energies into that total preparation, to provide a
foundation in the body’s automatic responses and strength for his conscious
efforts during the game...A successful performance at a moment of crisis rests
largely and essentially upon the depths of a self wisely and rigorously prepared in
the totality of its being—mind and body.\textsuperscript{31}

One does not engage in a discipline simply for the good of engaging in the discipline, but
because the discipline is the means through which one’s character is shaped. One does
not spend hours at the driving range simply to be good at practicing golf strokes, but
rather to be good at playing golf. While it may not be reduced to “ten thousand hours,”\textsuperscript{32}
formation in Christlikeness does require deliberate, sustained effort.

Many do not cultivate virtue because they believe (much like the ancient Greeks)
that character is innate and they simply lack the gravitas or inner disposition to become
the kind of person who able to behave virtuously. It is important to clarify that spiritual
formation is not about simply willing oneself to become better. Much like running a
marathon or learning to play the blues, the process of formation requires sustained effort
in sacred practices and submitting one’s habits to God so that one can come to experience
the Spirit’s generative power. Through gradual “training in Godliness” (1 Tim. 4:7)
individuals are opened to the transforming power of Christ. Upon receiving the grace that
God offers, they begin to experience incremental change toward inward Christlikeness.\textsuperscript{33}
Once the interior life begins to shift, external actions will follow suit, hence Willard’s
conviction that formation is fundamentally a renovation of the heart.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 3-4.


\textsuperscript{33} Willard, \textit{Renovation of the Heart}, 82.
The Pattern of Spiritual Transformation

Willard’s work underscores the reality that spiritual formation is an inescapable fact of human existence. Humans are fundamentally spiritual beings and as such will be formed by the persistent actions, attitudes, and habits of the mind and heart. All of these will in turn be born out in behaviors. In his work, *The Renovation of the Heart*, Willard lays out “the reliable pattern” of transformation as being the process of implementing “the appropriate vision, intention, and means.” 34 This “VIM pattern” is how Christ is formed in the life of the believer. Without such a pattern firmly in place, Willard confidently states that “Christ will not be formed in us.” 35

The process of internal renovation must begin with a compelling vision of the Kingdom of God and what life in the Kingdom looks like. Because humans have a telos, it is necessary to begin the journey of transformation with the end in mind. Furthermore, because humans are storytelling creatures, vision is captivated by a sense of narrative. Jesus, of course, came proclaiming in word and in deed that the Kingdom had come (Matt 4:17; Mk 1:15, etc.). According to Luke’s gospel his first public address was the kingdom declaration that the good news of Isaiah 61 had arrived in his person. To possess a clear vision of the Kingdom is to long for its fulfillment on earth (Matt 6:10; Lk 21:31; 22:18) and to rejoice in its presence (Lk 17:21; Jn 18:36-37) and availably to those who desire it above all else (Matt 6:13; 11:12; Lk 16:16). As Willard states, “the vision that underlies spiritual (trans)formation into Christlikeness is, then, the vision of life now and


35 Ibid.
forever in the range of God’s effective will—that is, partaking of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:1-2) through a birth ‘from above’ and participating by our actions in what God is doing now in our lifetime on earth.”³⁶ Above all, it is a conviction that the Kingdom of God is not some far off place that one hopes to go to when one dies, it is rather a distinct option that one can choose to enter into by following the example and teaching of Jesus in the here and now.

To be possessed by this vision calls for more than adherence to propositional truths about Jesus. Vision alone will not produce transformation, it must be paired with intention that bears itself out in conscious choice. As Thomas á Kempis wrote, “our intentions will reveal our spiritual progress and, if we wish to go far, we will need strong perseverance.”³⁷ If the vision fails to compel, one’s will will be left essentially unmoved. Like Jesus’s parable of pearl of great price (Matt 13:45-46), when one perceives the goodness and beauty of the kingdom with clarity, vision takes the form of obedience:

Concretely, we intend to live in the kingdom of God by intending to obey the precise example and teachings of Jesus. This is the form that trust in him takes. It does not take the form of merely believing things about him, however true they may be. Indeed, no one can actually believe the truth about him without trusting him by intending to obey him. It is a mental impossibility.³⁸

One’s intention to live in the kingdom of God is disclosed by the determination to obey the example and teachings of Jesus. Faith takes no other form. It is not only a matter of believing the right things about him, however true and important they may be. Faith is

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³⁶ Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 87.


³⁸ Willard, Renovation of the Heart, 87.
trusting in Jesus in obedience. When Peter is called out on the water in Matthew 14:22-36, his faith is demonstrated by action. He cannot properly know whether Jesus will enable him to walk on water until his feet stand upon the waves. Jesus can only properly be known by being followed. Søren Kierkegaard catches this nuance nicely in his *Upbuilding Discourses*. Taking the common metaphor of life as a road to be traveled upon, he writes “in the spiritual sense, the road comes into existence only when we walk on it. That is, the road *is* how it is walked.”39 Discipleship to Jesus refuses to be an abstract affair, it demands movement.

Once the vision of life in the Kingdom is firmly rooted in one’s heart, one must accept that Jesus actually intends for his followers to live in accordance with that vision in much the same manner he did. To live in the Kingdom as Jesus did, one must also commit oneself to doing the things that Jesus did. When the vision of Kingdom life is wed to a firm commitment to submit oneself to the processes of transformation, this will naturally result in the seeking out and application of *means* to that end. The means in question are those for spiritual transformation, “for the replacing of the inner character of the ‘lost’ with the inner character of Jesus: his vision, understanding, feelings, decisions, and character.”40 Hence the need for spiritual disciplines. If, for example, one grasps clearly that life in the kingdom is such that one is free from being consumed by anger, one would not be able to affect the kind of change necessary to live congruent with that vision by simply willing to do so, so matter how firm the intent. Rather, in partnership


40 Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 89.
with the Spirit, one must take up the necessary disciplines to retrain one’s body and
habits of thought in order to become a substantially different kind of person—one in
whom virtue is present and evident. Systemic change does not come about automatically,
it requires an entirely different kind of training.

In considering how progress in the spiritual life occurs, Thomas á Kempis wrote
that “the two main things which assist the amendment of life are a forcible withdrawal
from the vices to which we naturally incline, and a determined pursuit of any grace that
we especially need.” In the case of anger, “forcible withdrawal” will require a person to
actively determine what patterns of thought, embodied habits, and emotions that he or she
habitually nurses evoke feelings of anger within. One will not be able to act differently if
the inner being is essentially unmoved. Contrary to popular opinion, one does not “rise to
the occasion.” Having steeled one’s resolve, a person will rise only to the level of his or
her training. The second part, “determined pursuit of grace” is equally important. As
Willard states, one must “find the means of changing [one’s] inner being until it is
substantially like [Christ’s], pervasively characterized by his thoughts, feelings, habits,
and relationship to the Father.” In order to become a person in whom anger is not
persistently manifest, one must seek out disciplines that will gradually train him or her to
respond with patience and compassion where previously he or she would erupt. This is
how the virtues of graciousness and peacefulness begin to develop.

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An option for how one may choose to do this is by spending time in solitude to reflect on the sources of unmet expectations and fear. During this time, one might reflect on the breadth of biblical passages that speak of God’s steadfast love and be reminded that he is “slow to anger” (Ex 34:6, Num 14:18; Ps 86, 103, Neh 9:31, Joel 2:13—to name a few). Solitude and meditation will help that person internalize the reality that while God may not be pleased with all of one’s actions God’s general disposition toward his children is not one of anger, but of compassion. If one’s anger is the result of insufficient love for oneself producing deficient love for others, then it will become important for that person to set aside a portion of his or her week to rest and receive the gift and grace of love from God. Far from being rote exercises in which one engages as a means of winning divine approval, the disciplines of silence and solitude become means through which the Spirit impacts one’s being to shape daily actions, thoughts, and feelings over time. In this way, possessing the appropriate vision, intention, and means become the general pattern by which spiritual transformation occurs and in which the cultivation of virtue begins to take root in one’s heart.

**Educating Desire: Habits that Shape the Heart**

The question remains: how exactly is it that these embodied practices begin to shape thoughts and aim affections toward pursuit of the Kingdom? In some ways even posing the question belies the degree to which modern people have become accustomed to an intellectualist model of the human person in which one perceives of actions and behaviors as the outcome of deliberate reflection that culminates in some kind of rational choice. In discussing the discipleship framework used by most ministry practitioners,
James K. A. Smith writes, “We assume that a disciple is a learner who is acquiring more information about God through the Scriptures—that serious discipleship is really discipleship of the mind.” According to this model Paul’s admonition to “be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom 12:2) is simply a matter of thinking the right things about God.

In response to this “thinking thing” view of the human person, Smith’s project is to recover the Augustinian notion of desire’s primacy: “We are creatures who love first and foremost. . . as such our love is always ultimately aimed at a telos, a picture of the good life that pulls us toward it, thus shaping our action and behavior.” If human persons are creatures primarily motivated by longings, then spiritual formation becomes deeply concerned with training the heart to desire the proper object of its affection. The telos toward which one orients one’s life does not exist on the level of an ideal, rather it is more like a craving—something one hungers and thirsts after. Accordingly, the ways of life one adopts are indexed to one’s vision of the good life (hence vision as Willard’s starting point), not because one arrives there by conscious thought but because some picture of flourishing has seized the imagination. The disciplines function as heart calibrating tools which keep one’s desire properly oriented toward the Kingdom.

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44 James K. A. Smith, Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Culture Formation (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 80.

45 Smith, You Are What You Love, 12.
This becomes significant for the way ministry practitioners approach discipleship to the extent that they recognize desire to be a thing that operates largely without one’s conscious awareness. Summarizing his research in neuroscience and psychology, David Brooks writes, “We are primarily the products of thinking that happens below the level of awareness.”\textsuperscript{46} Like the background programs operating on a computer, subconscious desires are always present and to some extent governing one’s actions even when they are not the object of one’s current focus. Psychologists estimate that only 5 percent of human activity is the outcome of deliberate choices.\textsuperscript{47} That is, the day to day activities in which one engages are not carried out by conscious reflection but are instead the product of precognitive dispositions embedded in ritual acts and learned behaviors. These habits are appropriated and incorporated to such an extent that they become second nature.\textsuperscript{48} Many of these habits are mundane, like washing the dishes. Nevertheless, they perform a vital function in that they create shortcuts for the brain to accomplish the multitude of tasks with which it is pressed (which explains why it takes a great deal of initial effort to learn how to drive, only to find years later that one often cannot even remember things like the morning commute to work).

Some habits, however, are meaningful and play a significant role in shaping one’s identity and how one intends the world. Meaningful habits not only say something about


\textsuperscript{47} Smith, \textit{You Are What You Love}, Kindle Location 597.

an individual, but they also groove him or her into becoming a person who continues to develop that habit. Smith calls these “thick habits” that often “both signal and shape our core values or our most significant desires.” Therefore, it is not the case that the habits individuals develop over a lifetime are merely things that they do. Habits also do something to the individual—they have the power to pull the heart into a particular orbit and train one to see the world in certain ways, which causes one to act in certain ways. Brooks captures this sense well when he writes, “The person with good character has… been taught by others to see situations in the right way. When she sees something in the right way, she’s rigged the game. She’s triggered a whole network of unconscious judgments and responses in her mind, biasing her to act in a certain manner.” Because these unconscious actions have such a powerful affect, they deserve critical attention within the discussion of formation.

Disciplines, by their very nature, are a kind of learned habit that aim to steer one toward virtue and away from vice, or in Brooks words, “to see situations in the right way.” Training in virtue is a kind of formation, a programming of one’s internal dispositions. Smith likens the process of learning virtue to practicing scales on the piano as opposed to “learning music theory.” The goal is to train the fingers to know the keys so that music arises naturally. This can only happen through a great deal of disciplined

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49 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 82.


51 Smith, *You Are What You Love*, Kindle Location 344.
practice. To become virtuous is to pursue the disciplines necessary to possess the quality of character that enables one to “perform” the faith as a matter of habit.

Precisely because desire is shaped on the unconscious level through the processes of imitation and practice, it is vital that one take inventory of the ways in which one’s love is being directed. If the disciplines and habits of a well-ordered life direct one toward one’s telos, it is also the case that disciplines and habits can become misdirected (much more so that a poorly ordered life will develop misdirected habits). Humans cannot escape the ritual shaping possibilities of the culture in which they’re embedded. The work of discipleship will require the church to provide counter-formative practices. This will entail a process of learning how to distinguish the Christian message from “the operative assumptions, values, and pursuits of our host society.”

To illustrate, consider the remarkably formative power of capitalism in American culture. The reason for its power is that it does not seek to capture the mind. Every advertisement, every image in every storefront, every sports team and television show tries its best to provide an image of “the good life,” promising that if one dresses a certain way, drinks a certain beverage, engages in a particular social activity, holds specific political views, etc. one will find fulfillment. All of these things have a way of forming the way one sees the world by shaping one’s desires. The reason consumer culture is so successful is that it aims not for the head, but for the heart. Marketing agencies have rightly discerned that humans are embodied desiring creatures whose orientation to the

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world is not primarily through the rational mind, but through the imagination. Thus, advertisements appeal at the level of desire and longing. These are the things that shape individuals; the things for which people live and die (which is precisely why a narrow focus on propositions cannot sufficiently form the person). Smith calls this cultural process of shaping desires the “liturgy of the mall” and like all formative practices, the goal is to mold the heart—to capture one’s vision and imagination. Bearing faithful witness in contemporary North American culture requires disciples to be trained in recognizing the disparity between how the cultural logic of late-capitalism defines the human person and how this is set this against the story of the faith. Chiefly, capitalism depends upon a culture of consumption—particularly a culture that always requires new products. The forces that create such a culture are predicated upon systematic violation of the tenth commandment. Faithfulness requires acts of resistance.

Because of the seductiveness and persistence of this formation, Christians do not always perceive any shaping forces are at work. This is also the case with the church as a whole. As Smith concludes, because “the disciplinary mechanisms of Disney, MTV, and the Gap are so insidious and covert, we don’t recognize the way in which their message—and their vision of the human telos—is shaping our own identity.” Learning to read the world through the lens of Scripture (Calvin) means that Christians must ask critically if they have become captive to the narratives and cadences of a consumerist culture. Do they move about the world marking time according to the cycle of the

53 See Chapter 2 “Love Takes Practice” in Smith, Desiring the Kingdom, 75-88.

54 Smith, Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?, 106.
church’s calendar, or according to the release cycle of Apple products or Marvel films? Given the largely unconscious nature of formation, they may not be aware of how they have been formed.

In the affluence of Newport Beach, where Ferrari and Fendi are household names, this is an every-day challenge. No matter how great the abundance, Christians in this context assume it is a necessity of their station to acquire more, even if such acquisition means unjustly exploiting others or neglecting the needs of their neighbors. In this cultural system, what had once been considered a vice is now considered virtue and the habit-forming mechanisms of the culture will require significant counter-formation. The only means of escaping such unremitting covetousness is to identify a set of practices or disciplines within the narrative of the Christian tradition that will shape hearts toward radically different ends. People must be trained to love differently and to desire a different set of goods than those which the culture has identified. Smith writes, “We can distinguish good discipline from bad discipline by its telos, its goal or end. So, the difference between the disciplines that form us into disciples of Christ and the disciplines of contemporary culture that produce consumers is precisely the goal they are aiming at.” The development of such disciplines is an affair of the imagination. Ultimately, the disciplines that produce fully formed disciples will be those that draw people toward God’s intention for all of creation. It is to a consideration of incarnational mission that this chapter now turns.

55 Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 82.

56 Smith, *Who’s Afraid of Postmodernism?*, 102.
Having thus laid out the case for the importance of the disciplines in cultivating the kind of virtues that will direct disciples of Jesus toward the appropriate telos of their existence, this chapter will conclude with some brief reflections on the centrality of mission to Christian life. In the great commission, Jesus discloses the missional thrust of discipleship: “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” (Matt 28:19-20). Within the last century the church has recovered an understanding of its vocation as participation in the Missio Dei, and of the life of discipleship as being related to the collective endeavor of the church body to live out the great commission. All that has been written about spiritual formation thus far hinges upon one central fact: the cultivation of virtue is not primarily for the benefit of the individual. It is intimately linked to the church’s vocation of sentness. The telos of Christian community, as Inagrace Dietrich puts it, “is not simply for the benefit of those who choose to participate in Christian community. A community of love rooted in the redemptive reign of God can never be an in-house enterprise, for such love is contagious and overflowing. It seeks to embrace all humanity.”

To echo the Barthian thrust of St. Andrew’s strategy, disciples of Jesus are not made simply in gathering and in the building, but in the sending.

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With this vocational reality in mind, the mission of St. Andrew’s to “lead lives that reveal God’s goodness” cannot be interpreted to mean celebrating God’s blessings in the life of individual believer. Rather, it must be understood as a matter of participating in God’s intention to bring the flourishing of his Kingdom to the whole cosmos. Salvation is more than a transaction between individuals and God. It is the social reality of shalom—of renewed and reconciled relationships. As such, it is not a mission that can be lived fully as an individual. Faithfulness to this mission is a collective endeavor that requires formation in the structures and practices of being in community.

**Story-Telling as Witness to the Kingdom**

The recovery of narrative as an essential means by which followers of Jesus understand and orient themselves in the world remains a critical task for the formation of a missional identity. It is through the stories told within the bond of community that one comes to learn of God’s dealings with his people and of the ultimate telos to which they are heading. Through these stories and practices that one begins to envision “what human life is for and what sort of persons we should be.”\(^{58}\) Furthermore, narrative is a means of communication that imaginatively engages the fullness of humanity and shapes individuals by placing their histories “in the texture of the world” amid the reality of God’s unfolding drama.\(^{59}\) The Christian life is not something one simply intuits. It is through the *telling* and *living* of a story that followers of Jesus come to understand the

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telos which frames their existence. Discipleship only arises as an imaginative possibility when one is initiated into a determinative story of who human beings are and who it is that Jesus calls them to be. Indeed, the very way one understands human life “depends on what conception we have of the human story. What is the real story of which my life story is a part? That is the question which determines what we believe to be success and what failure.” Without a sense of the story, the appropriate vision of the kingdom will not capture one’s imagination. Possessed by the particular story of the Kingdom of God that has arrived in Jesus Christ, disciples are given the necessary vision to navigate through life adjudicating faithfulness or unfaithfulness by how well their actions correspond to the narrative they have inherited and now claim as their own. Conversely, they will find the life of faith to be quite unintelligible without a sense of the ultimate meaning of the story or of where that story is ultimately headed.

But spiritual formation is not merely a matter of hearing the story, the claims of the story must be demonstrated in the life of a community. Disciples of Jesus do not discover or learn the practices that will sustain them on their own. Mentors, teachers, partners—in other words, the body—become necessary to provide the advice, challenge, and support that will enable them to engage and fully participate. The practices and disciplines of the church are defined by the community. Accordingly, their practice only make sense from within a living tradition.

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61 Ibid, 102.

Lesslie Newbigin draws attention to the robust formative practices of Benedictine monks as an example of how hearts are attuned to the Kingdom within community. The rule, with its balanced combination of prayer, labor, and devotion is thoroughly rooted in Scripture as the source from which the community receives life. Because of this centrality for study and worship, “the biblical story came to be the one story that shaped the understanding of who we are, where we come from, and where we are going.”63 Being awash in the constant cadences and images of the narratives of creation and redemption throughout the changing seasons, seeing those narratives play out in the dramatic unfolding of human events and in the iconography that accompanied the celebration of Eucharist and Baptism, Scripture became the “one story” that served as the governing rule for all aspects of human life and endeavor.

Those who wish to follow Jesus only discover the kind of practices necessary to sustain faithful lives by being part of a “storied community.” One learns what to desire and how to act as part of an apprenticed community that has received patterns of faithfulness from those who practiced them before. Individuals learn what virtue looks like by seeing it in others. As Hauerwas writes, “the problem lies not in knowing what we must do, but how we are to do it. And the how is learned only by watching and following.”64 One becomes a faithful follower of Jesus by learning from those whose lives reflect God’s reign and who are sustained by meaningful disciplines and practices.


64 Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 131.
that orient them toward that reign. In a certain sense, one learns what it means to follow Jesus by doing the things that other Jesus followers are doing.

These practices become ritual: they constitute material, embodied routines that believers engage in repeatedly; they constitute the kind of rhythm that shapes disciples into beings who naturally embody the particular telos toward which they are directed.65 The community interprets and reinterprets these practices in light of God’s call for its common life and in faithful response to the culture in which it is embedded. In this way, missional formation must essentially be a process of biblical formation. Equipped with an interpretive framework that would render their own histories as the continuation of the apostolic mission that began at Pentecost, Christians are given a lens through which to understand themselves and interpret the surrounding culture. Engagement with Scripture and seeing the missional arc of its narrative provides fuel for the church to respond imaginatively to the world.

As mentioned above, this means examining the relationship of the church to the culture in which it is embedded and exploring creative means of engagement. This is why it is critical for disciples to discern between the formative practices of cultural narratives and those of the gospel story. Jesus is the narrative that shapes the church. This means that the church’s primary act of witness to the world is “by helping the world to know what it means to be the world. For without a ‘contrast model’ the world has no way to know or feel the oddness of its dependence on power for survival.”66 If the Jesus story is

65 Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 85-86.

66 Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 50
a true interpretation of reality, it requires a community to be demonstrably different. Missional witness begins by offering the community in which the people of God are embedded a distinctive form of life which stands in faithful contradiction to that by which the broader culture operates. The more perceptively the church is able to pinpoint areas of departure between the culture in which it is embedded and the kind of community necessary to manifest the reign of God, and the more faithfully the church is able to live in its place, the more robust its witness.\footnote{Barrett, “Missional Witness,” Kindle Electronic Edition, Locations 2347-2350.} In this way, the story of Scripture becomes the narrative by which disciples recognize the collision between the dominant culture’s understanding of the nature and purpose of human life and the biblical understanding of the kingdom vocation. Simultaneously, Scripture becomes the lexicon by which disciples are able to read the formative mechanisms hidden within cultural narratives and the index to identify, name, and critique the ways in which various social realities seek to form them.\footnote{Dieterich, “Missional Community,” 151.} This is what it means to be part of a living tradition. One does not know the story by simply hearing it, but by learning to imitate the rituals and practices of those whose lives mirror the ends of that story. Ultimately, one knows the story he has received is true when he sees it truthfully embodied in others through the living out of faithful practices and graceful witness in everyday life.

\textbf{Built to Be Sent: Practices for Mission}

Discipleship, thus described, is marked by being initiated into the particular story of the Kingdom and by being sustained and nourished by a community whose practices
cultivate virtue and shape one’s desire by offering a compelling counter-narrative to the reigning cultural powers. Through these formative practices the Spirit enables them to bear God’s likeness in their character as revealed through their behavior. Disciples *rehearse* the story in the gathered community for the purpose of *living* the story in the world, for it is a story in which they participate in God’s mission to the world. Christian community becomes the staging ground where God’s drama is acted out.

The church’s two central practices of baptism and communion shape believers for ministry of witness by immersing them in a story that is historical, communal, experiential, and dynamic. Baptism is the act of incorporating people into the reality of God’s kingdom. It becomes the act of publicly defining one’s identity as “a citizen of heaven” (Phil 3:20) by drowning the old self so that the resurrected life can emerge (Eph 4:22-24). In the same way, the church’s practice of table fellowship cast the vision for a particular way of life that is sustained by the promises and gifts of God. As Dietrich describes, “The Lord’s Supper gathers committed believers in communal meal and prayer to offer thanksgiving to God as they support and share with one another in daily life. The Lord’s Supper is a protest against and an alternative to the world’s use of food and community.” The community shaped around these practices is redeemed and re-formed to demonstrate the tangibility of love, hope, forgiveness, mutual accountability, and generosity within the world. Without communities so formed, the world will have no way of knowing that God’s creation is meant to live this way. By its shared life, the church

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69 Ibid, 148.

70 Dietterich, “Missional Community,” 165.
demonstrates to the world the nature and the reign of God. Thus, the purpose of the church is to tell and embody a story; the story of God’s creative and redemptive acts, the story of God’s faithfulness amidst human sin and confusion, and the story of God’s promises in the end. The church affirms this story every time its people gather to celebrate it, interpret it, and demonstrate it in the world.\footnote{Newbigin, \textit{Proper Confidence}, 76.}

\textbf{Accountability and Community}

Finally, one of the central practices that shapes God’s people for mission is that of intentional fellowship, as it is through gathering together in face-to-face community that individuals experience reconciliation and covenant together for mutual accountability. A certain diagnostic realism is required if one hopes to embark upon the journey of spiritual formation and transformation. Often one is quite unaware of his or her own deficiencies of character and ingrained habits. Given the human propensity toward self-deception, a community of disciplined practitioners is required to ensure that one is seeing clearly and living faithfully. Within the ecclesial context of St. Andrew’s, Life Groups provide the social structure necessary for disciples to challenge and be challenged by one another as they seek to follow Christ in a hostile world. For the goal of this project to ring true, the robust presence of \textit{koinonia} will need to be palpable in the life of the community.

John Wesley believed that intentional and disciplined small groups could incubate faithful Christian discipleship,\footnote{Dietterich, “Missional Community,” 171.} as it is within intimate community that individuals might move beyond emotional support to include structured sharing about the challenges of
pursuing Christ. Through social interaction within the community of God’s sent people disciples learn what it means to lead a life worthy of their calling (Eph 4:1). The missional theologian, Inagrace Dietterich describes the practice of this kind of fellowship as being vital to developing the virtues necessary to sustain the life of faith.

The intent is to create a social space and climate that encourages honest, caring relationships within a community of people who make time for one another, who celebrate and rejoice together, who know and serve each other, and who are accountable one to the other. Skills and habits of listening, praying, studying, thinking, sharing, disagreeing, comforting, planning, working, and thus discovering and building up each other will need to be developed. Within communities of mutual accountability, the living of the Christian way of life…is not the responsibility of isolated individuals. It involves the shared insight, the tangible support, and the committed obedience of the entire community.73

In addition to becoming communities of support and encouragement, small groups also become a critical means of identity formation. The modern emphasis on autonomy too often ignores the formative power of the various communities in which we participate, but as Robert Bellah pointed out in his landmark study, Habits of the Heart,

We find ourselves not independently of other people and institutions but through them. We never get to the bottom of ourselves on our own. We discover who we are face to face and side by side with others in work, love, and learning. All of our activity goes on in relationships, groups, associations, and communities ordered by institutional structures and interpreted by cultural patterns of meaning.74

One’s identity and vision are both taught and caught from one’s interaction with others in social settings. One begins to take on the characteristics of others in the group. In this sense, the question is not whether disciples will be socialized, but which society will have its way with them. In the same way, one comes to define oneself through the way others

73 Ibid.
respond to them, “The manner in which they act toward us defines our “self,” we come to categorize ourselves as they categorize us, and we act in ways appropriate to their expectations.”75 Participating in Christian community helps disciples practice narrating the story of faith as it intersects with their lives and as they interact with others pursuing a similar telos, it also reinforces their identity as those on whom the story makes claim. The act of defining one’s story publicly helps ensure one is truthful in the telling.

Consequently, this ministry project is predicated on the assumption that the kind disciplined life that cultivates virtue can only be accomplished within the context of supportive Christian community. This is why participation in Life Groups must precede the narrative assessment through which members will examine their lives. It is to this ministry plan that the discussion now turns.

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PART THREE

MINISTRY PRACTICE
CHAPTER 4
CURRICULUM DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, AND ASSESSMENT

Building upon the theological considerations of the previous chapter, this section lays out the rationale for creating, evaluating, and disseminating the content of St. Andrew’s Life Marks Journal, the first draft of which is presented in chapter five. This section proposes a theologically informed response to spiritual formation geared toward the specific contextual considerations of the mission measures portion of St. Andrew’s vision frame. The project addresses why it is vital to communicate to the congregation the importance of sustaining attention on spiritual growth and the spiritual disciplines as well as upon the missional thrust that such formation entails. In describing the proposed implementation plan, consideration is given to the timeline and the resources needed to launch the new ministry initiative, as well as to the identification, recruitment, and training of leaders who will help in the evaluative process and those who will assist in the beginning of new Life Groups. Additionally, attention is given to the process by which feedback from pilot groups will be gathered and implemented before launching to the entire congregation. On the whole, the development, training, and roll-out phases of the project are projected to take place over a six-month period.
Curriculum Goals

The goal of the curriculum is threefold: to enable participants to reflect theologically upon their personal histories and habits as a means of “diagnosing” the condition of their spiritual lives, measured by relative health/deficiency in the six virtues of St. Andrew’s Life Marks (Grace, Peace, Faith, Friendship, Joy, Generosity). Secondly, to provide a structure for participants to engage a community of mutual discernment that will provide support and accountability as each member presents their spiritual journey in the form of an autobiographical narrative. The final goal is to facilitate the creation of a personal rule that employs spiritual disciplines aimed toward addressing perceived areas of improvement and needed growth. The next section will briefly describe how the curriculum aims to accomplish these goals.

Diagnosis, Community of Support, Identifying Means

Following the introductory materials which describe the life of faith as a spiritual journey, the project begins by setting a conceptual framework for diagnosing areas of relative strength and weakness as it relates to each of the six mission measures in the life of the participant. Much in the same way that a doctor examines a patient by taking blood pressure and discussing symptoms, the curriculum begins by asking participants to conduct an audit of their habits and daily rhythms. This allows one to “peek beneath the hood” of one’s life in order to discover the cultural practices and forces that unconsciously shape desires and create habit forming patterns. Again, because these

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1 James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Culture Formation*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 84.
processes are largely hidden, it will require active reflection to discover how it is that one’s heart is being pulled and to what end. A second diagnostic tool to which users are introduced is a “Life Graph” that serves as a reference point by which participants exegete their own lives as they see the ebb and flow of God’s presence through the circumstances, people, and “boundary events” that have made significant impact upon them.2 Whereas the first diagnostic tool helps people see the everyday “micro” picture of habits that shape their desires, the “Life Graph” is a means of looking at the “macro” picture of one’s life to see patterns of consolation and desolation.

The final diagnostic aspect comprises the majority of the curriculum, and that is a combination of narrative questions corresponding to each of St. Andrew’s six mission measures (Life Marks) which require participants to actively reflect upon their actions, behaviors, and emotions in the present. After having undergone active reflection and response with the narrative questions, participants will write a mini-story that relates an incident from their lives to a particular life mark. The process of writing stories forces one to confront whether growth has occurred. As Charles Taylor notes, “articulacy fosters reality.”3 One’s ability to positively identify a narrative in which they self-consciously exhibit virtue reinforces the understanding of the self as one who acts virtuously.

Following the narrative questions and the mini-story, participants answer a series of “Likert Scale” questions which force them to plot their responses along a continuum

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from 1 to 5 (one being “strongly disagree” that the sentence accurately describes me and five being “strongly agree” that the sentences describe me). These questions were influenced by David Augsburger’s designations of monopolar, bipolar, and tripolar spirituality, as it is necessary to conceive of one’s spirituality not merely in relation to the self and the divine, but outward toward service of one’s neighbor. The composite score of these answers are then plotted along a radar graph. The picture that emerges represents a qualitative analysis of one’s own spiritual condition.

Given the subjective nature of qualitative analysis, the curriculum is meant to be conducted within a community of care and support. Narrative becomes a critical medium for measuring growth precisely because it is through the stories one tells that one attempts to discover and define oneself before others. But the practice of defining oneself publicly through story-telling also requires others to affirm, validate, or challenge one’s own self-understanding. As Wuthnow observes, “In the telling of personal stories, members gradually become a different people, individuals whose identities depend in subtle ways on the feedback given by other members.” One needs the active presence of others to understand whether the story one is telling about oneself is true. It is only within an environment of intimacy and trust that others may gain the fortitude to help one give up false accounts of the self. While they may take several forms, these false accounts

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4 David Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbor*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006) Kindle Electronic Version, Locations 132-135. “Monopolar refers to the discovery of an unfolding self, bipolar to the dual discoveries of depth of self and the height of the transcendent God, and tripolar to the inward, upward, and outward movements of the soul—or in other terms, the journey into the human soul, the quest for communion with the Divine, and the commitment to love and serve the neighbor.”

become manifest through one’s being hyper-critical regarding one’s own behavior, or because one suffers from a grave blindness with respect to his or her own actions and dispositions and the affect these may have on others. Additionally, through cross-mentoring the small group community is able to provide the kind of encouragement necessary to stick with the process of pursuing transformation through a disciplined, Spirit-led life.

The curriculum concludes with an adumbration of practical disciplines for growing in each of the six Life Marks. These disciplines are gleaned from the growing body of literature on the subject, most notably: Willard’s *Spirit of the Disciplines*, Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*, Adele Calhoun’s *Spiritual Discipline Handbook*, Richard Peace’s *Noticing God*, and *Meditative Prayer*, Ruth Barton’s *Sacred Rhythms*, and Marjorie Thompson’s *Soul Feast*. Additionally, Stephen Macchia’s *Crafting a Rule of Life* provides assistance in framing a “holistic description of the Spirit-empowered rhythms and relationships that create, redeem, sustain, and transform” the life God invites believers to undertake for Christ’s glory.⁶ Ultimately, it is through the ongoing commitment to building a new set of disciplines in one’s life that one becomes open to the Spirit’s transforming presence. The curriculum is meant to help provide the appropriate diagnosis and support, but the locus of the Spirit’s transformational activity takes place in the daily, weekly, and monthly rhythms of life in pursuit of the means for transformation after the curriculum has been completed. The support and accountability

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structures of community are indispensable to this process. Accordingly, attention is given to corporate disciplines as well as to the individual disciplines.

**Ministry Implementation: Overview of Pilot Groups and Additional Resources**

Training leaders and beta-testing the curriculum among well-functioning Life Groups are vital steps in the process of delivering a final product for congregational use. The first phase of this strategy is accomplished by first engaging key ministry staff and lay leaders for the purpose of testing the curriculum’s effectiveness on those with no previous formal group experience with one another. Given the depth of spiritual maturity among these leaders and practitioners and their proximity in cross-departmental working relationships, a truncated time for establishing depth and intimacy is expected. A second benefit of beta-testing among key staff and leaders is to help build a sense of anticipation and momentum in the congregation. As leaders report their depth of experience and become versed in the goals and process of the curriculum, they will be able to cast vision among their various spheres of influence.

The second phase of the strategy incorporates a larger pilot group selected among current Life Group leaders who meet three criteria: they are regularly engaged in quarterly training events, their Life Groups demonstrate commitment to St. Andrew’s TABLE values, and the Life Groups self-report a high degree of trust and vulnerability in their interpersonal sharing. Consistent with the congregational value of *Relational Ministry*, the St. Andrew’s Life Group Ministry Lead will determine which groups meet

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these criteria based upon the Ministry Lead’s personal history with Life Group leaders and his or her familiarity with groups. A final decision regarding participants in the Pilot ministry is reached after informal interviews with leaders who meet the criteria above. In total, five groups will be asked to Pilot the curriculum and the leaders will be trained to lead the groups through its various elements. Upon completion of the curriculum, Pilot groups agree to provide feedback through a web-based evaluation of the curriculum (see Appendix D). A secondary focus group with the selected Life Group leaders will provide additional in-depth feedback regarding the subjective impressions that the Life Group leaders formed throughout the weeks of the pilot project. These suggestions for revision are considered and integrated before the congregational launch. The final phase of implementation is designed to run concurrent with a seven-week sermon series on the Life Marks, inviting all Life Groups to participate. Prior to the launch of this series, all Life Group leaders will be trained at a Lead Night training event and will have the opportunity to engage with the material before bringing along their respective group members. Appendix E contains leader’s notes which will serve as the orienting document for these training sessions.

In addition to the primary resource (chapter five of this project) and the seven-week sermon series, the final implementation plan incorporates daily blog posts and video stories accessed through the church’s website, that embody each of the six Life

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8 “Lead Night” is the monthly gathering of St. Andrew’s leaders across all ministry teams. This leadership forum is specifically designed to cast vision for congregation wide initiatives and to regularly encourage and thank leaders for their ministry. Following the main presentation, ministry teams form “break out” groups for training.
Marks. Because story is a more “fully orbed means of communication,” it is able to activate the imagination and allow others to see their actions in a world where God’s story unfolds. Creative video-based narratives allow for the participants to see what a life marked by the virtue of, say, “grace” looks like in ordinary, every-day living. Seeing such a life allows participants to internalize teaching in a way that cannot easily be communicated by the sermon alone. The abilities to see oneself in the biblical story and to narrate the biblical story within the occurrences of one’s daily life are crucial for discipleship and formation. The blog posts and video stories reinforce the sermon teaching so that when participants engage with the material of the Life Marks Journal, they are primed for meaningful self-discovery.

**Ministry Implementation: Timeline**

Successful implementation of the Pilot Life Marks Journal begins eight months prior to the congregational launch. The following description of the timeline will encompass the five months prior to launch and the month following the conclusion of the seven-week initiative so that the timeline can be applied broadly to the program year. The most ideal scenario is a January launch date. Given the realities of congregational life, a clear post-Christmas initiative creates a rallying point for the community. Also, the topic of personal and communal transformation resonates deeply with the cultural practice of making “New Year’s resolutions.” North Americans are somewhat predisposed to thinking about self-improvement around the turn of the calendar year anyway, so the

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coordination of a sermon-series and the launching of a curriculum centered upon diagnosing spiritual health and cultivating virtuous habits is both timely and relevant.

In June of 2018, the project lead will assemble a leadership team to review the scope of the project. Members of the leadership team include the Lead Pastor, Life Group Ministry Lead, Minister of Communications, Pastor for Spiritual Formation, and two Spiritual Formation Lay Leaders. After an initial review of the strategic necessity for assessing St. Andrew’s Mission Measures, the leadership team will be briefed on the program design of the Life Marks assessment. The team is then tasked with developing a strategy for orienting ministry efforts toward the successful execution and launch of the congregation-wide assessment. This includes coordinating the winter education programming to correspond with themes of spiritual transformation, planning the January sermon series and securing members of the preaching team’s “buy-in” on the goals of the series and the basic theological convictions therein, working with the Life Group Ministry Lead to identify and recruit Pilot Group leaders, enlisting key Ministry Staff and lay-leaders to beta-test the curriculum, and collaborating with St. Andrew’s Communication staff to design and create supporting video stories and to develop a unified design and graphic package for the materials.

Over the summer months, much of this orienting work is done through aligning ministry teams toward the winter initiative. The August 2018 meeting of session provides the project lead and Senior Pastor with an opportunity to cast vision and receive initial feedback from the key lay leaders of the church. Their participation in the first phase of the Pilot Program is vital to building momentum within the congregation. Simultaneously during the summer months, the Life Group Ministry Lead identifies and recruits potential
Life Group leaders to commit to phase two of the Pilot Program and the Minister of Communication begins to develop video-based content that captures stories from within the congregation and its network of ministry partners that manifest the virtues of the congregational Life Marks.

September of 2018, is marked by three activities. The first “Lead Night” of the program year offers an overview of where St. Andrew’s is heading. As part of this presentation, the Senior Pastor describes a brief overview of the goals and aims of the Life Marks Journal and corresponding Sermon Series that casts these events as highlights of the year’s thematic goal. The month’s second key event is the training of phase one and two Pilot Group Leaders following the main “Lead Night” presentation. This training is a collaborative effort conducted by the Project Lead and the Life Group Ministry Lead. Shortly thereafter the eight to ten Pilot Groups will begin their seven-week journey. During the beta-test phase, the Communications team begins development of the graphics and layout for the final curriculum.

Pilot Groups conclude their beta-tests in late October/early November of 2018 upon the completion of an on-line curriculum evaluation. Following the feedback from individual members, the Life Group Ministry Lead conducts secondary interviews with the group leaders from both phases of the beta test in order to create a more detailed picture of the curriculum’s strengths and weaknesses. This feedback is vital not only to the launch, but also to the ongoing viability of the narrative assessment. The input generated from staff, ministry leaders, and Life Group members will shape future iterations of the assessment. Once this feedback is compiled and evaluated, the leadership team reviews the material and makes final revisions. By the second week of December
2018, the final edits are completed and the Communications team applies design and layout work to the revised content. Promotional materials featuring testimonials from beta-test participants begin to appear during the advent season as a means of building anticipation in the congregation.

The January 2019 Lead Night is devoted to describing the goals, aims, and process by which participants engage in spiritual transformation through the Life Marks Journal and the Life Group interactions that the curriculum engenders. Following the Lead Night presentation, Life Group leaders receive in-depth training on the curriculum and an orientation to the various materials that will be used throughout the seven-weeks. Both the sermon series and curriculum launch take place on the first Sunday following the January Lead Night.

The final assessment will be launched in March of 2019. Every Life Group participant that engaged with the curriculum will be invited to offer feedback and suggestions. For the broadest application, this assessment will be geared toward evaluating five key items: 1) whether the goal and intent of the curriculum was clear, 2) whether the curriculum was user-friendly and enjoyable, 3) whether the curriculum promoted good group discussion, 4) whether the curriculum helped the user understand relative areas of strength and needed growth in relation to the Life Marks, 5) whether the curriculum helped identify appropriate spiritual disciplines to aid in growth. Opportunity for general feedback and observation are included. Of course, the real measure of success is determined by whether year after year St. Andrew’s begins to see lives transformed by the power of the Spirit in such a way that they are marked by the possession of
unmistakable virtue, the possession of which propels them outward as they engage a broken and hurting world.
CHAPTER 5

LIFE MARKS JOURNAL

Story is the most natural way of enlarging and deepening our sense of reality, and then enlisting us as participants in it. Stories open doors to areas or aspects of life that we didn’t know were there, or had quit noticing out of over-familiarity, or supposed were out-of-bounds to us. They then welcome us in. Stories are verbal acts of hospitality.¹

Introduction


These are virtues that mark the lives of those who follow Jesus. It is an astonishing list. I imagine you’d be hard pressed to meet a person who is content with the degree to which their character bears these marks and yet it is remarkably easy to navigate through life without giving a lot of attention to the way God has built these qualities into us, or the ways that we can grow in them. In his book, Orthodoxy, G. K. Chesterton describes his conviction that life is like a grand adventure story.² At the heart of these stories lies a quest that requires dedication and heroism if it is to be completed. These adventures recall the bravery of loyal companions who face danger and sacrifice


much in order to achieve the goal. Likewise, the desert fathers often spoke of life as a story that could only really be understood by the telling of stories.\(^3\) When a story involved growth or flourishing, these ancient monks treated life as if it were a journey in which a person or a community was moving from a worse to better condition.

The vision of life as a quest in which something vital is sought or as a journey toward an ultimate destination provides a structure that enables us to see the meaning of our joy, our struggles, and the ordinary events of our days. It allows us to see everything that happens in our lives, and the variety of ways we respond as either moving us closer to or further from our goal. Once we take a step back and see the narrative unity of our lives, we might just be able to make distinctions between the kinds of things that help us and those that hinder us on our journey.

Thinking of our lives as a journey might also give us the distance necessary to see patterns. For example, are there obstacles you encounter or ingrained behaviors that rob you from experiencing peace on a routine basis. Do you embrace with gratitude the small moments of joy that are presented to you every day, or is it your habit to keep your head down and maybe give them passing acknowledgement on your way to the next meeting and next deadline? Life comes at us quickly, yet it is remarkably easy to journey along from event to event without taking moments to pause, breathe deep, and notice the signposts of God’s presence along the way.

Imagine this tool is a guide for the journey. Over the next eight weeks you are invited to use it as a kind of map that lets you look back on the events of your life to see

how God has been present, actively shaping you for life in his Kingdom. However, journeys are never chronicled by simply pointing to a map or a travel itinerary. Because this is so, we are going to ask you to bring your journey to life by telling a story. This tool is designed to help you see your life as an unfolding story which is intimately linked to the larger plot of the story God is telling in the world.

One last thing about journeys—it is hard to even think about beginning one if you don’t have a clear picture of the destination. Simply put, our destination is the Kingdom of God. Our journey is the process of being formed in the likeness of Jesus so that we are able to serve as ambassadors of his kingdom. The Life Marks we are going to explore are not indicators that we have arrived at the destination. Instead, think of them as mile markers along the path. When we grow in virtue and our character begins to change, it is a good bet that we are moving closer to the destination. Stay alert, pay attention to your life, and may the God who possesses all virtue speed you on your way.

Blessings on the journey,
Steven Good
Associate Pastor for Spiritual Formation and Discipleship

_How to use this tool_

Journeys are meant to be embarked upon with others. Imagine Frodo trying to reach Mordor without Sam, or Luke rescuing Leia without Han. For that matter, where would King David have been without Jonathan, or Paul without Barnabus? We need others to come alongside us, to challenge us when we have lost our purpose and encourage us when we think we cannot continue. For these reasons, this tool will work best within the context of a supportive and intimate community. Your time will be most
fruitful if each of the members of your Life Group reflect upon the questions and write out your responses ahead of your time together. There is space provided within the study guide for your writing, but you may find your own notebook or journal to be a better option. Please take the time to reflect and write ahead of time. This tool is divided into nine sections that your Life Group leader will guide you through over the course of your eight-week journey together.

1. A “Practices Audit” designed for you to take an honest look at the habits and practices that you acquire and that shape your desires without your knowing it.
2. A “Life Graph” which you will use to chart high and low points of your journey with God to begin to see larger patterns over time.
3. A brief story and Scripture passage describing each Life Mark, followed by a series of narrative questions for each Life Mark. As you work through these questions, the goal is to notice how God has been present in the events of your life. How are you growing in grace, peace, faith, friendship, joy and generosity?
4. Scale questions that help you chart where you are at this moment in your spiritual journey. These will be used to graph the unique shape of your journey in the seventh section.
5. A set of practical spiritual disciplines that will aid in growth for the Life Mark.
6. Prompts to help you shape your story for the purpose of sharing with your Life Group.
7. A “Radar Graph” to help provide a visual picture of what your spiritual journey looks like at this moment. This will help you see areas where God has shaped you and areas for growth.
8. A template for you to develop a “scaffolding” for the disciplines you intend to practice on a daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, and yearly basis.
9. Appendices for you to consider that will help you along the journey and a list of resources for further study.

Note to Individuals:

If you have come upon this guide and plan to use it in your personal devotion time, that’s wonderful. Since it is designed for group use, you are encouraged to enlist the help of a friend to help you understand what God is communicating to you. It will be particularly useful if you process the narrative questions with another person.
Note to Life Group Leaders:

This tool works best when group members work through the guide prior to gathering. While every effort has been made to make the questions accessible to a new participant, preparation will enrich your discussion tremendously. You will find it is difficult to go through all six Life Marks for each person in your group. Depending on how much time you wish to spend, you may opt to have each member choose one area of strength and one area in which they’d like to see growth over the next year. Consider setting aside time for quarterly “check-ins” throughout the year. As a leader, the best preparation you can make is to pray for each member of your group throughout the week.

Suggested Plan:

WEEK 1: Read: Introductory Materials (pp. x-x: 15 min.)
Do: Life Map (pp. x-x: 1 hr.) Practices Audit (pp. x-x: 1 hr.)

WEEK 2: Read: Grace (pp. x-x: 15 min.)
Do: Exploring Your Journey, Telling Your Story, Charting Grace in Your Life (pp. x-x: 1 hr.) Spiritual Discipline (pp. x-x; time varies)

WEEK 3: Read: Peace (pp. x-x: 15 min.)
Do: Exploring Your Journey, Telling Your Story, Charting Peace in Your Life (pp. x-x: 1 hr.) Spiritual Discipline (pp. x-x; time varies)

WEEK 4: Read: Faith (pp. x-x: 15 min.)
Do: Exploring Your Journey, Telling Your Story, Charting Faith in Your Life (pp. x-x: 1 hr.) Spiritual Discipline (pp. x-x; time varies)

WEEK 5: Read: Friendship (pp. x-x: 15 min.)
Do: Exploring Your Journey, Telling Your Story, Charting Friendship in Your Life (pp. x-x: 1 hr.) Spiritual Discipline (pp. x-x; time varies)

WEEK 6: Read: Joy (pp. x-x: 15 min.)
Do: Exploring Your Journey, Telling Your Story, Charting Joy in Your Life (pp. x-x: 1 hr.) Spiritual Discipline (pp. x-x; time varies)

WEEK 7: Read: Generosity (pp. x-x: 15 min.)
Do: Exploring Your Journey, Telling Your Story, Charting Generosity in Your Life (pp. x-x: 1 hr.) Spiritual Discipline (pp. x-x; time varies)

WEEK 8: Read: Crafting a Personal Rule (pp. x-x: 40 min.)
Do: Charting the Shape of Your Spiritual Life, Crafting a Personal Rule (pp. x-x: 2 Hours)
Week 1: Spiritual Practice—Creating a Life Graph

The purpose of a Life Graph is to help you reflect upon the whole of your life and notice the high and low points of your journey with God. This is a visual tool aimed at helping you understand the patterns of your life as a whole. With the zero value being a neutral point, the x (vertical) axis above the line represents the high moments: times when you’ve deeply known God’s presence, have had intense experiences in one or more of the Life Marks, or have come into contact with transforming agents (such as Scripture, the Holy Spirit, the Church, Wisdom). Low moments appear below the line. The y (horizontal) axis represents time. Since our lives are never a consistent assent toward perfection, a realistic graph will represent several peaks and valleys throughout time.

It may be helpful to begin by dividing your life into time periods. For instance, Childhood, Adolescence, Young Adulthood, Adulthood and Post-Retirement. Begin by brainstorming the significant events, persons, circumstances, and places in your life. Once you’ve got a good list, begin to assign values to them (-10 to +10, 1 to 100, etc.) and then plot them along the graph. Don’t worry about being overly scientific about the values you assign. Remember, this exercise is to help you understand yourself. As you move through this exercise, you’ll begin to notice the ways that God has used these people, places, and circumstances to shape you. You’ll also begin to have a better awareness of how God speaks to you through your life. Below is the life graph of a

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fictional man. Notice the events that served as a catalyst for growth and/or desolation throughout the years of his life.

Even though the person is fictional, a cursory glance at the events of his life will help you see the “storied” nature of your life. Using the template on the opposite page, create your own life graph. You’ll return to this throughout the eight weeks.

[SPACE FOR LIFE GRAPH TEMPLATE]

**Week 1: Spiritual Practice—Inventory the Habits of Your Heart**

Throughout the church’s history, men and women have sought the Spirit’s transforming power through prayerfully engaging in spiritual practices (or disciplines) that open us to an awareness of God’s presence in our lives. One of those practices, known as the *prayer of examen*, is simply reviewing the details of their day and noticing where God has been active in moments of consolation and desolation. The following
exercise is an adaptation of this ancient spiritual practice. In the same way that the Life Graph allowed you to step back and consider the trajectory of your spiritual journey over the “big picture” of your life, this practice invites you to take a closer look at the small details of your day and to pay attention where your heart is being directed. What are the cultural forces that subconsciously tend to pull your thoughts and affections into their orbit and may be directing your heart toward some ultimate end? As you think about where your life is ultimately headed, this spiritual practice will help open your attention to how God is present in your every-day actions, and also how your routine habits can have the effect of shaping you to love things that pull your heart away from God.

Throughout the week, ask yourself these questions, then discuss in your Life Group:

- What are the things you do that do something to you (get you fired up, make you sad or anxious, make you more compassionate)?
- What kind of media do you consume (TV, News, Movies, Magazines, Books, Internet Video)? What kind of vision of “the good life” do these media sources you want to pursue? What kind of affect do they have on you?
- Take a good look at the kind of advertisements that come at you this week. What kind of person do they want you to become?
- To what kingdom are these rituals aimed? What do these cultural institutions want you to love?
- Where do you see the Kingdom of God present throughout your week?
- What do you think are some of the most powerful practices in our culture?
- If you have children, what are the cultural forces you don’t want them to be shaped by? What are the ritual forces you do want them to be shaped by? Why?
- In what kind of intentional spiritual practices do you engage and how are they shaping you?

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6 James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Culture Formation.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 82-84.
Week 2: Grace

Scripture:

Read Ephesians 2:1-10, taking note of the words and phrases that stand out to you.

Opening Story:

“Yes, I ran that horse and buggy off the road,” the man said. “I’d run all the Amish out of the county if I could.”

The angry man, a neighbor to my oldest brother in Holmes County, Ohio, is one of the last of a large, historic Lutheran community that settled these beautiful rolling hills in the 1800s. Now virtually all of those who share his heritage have moved to the city, and Amish families have claimed their farmlands. For some reason, however, this neighbor has held out. Like his parents, the neighbor tells scornful stories about the Amish and jokes about how his Lutheran forebears drowned the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century. He makes light of their simple lives, horse-drawn buggies, and old style of dress. His hassling of Amish people on the road or at the store is a facet of community life.

On a humid day last summer an electrical storm broke out. The air crackled, and the neighbor’s barn burst into flames and burned to ashes. By the time the ash heap had cooled, he had begun to hear word of his neighbors’ plans. Amish people from all around gathered to begin clearing the rubble, drawing up plans, cutting timbers, and scheduling a barn raising. When the day came for the event, the neighbor’s previously off-limits barnyard was swarming with men in straw hats and barn-door denims. By evening, the great framework was complete, the roof was sheeted, and the siding was going up. And
the neighbor stood in the driveway, shaking his head wordlessly, tears running lines
down his face. The barn stood fresh against the sky, and long tables of food and drink—
homemade bread, noodles, chicken, date pudding, and rivers of lemonade— welcomed
him into the circle of tired celebrants.

From David Augsburger - *Dissident Discipleship*

**Exploring your journey:**

- How are grace presented in the opening story and in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians?
- How do Scripture and this story hold up a mirror to the way you have either received grace or given grace to another?
- When has someone extended grace to you?
- As you think about the last year of your life, have you grown more aware of God’s grace toward you? How so?
- How has your experience of grace translated into your extending grace to someone else? (As you think about this experience, try to determine whether this was a “special occasion” or if this was an ordinary occurrence for you.)
- Are there areas of life where you struggle to accept God’s grace?

**Telling your story:**

At the beginning of each session you will be asked to review and reflect on the answers you gave above and then write a mini-story about how God is working in your life in regard to the week’s Life Mark that you’ll then share with your Life Group. As you consider how to frame your story, consider whether receiving and giving grace has become a regular rhythm of your life, or is this an area in which you struggle? How have you grown in the last year? What new patterns or behaviors have emerged?

---


Describing Grace in your life:

For the following questions, mark the answer that most accurately reflects you *most of the time*. Assign numerical values from 1-5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) for each category and write the total number below.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<td><strong>Experiencing Grace</strong></td>
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<td>I am grateful toward those</td>
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<td>who have been patient and</td>
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<td>compassionate with me.</td>
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<td>I have been shown grace by</td>
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<td>others when I haven't</td>
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<td>deserved it.</td>
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<td>I generally don't hold</td>
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<td>grudges.</td>
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<td>I believe that mercy</td>
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<td>triumphs over justice.</td>
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<td><strong>Receiving Grace as a Gift</strong></td>
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<td>from God</td>
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<td>I believe God’s love,</td>
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<td>acceptance, and forgiveness</td>
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<td>are gifts given</td>
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<td>unconditionally.</td>
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<td>I believe that Christ bore</td>
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<td>the penalty for my sin and</td>
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<td>do not need to “perform” in</td>
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<td>order to gain God’s love.</td>
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<td>I rejoice and find great</td>
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<td>freedom in the fact that</td>
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<td>there’s nothing I can do to</td>
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<td>win God’s favor or to earn</td>
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<td>my salvation.</td>
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<td>A deep sense of God’s</td>
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<td>directs my actions toward</td>
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<td>others.</td>
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<td><strong>Extending Grace to Others</strong></td>
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<td>I treat others better than</td>
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<td>I hope to be treated.</td>
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<td>I see others as persons who</td>
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<td>bear God’s image and respond</td>
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<td>to them accordingly.</td>
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<td>Because I am aware of how</td>
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<td>much God has forgiven me, I</td>
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<td>readily and easily forgive</td>
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<td>others.</td>
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<td>I believe that God’s love and</td>
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<td>mercy cause me to model a</td>
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<td>life of reconciliation and so</td>
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<td>I intentionally seek out</td>
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<td>ways to bring about healing</td>
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<td>where there is brokenness.</td>
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**Add the Number from Each Section**

*Practice:*

Refer to the Appendix—Practical Disciplines for Growing in Virtue. Choose a discipline related to Grace that you’ll integrate into your life this week.
Week 3: Peace

Scripture:
Read Philippians 4:4-9, taking note of the words and phrases that stand out to you.

Opening Story:
Horatio Spafford was a devout Presbyterian elder who practiced law in Chicago during the middle of the 19th century. He met his wife, Anna, in a Sunday school class and was charmed by her faith, beauty, and intelligence. They married in 1861 and raised four daughters. For the Spaffords, life was good. Their faith was strong, their family was growing, and business was thriving.

But in 1871 Chicago’s Great Fire destroyed one third of the quickly expanding city, including Spafford’s real estate holdings along the shore of Lake Michigan. With their life-savings gone, the Spaffords started over; Horatio focused on law, Anna assisted others recover after such loss, and both on raising their family. A few years into their recovery, Spafford planned an extended trip to England to offer rest for his family and to join his good friend, the evangelist Dwight L. Moody, for his fall revival. Just before embarking, Horatio was detained by business, so he saw his wife and daughters board the Ville du Havre steamship and promised meet them across the Atlantic soon.

On November 22, 1873 their ship was struck by a British vessel and sank in less than fifteen minutes. Two hundred twenty-six passengers drowned in the middle of the Atlantic, including all four of Spafford’s daughters; eleven-year-old Annie, nine-year-old Maggie, five-year-old Bessie, and two-year-old Tanetta. His wife Anna was one of only a few rescued, and upon arriving in England she sent Horatio a two-word telegram: “Saved
alone.” Upon hearing of the devastating tragedy and receiving his wife’s telegram, Horatio immediately left Chicago to bring his wife home. While crossing the Atlantic, the ship’s captain summoned Spafford to the deck as they passed over the swath of water where his daughters died. Amid his overwhelming grief and pain, he penned the words of this now familiar hymn:

> When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
> When sorrows like sea billows roll;
> Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
> It is well, it is well with my soul.9

**Exploring your journey:**

- How do the opening story and Paul’s prison letter to the Philippians describe what it means to experience the peace of God?
- Under what circumstances have you experienced a deep understanding of God’s peace?
- When have you responded to adverse circumstances with a sense of trust and openness to God’s leading?
- Are there any people, circumstances, events, habits, etc. which regularly evoke feelings of anxiety or worry in you? Where do you see God in these moments?
- When has your peacefulness allowed you to bring a sense of calm and assurance to others who were experiencing an emotionally or spiritually charged situation? (As you think about this experience, try to determine whether this was a “special occasion” or if this was an ordinary occurrence for you.)

**Telling your story:**

Review and reflect on the answers you gave above and then write a brief story about how God is working in your life in regard to peace. Has experiencing God’s peace and engaging others from a place of peacefulness become a regular rhythm of your life, or is this an area in which you struggle? What new patterns have emerged this year?

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Describing Peace in Your Life:

For the following questions, mark the answer that most accurately reflects you *most of the time*. Assign numerical values from 1-5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) for each category and write the total number below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Experiencing Peace</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>I rarely experience anxiety and/or worry.</td>
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<td>I experience peace in the ordinary moments of life and not just when I’m on vacation or able to slow down for extended periods of time.</td>
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<td>I routinely approach the ordinary activities of my day with a sense of calm and unhurriedness.</td>
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<td>I experience a deep stillness of the soul.</td>
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<td><strong>Receiving Peace as a Gift from God</strong></td>
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<td>I experience God’s nearness throughout my day.</td>
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<td>Often when I pray, I experience a sense of the Spirit’s calm over me.</td>
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<td>I trust in God’s provision and therefore rarely experience fear.</td>
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<td>I live in constant awareness of God’s presence and this is a source of deep rest for me.</td>
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<td><strong>Sharing Peace with Others</strong></td>
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<td>The pace of life at which I operate invites others into a sense of calm and peacefulness.</td>
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<td>Others describe me as a “non-anxious presence” and seek me out for my ability to resolve conflicts peacefully, fairly, and compassionately.</td>
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<td>People come to me for counsel or wisdom on how to live at a more relaxed pace.</td>
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<td>I feel called to help others who are anxious find the peacefulness that only God can bring.</td>
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Practice:

Refer to the Appendix—Practical Disciplines for Growing in Virtue. Choose a discipline related to Peace that you’ll integrate into your life this week.
Week 4: Faith

Scripture:
Read Matthew 14:22-33, taking note of any words or phrases that stand out to you.

Opening Story:
In the early 40’s Clarence Jordan founded the Koinonia Community – an intentional racially-integrated community right in the heart of the deeply segregated South. Before long, the Georgia supreme court threatened to take the farm because it violated the state’s segregation laws. Jordan asked his brother, Robert, who would later become a state senator and a justice on the Georgia Supreme Court, to be Koinonia’s legal representative. The following is an account of their conversation:

Robert responded, “Clarence, I can’t do that. You know my political aspirations. Why, if I represented you, I might lose by job, my house, everything I’ve got.”

“We might lose everything too, Bob.”

“It’s different for you.”

“Why is it different? I remember, it seems to me, that you and I joined the church, the same Sunday, as boys. I expect when we came forward the preacher asked me about the same question he did you. He asked me, ‘Do you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?’ And I said, ‘Yes.’ What did you say?”

“I follow Jesus, Clarence, up to a point.”

“Could that point by any chance be—the cross?”

“That’s right. I follow him to the cross, but not on the cross. I’m not getting myself crucified.”
“Then I don’t believe you’re a disciple. You’re an admirer of Jesus, but not a disciple of his. I think you ought to go back to the church you belong to and tell them you’re an admirer not a disciple.”

“Well now, if everyone who felt like I do did that, we wouldn’t have a church, would we?”

“The question,” Clarence said, “is ‘Do you have a church?’”

Exploring your journey:

- How is faith (or lack of faith) presented in the opening story and in the passage from Matthew’s gospel?
- Do you tend to approach faith more cognitively (with your mind) or affectively (with your heart)?
- How has God demonstrated his faithfulness to you?
- As you look over your Life Graph, during which period of your life has your faith grown the most? When did you have the greatest challenge?
- How would you describe the greatest obstacles and aids to your faith today? What kinds of circumstances add to or take away from your faith?
- Describe a situation in which you were asked to do something for which you felt entirely unequipped or unprepared. Where did you notice God in the midst of that experience or circumstance?

Telling your story:

Review and reflect on the answers you gave above and then write a brief story about how God is working in your life in regard to Faith. Do you experience a sense of movement in your faith or a plateau? What new insights or habits have come about in the past year that have made an impact on how you follow Christ or trust in Him?

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Describing Faith in your life:

For the following questions, mark the answer that most accurately reflects you *most of the time*. Assign numerical values from 1-5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) for each category and write the total number below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiencing Faith</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Belief in “things unseen” comes easily and naturally to me.</td>
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<td>I believe that my life has a purpose beyond myself.</td>
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<td>My life is governed by a strong sense of connection to other people and to God.</td>
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<td>I act in a way that is consistent with my beliefs all the time.</td>
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<td>Receiving Faith as a Gift from God</td>
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<td>My faith is able to easily integrate knowledge and wisdom from scientific discoveries.</td>
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<td>God has revealed himself to me in ways that I cannot explain and for which I can only rejoice.</td>
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<td>I believe that the Christian narrative is the most wonderful, beautiful, truthful, and comprehensive story by which one can live one’s life.</td>
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<td>There is nothing more secure in this world than God’s promises to me.</td>
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<td>Sharing Faith with Others</td>
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<td>I am eager to share my faith with others.</td>
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<td>I have grown tremendously in my faith as a result of sharing my doubts and struggles and confessing my sin to other Christians.</td>
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<td>In ways that don’t always make sense to me, my faith frequently compels me to act in obedience to God and in response to his grace toward me.</td>
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<td>I am willing to sacrifice comfort, income, safety and reorder my entire life in response to God’s call because in Him, I have found my rest.</td>
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*Practice:*

Refer to the Appendix—Practical Disciplines for Growing in Virtue. Choose a discipline related to Faith that you’ll integrate into your life this week.
Week 5: Friendship

Scripture:
Read 1 Samuel 18:1-3; 19:1-5; 20:42, taking note of any words and phrases that stand out to you.

Opening Story:

When infamous “pick-ax murderer” Karla Faye Tucker was executed on February 3, 1998, crowds gathered outside to cheer her death. Inside the prison, however, a man named Ron Carlson was praying for Karla and comforting her family. What makes Ron’s story remarkable is that his sister, Deborah, had been murdered by Karla fifteen years prior and the violent nature of her death was the reason for Karla’s execution. When Ron first heard the news, he was devastated. Deborah raised him since boyhood, and she was very special—her life senselessly ended over a few hundred dollars.

Hatred burned in Ron’s heart for years, leading him down a destructive path not unlike Karla’s. He abused drugs, thought of killing people, and in his lowest moment contemplated suicide. He was consumed with bitterness and anger. At rock bottom, he picked up a Bible and discovered in its pages a story of forgiveness in the face of murder. It was Jesus’s crucifixion. Ron gave his life to Christ and began down the long and challenging road of faith.

Forgiveness was a powerful part of Ron and Karla’s story, but so was friendship. In addition to forgiving her, Ron was compelled by God to love and serve her. He was didn’t think he could do it, but he felt the Spirit of God say, “Ron, you can’t. But through me you can.” Karla was shocked by Ron’s first visit. The brother of her victim sought her
out not for revenge, but for friendship. Ron soon found that God had radically changed Karla’s life too. He decided to return again. Through their friendship, he found that Karla’s faith was authentic and that God was more real than ever. Ron began to visit Karla on death row frequently and write letters. They soon became close friends. Ron’s family was furious at the improbable relationship that developed. Karla herself was mystified by his attitude toward her. In an interview given weeks before her execution she said, “It’s unbelievable. Amazing. Forgiveness is one thing. But to go beyond that and reach out to me – to actively love me...? I’ve been given a new life, and the hope – the promise – that this is not the final reality.”11 Karla went to her death bravely, transformed by two friends she never expected: God and Ron.

Exploring your journey:

- Which aspects of Jonathan and David’s friendship stand out to you from these verses? What about Karla and Ron’s story?
- Who is your best friend? What is it about your friendship with this person that you most value and why?
- Which friends have been the most influential along your journey of faith?
- How have friends who also follow Jesus impacted your relationship with God?
- What circumstances in the last year have prompted you to grow deeper in friendship? How did the friendships develop in this time?
- How did a friend provide you with a glimpse of God’s love in that encounter or circumstance? What did you learn about God?
- In what ways have you extended meaningful friendship toward others?

Telling your story:

Review and reflect on the answers you gave above and then write a brief story about how God is working in your life in regard to friendship.

Describing Friendship in your life:

For the following questions, mark the answer that most accurately reflects you most of the time. Assign numerical values from 1-5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) for each category and write the total number below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiencing Friendship</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I receive others without calculating whether the relationship will advantage me in some way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My life is marked by deep and significant friendships.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My life has been greatly enriched by those who have poured into it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I give significantly to friends in need without thought of reciprocity.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receiving Friendship as a Gift from God</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I take comfort in the fact that I am a friend of God.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I rarely wonder if God likes me or if I like God.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I enjoy spending time with God. This is a regular part of my devotional life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have a strong sense of what God desires of me because we frequently discuss what we are doing together.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sharing Friendship with Others</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendship is essential to the life of faith.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I maintain friendships with people who are of a different background, gender, ethnicity, and social class from me.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My friendships continue to grow in depth and maturity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My friends would describe me as self-giving and self-sacrificing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Add the Number from Each Section</td>
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Practice:

Refer to the Appendix—Practical Disciplines for Growing in Virtue. Choose a discipline related to Friendship that you’ll integrate into your life this week.
Week 6: Joy

Scripture:
Read John 15:9-17, taking note of any words or phrases that stand out to you.

Opening Story:
Jay and Katherine Wolf are ordinary, Southern California people. Yet in them you can see something extraordinary: their joy. Eight years ago, the Wolfs were a young married couple, making a life in Los Angeles and a spiritual home at Bel Air Presbyterian Church. That year, the life they were making was turned upside down, and the hand they were dealt was going to make them—or break them. In April of 2008, at the age of twenty-six, Katherine suffered a massive brain stem stroke while their six-month-old son, James, slept in the next room. She was not expected to live or recover, but she did more than recover—she and Jay have discovered a whole new meaning to their lives.

However, the long road to recovery for Katherine and Jay would require them to begin again from scratch. The damage to Katherine’s brain required her to re-learn basic functions such as eating, speaking, and walking. Slowly, step by step, she learned to live again. What they once took for granted now looks very different for the Wolfs. From double vision to deafness, facial paralysis to lost use of her hand, and a brain aneurysm removed in 2013, significant obstacles remain. The daily challenges are deep and difficult. Tears and frustrations abound.

Yet in the years since her life-changing stroke, one thing has never changed: their joy. Katherine is still one of the warmest, big-hearted, and open-handed people you will meet. Jay laughs easily and often and has been a constant support and encouragement.
Their physical struggles are real and far from over, yet their joy is contagious. Paradoxically, their suffering and joy have existed simultaneously. They are quick to point out that the foundation of that joy is their God. They celebrate the beauty and the pain because each day is a gift from Him.

For the last few years, they have offered all those days to God. The unshakeable joy and hope they have in Jesus has blossomed into a full-time ministry called Hope Heals. They still serve their local church as God’s mission takes them around the country to share their story of pain, and the joy and hope in its midst. All along the way, their smiles and kindness are ignited by the joy of the Lord that lies beneath it.

*Exploring your journey:*

- Based on the opening story and Scripture reading, how would you describe the qualities of the joy of Christ?
- When have you experienced a deep sense of joy?
- James 1:2-4 describes the joyfulness that comes from facing trials and hardships. When have you known this to be true? What were the circumstances and how did trial give way to joy?
- If your friends were to write a list of attributes describing your life, where do you think joyfulness would appear on the list?
- If you’re not a particularly joyful person, what stands in the way?

*Telling your story:*

Paul encourages the Philippian church to “rejoice in all things.” Take a look at your Life Graph for a moment—where have the moments of joyfulness been most pronounced? As you think about your life in the past year, is joyfulness a habitual response? Does it tend

---

to arise out of the particularity of your circumstances? Write a brief story about how God is working in your life with regard to joy.

_Describing Joy in your life:_

For the following questions, mark the answer that most accurately reflects you _most of the time._ Assign numerical values from 1-5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) for each category and write the total number below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiencing Joy</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My life is animated by a deep and abiding sense of contentment and happiness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circumstances don't dictate my mood.</td>
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<td>Even in the midst of adversity I am able to experience joy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I rejoice in even the smallest things.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Receiving Joy as a Gift from God</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I regularly take time to reflect on where I experience joy in God.</td>
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<td>I often express my thanks to God for his goodness.</td>
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<td>I am excited about God’s purposes for my life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am constantly rejoicing in what God has done in my life in spite of my circumstances.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sharing Joy with Others</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I love to celebrate the wonder of life with others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have a gift for making others see the goodness and beauty of life.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I enjoy helping others see God in the midst of their difficult circumstances.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others would say that the joy of Christ is evident in my life.</td>
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</table>

*Add the Number from Each Section*

_Practice:_

Refer to the Appendix—Practical Disciplines for Growing in Virtue. Choose a discipline related to grace that you’ll integrate into your life this week.
Week 7: Generosity

Scripture:
Read 1 Samuel 1:10-11, 19-20, 24-28, taking note of the words or phrases that stand out to you.

Opening Story:
Afam Onyema was born in Chicago and raised by immigrant parents from Nigeria. Before leaving his homeland to sharpen his medical skill in the United States, Onyema’s father (a respected Chicago doctor) promised to return one day to improve healthcare and save lives in his homeland. He was raised hearing about his father’s dream to faithfully obey God by caring for the underserved and unnoticed in their home country.

Years later, Onyema graduated cum laude from Harvard University then near the top of his class at Stanford Law. He was poised to make a name for himself, and a great deal of money, in the high-powered world of corporate law. But his earthly father’s dream and his heavenly Father’s passion for the poor and oppressed gnawed at him.

Nigeria’s transition to democracy in 1999 finally presented opportunities to begin life-saving work. Afam prayerfully decided to answer the call. He turned down multiple lucrative job offers to lead his family’s new non-profit, GEANCO, an organization dedicated to establishing the first world-class hospital in Nigeria. In 2005, GEANCO began, and Onyema travelled the country sharing their vision of healing and raising awareness and support.

Afram has given his life to God’s call and GEANCO’s mission, and because of his sacrifice, the door has opened wide for many people to practice generosity. To date,
GEANCO has been given 20 acres of land in Southeast Nigeria for the hospital, United Airlines donates flights for medical mission teams, and Stanford Hospital provides expensive medical supplies. Doctors from around the US and Nigeria generously volunteer their time, money, and expertise to replace hips and knees and offer hope to the sick in Nigeria. Onyema’s fundraising work for GEANCO has allowed hundreds of people and organizations to donate money, from five-dollar gifts to multimillion-dollar donations of funds and state-of-the-art medical equipment. Because of God’s graceful generosity toward him, Afam has responded by generously giving his life to God. His willingness to give it has birthed generosity in hundreds of others that is deeply impacting the poor and needy in Nigeria.

Exploring your journey:

- How do Afam’s story and the story of Hannah’s giving of her son reflect God’s desire for generous hearts to be cultivated in the lives of his people?
- Do you like to give to others or do you prefer to receive?
- When have you recently benefitted from the generosity of someone?
- How is generosity most evident in your life? (giving of your time, resources, sharing your expertise?)
- When have you experienced joy as a result of giving to others?
- What has giving to others taught you about the heart of God?

Telling your story:

As you think about your life, where does generosity fit? Do you tend to think of all your possessions and gifts as belonging to you, or as gifts that you have been given to hold in trust for God? Take a look at a random week of your credit card spending—how well does that week reflect your stated values? Write a brief story about how God is working in your life in regard to generosity.
Describing Generosity in your life:

For the following questions, mark the answer that most accurately reflects you most of the time. Assign numerical values from 1-5 (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) for each category and write the total number below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiencing Generosity</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I give of my time, resources, and gifts without thinking of how it will benefit me.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer not to receive recognition for my generosity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I give freely to anyone in need.</td>
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<tr>
<td>My life has benefitted greatly from the generosity of others, so I seek to follow their example.</td>
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</table>

| Receiving Generosity as a Gift from God                                                |                   |          |         |       |                |
| I am grateful for the ways God has met my needs.                                      |                   |          |         |       |                |
| I like using my gifts and time to meet the material and spiritual needs of others.    |                   |          |         |       |                |
| I believe that God has given me unique gifts to steward, and I would be unfaithful if I didn’t use them to draw others into his Kingdom. |                   |          |         |       |                |
| All I have comes from God and I feel compelled by gratitude to return to Him all that He has blessed me with. |                   |          |         |       |                |

| Sharing Generosity with Others                                                         |                   |          |         |       |                |
| God was first generous to me, so I am able to give out of gratitude to what he has done. |                   |          |         |       |                |
| I am most fulfilled when I am using my talents and gifts to impact the Kingdom of God. |                   |          |         |       |                |
| I give sacrificially beyond a tithe.                                                   |                   |          |         |       |                |
| God has given me a unique burden for those in need, so I have arranged my entire life in order to meet others needs as a way of revealing God’s goodness. |                   |          |         |       |                |

Add the Number from Each Section

Practice:

Refer to the Appendix—Practical Disciplines for Growing in Virtue. Choose a discipline related to grace that you’ll integrate into your life this week.
Week 8: Charting the Shape of your Spiritual Life

As we said at the beginning, these Life Marks are not the destination, but rather signposts that point us in the direction as we move toward maturity in Christ. As we continue our journey we will experience growth in each of these areas. Below is a visual tool to help you chart the “shape” of your spiritual life—as you understand it—at this moment. Over time, this shape will change and grow as you progress in your journey. Remembering that Jesus is the embodiment of a life filled with these marks, this tool is simply a means to help you see where you’ve grown and where you can experience growth. None of us are tens all around, and none of us are stuck at one everywhere.

Ultimately, this is a chance for you to take a realistic self-assessment. You may be surprised at how you’ve scored yourself. To chart your growth along each of these axis points, simply refer to the total number from each of the “Charting the Life Mark in your Life” sections. Before marking them, take a moment to re-read your responses. Did your Life Group help you to see something differently? Feel free to adjust your previous responses based on these conversations. Once you’ve plotted your scores along the graph, choose one or two areas in which you’d like to pursue growth.
Week 8: Crafting a Personal Rule

One way to become conscious of how God is prompting us to continue on our journey is by choosing practices and disciplines appropriate to the areas that we perceive a need for growth.\textsuperscript{13} This tool has been designed to help us recognize the areas in which we are progressing and struggling in our spiritual life. While the disciplines described below are all considered to be foundational to the Christian life, there are times when certain disciplines need to be entered into with greater attention because they have proven to be effective in allowing us to partner with the Spirit to help us grow in areas where we know we do not look like Christ. For instance, those whose lives are burdened with anxiety and who therefore long to experience a deeper understanding of God’s peace might benefit from the disciplines of silence and solitude (though these will likely be difficult). Similarly, those who would like to experience more of Christ’s joy may need to explore the discipline of celebration.

As their name indicates, spiritual disciplines require consistency and time to produce results. They are not means of earning salvation or of currying favor with God. Instead, they are a pathway to channel our longing after God. Formation into Christlikeness does not happen by accident. Much in the same way that a concert musician would submit himself to endless hours poring over the intricacies of a Tchaikovsky score in order to gain the competency necessary to perform, so must the disciple of Jesus find a reliable means to practice the life that he or she desires to live in

\textsuperscript{13} Diogenes Allen, \textit{Spiritual Theology}, 86.
faithful response to God. A well-ordered life requires a scaffolding of disciplines that support this God-given desire to grow in a particular way.

The goal is to create a structure that will place the disciplines within reach. For centuries, monastics have adhered to a “rule” that serves as a holistic description of the Spirit-empowered rhythms and relationships that allow for growth and flourishing. Creating a personal rule isn’t about creating boundaries that keep you from doing things. Instead, think of it as a kind of scaffolding that helps support you to do the things you want to do and become the person God intends you to be. Stephen Macchia describes it well, “A rule of life is descriptive in that it articulates our intentions and identifies the ways in which we want to live. And when we fall short of these intentions, the rule becomes prescriptive, showing us how to return to the path we have set.”14 Ordering your thoughts about how to incorporate the disciplines begins to look like a plan for partnering with the Spirit for transformation.

Far from being a fixed entity, this is a tool designed to be recast and renegotiated depending on your life circumstances and changing needs. With remarkable candor, Ruth Haley Barton writes, “our rhythm of spiritual practices needs to be ruthlessly realistic in view of our stage in life…if we do not take into account a realistic assessment of our stage of life, we are doomed to fail.”15 At the same time, it would be a mistake to assume that we need to wait for ideal conditions in order to begin. The only life in which God can meet us happens to be the life we are currently living. Because this is so, the process of


ordering our lives requires us to be clear about which parts of our lives are etched in stone and which are scribbled on sand. Furthermore, as we partner with the Spirit in the process of transformation, we will no doubt see change and growth in our lives. Because we can expect this change, the way that we engage the disciplines should be revisited frequently and adjusted according to the changing seasons of life.

Developing a plan for transformation takes time. One should expect at the outset a period of experimentation and exploration with various disciplines so as to gauge a sense of the meaning they have in one’s life and what sort of adjustments will be needed to successfully incorporate them. This is a deeply personal process. Not only will we apply disciplines that help us live the quality of life God intends us to live, the methods by which we practice the disciplines will also be idiosyncratic. To draw upon the examples used earlier, not everyone will need to arrange his or her rule in order to prioritize freedom from being governed by anxiety.

Whatever areas of sin and negative patterns that God is bringing to our attention, we can choose disciplines that help us address them. But this is not to say that we must become fixated upon problem solving. Again, the goal is not merely to troubleshooting our lives or to pursue a vision of life that will allow us to become a particular kind of person unmoored from a robust vision of God’s intention. The goal is to introduce the rhythms and patterns of Jesus in order to make our lives look more like Jesus’ life—so that we become capable of revealing God’s goodness to a broken world. On the following pages, you’ll find a snapshot of some spiritual practices to aid in your growth, as well as some additional resources to guide you in the coming months.
Below is a template for creating your own “personal rule” that arranges the disciplines you’ve chosen to engage in terms of daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, semi-annual, and yearly cycles. The template includes personal disciplines that you’ll engage in as well as corporate disciplines that will draw you into community. As you begin to develop your rule consider the following questions to guide you.

- Which spiritual practices and relationships have been the most powerful in both shaping my desires and in causing me to long for God’s presence?
- What are the realistic boundaries on my time?
- What do I need in terms of community resources, time, and space to plan for ongoing spiritual formation?
- What have I learned these past eight weeks about the importance of community for my formation? Which of these disciplines can I share with friends or my Life Group?
- What am I beginning to understand about my daily, weekly, monthly requirements for engaging in the disciplines?
- Which disciplines do I know that I need to engage in regularly as a means of offering myself to God?
- How much do I really want to do this?
- What are the sins and negative patterns that I’m aware of in my life?
- Where will I engage in these disciplines?
- What kinds of activities will I need to cut out of my life to make room for spiritual formation?

After you’ve answered these questions, prayerfully bring your longings to God.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disciplines</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Corporate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
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<td>Weekly</td>
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<td>Monthly</td>
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<td>Quarterly</td>
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<td>Semi-Annually</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yearly</td>
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</table>
Appendix A: Sharing your Story with your Life Group

The best stories have an unmistakable ring of authenticity. They’re not always those with the most flourish or that contain the most drama, but the ones that resonate with us do so because we recognize our own story in them. Ultimately your story connects to the bigger narrative God is telling. When you share your story within the context of community, others will help you notice things that you didn’t know were there. In the same way, when others tell their stories, you’ll allow them to hear nuances and cadences they weren’t able to grasp in the telling. Secondly, the act of telling helps your story to become more a part of you. In the sharing of stories, you’ll begin to see some of the common, but no less powerful, ways that the Spirit has shaped each of the lives of the members in your Life Group. Lastly, the act of telling your story within a community helps you to know whether the story you are telling is true. Others may help you to see key aspects of your life in a new, and hopefully liberating way. You are invited to be honest and vulnerable. Below are a few things to keep in mind as you’re listening to others tell their stories. Feel free to take notes on the opposite page.

- Remember that telling our stories leaves us exposed. Lead with affirmation when others have taken the risk.
- Do you sense continuity between the stories you’ve heard and what you know to be true of the person sharing? If so, tell them. If not, ask them to clarify where you see discontinuity.
- What similarities have you noticed between the story you’ve heard and your own?
- Where did you see God most clearly in the stories you heard?

Notes:
Appendix B: Practical Disciplines for Growing in Virtue

Grace

Pray for your enemies: The core of Jesus command to “pray for those who persecute you” is to see those who pose a threat to us in the light that God sees them—which is the same light that God sees us.

- Actively seek the good for this person. Hold him or her up before God and pray for their blessing. Do this once a day for a week and note of what kind of changes, if any, are taking place in your heart.
- As a kind of imaginative prayer, picture bringing this “enemy” with you before Jesus as he suffers on the cross at Golgotha. What do you imagine Jesus saying to this person? What do you imagine Jesus saying to you? Now ask Jesus to forgive you with the same measure by which you are willing to forgive your enemy. How does Jesus look on you in this moment?

Pray through the news media: In a world filled with antagonisms, it can be easy to get swept up in the cycle of soundbites and punditry. When you read through the newspaper/ websites or listen to the news on television or radio, do so with eyes and ears tuned toward God’s heart of compassion toward the world.

- Pray for the events/persons/circumstances that you encounter. Seek God’s peace and mercy to be present in these situations. Pray for those who cause harm or spread misinformation.
- Pray, seeking God’s best for those who hold views different from your own.
- Do this as often as you engage news media for a month and take note of how your heart has changed.
- Alternatively, if you find it difficult to avoid being swept into the antagonisms, consider a fast from media.

Practice responding rather than reacting: Dallas Willard once said he was “practicing the discipline of not having to have the last word.”\(^\text{16}\) It is incredibly difficult when we are

\(^{16}\) John Ortberg, Soul Keeping: Caring For the Most Important Part of You (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 21.
triggered to have the presence of mind to respond gracefully. However, we can practice pausing and slowing ourselves before we react to others with harsh words.

- When triggered: stop, take a deep breath
- Offer a prayer of intercession for the person who has triggered you, or a prayer for God to release your aggression.
- Respond slowly and deliberately.

Seek a Friend for Mutual Accountability/Confession: 1 John 1:9 confidently proclaims, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” One of the most powerful ways to experience grace is to find a mature believer with whom you can mutually confess sin and exchange the assurance of forgiveness. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes, “When I go to my brother to confess, I am going to God.”17 To hear the words of Christ pronounced from a fellow brother or sister is to experience freedom.

- Choose a pattern of meeting that will allow you adequate time.
- Confess to one another, pray, and pronounce Christ’s forgiveness over one another before offering your own words.
- Pray for one another regularly.

Peace

Centering Prayer: A form of prayer with roots in the contemplative tradition where the one praying seeks to quiet scattered thoughts and desires in order to be attentive to Christ’s presence.18

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• Set aside 15 minutes and settle in a comfortable position.
• Choose a short phrase or attribute of God (i.e. peace) and let your deliberation on this word draw you into the presence of Christ. When distracted return to this word.
• Alternatively, begin by reading a passage of Scripture and choose a word or phrase from the passage.
• Throughout your day, return to the word with thankfulness.

Silence/Solitude: These are disciplines of attending to and listening for God without distraction or noise. Regular practice of silence and solitude free us from our addiction to productivity and hurry. Solitude is widely regarded as the fundamental discipline of the spiritual life. It is the “furnace of transformation” that must be returned to again and again as your life in Christ develops.¹⁹

• Set a period of time in which you do not speak and in which you isolate yourself from sounds and/or others and attend to the Spirit.
• Drive to work without the radio on. Use the time for quiet prayer.
• Engage in a Half Day or Full Day Spiritual Retreat

Prayer of Release: A form of prayer in which we intentionally and kinesthetically offer our anxieties and worries to God.²⁰

• Begin by placing your palms down as a symbolic indication of your desire to turn over any concerns you may have to God.
• Whatever it is that is bothering you or weighing you down, silently turn it over to God.
• Next, turn your palms up as a symbol of your desire to receive from the Lord. Ask for whatever you think you need.
• Finally, end with a time of silence, simply trusting that the Lord will supply your need.


Rest: We honor our God-given limitations when we pay attention to the physical, spiritual, and mental needs of our bodies. Rest reminds us that God’s kingdom does not hang in the balance of our effort. If we are not sufficiently rested, our ability to enter into any of the disciplines will be minimized.

• Sleep at a consistent time each night
• Avoid activities that increase stress before bed-time
• Try to get at least 8 hours of sleep three times a week.

Faith

Bible Study: The world of Scripture is vast enough that one travel throughout its pages and yet always come to some unfamiliar country. Study involves grasping the meaning, content and context of the Bible in order to be shaped by the story.

• Find a way of encountering Scripture that suits your learning style (i.e. reading, listening to audio, reading aloud, etc.)
• Invest in a commentary or a good study Bible.
• Seek a companion to help you understand.
• Choose a specific reading plan or join a Life Group.

Devotional Reading: Distinct from Bible Study, devotional reading requires an openness to hearing God speak through the text for the purpose of applying what you read to your life.\(^2^1\) In other words, this type of reading is aimed at formation rather than information.

• Prayerfully come to the Word with attentiveness and stillness.
• Read slowly, lingering over the words so that they make an impression on your heart and mind. If you find that a word or phrase catches your attention, release the need to read further. Attend to what God is saying to you in this moment.

\(^2^1\) Foster, Celebration of Disciplines, 68.
• Read the word again, consider how God might be speaking to you or inviting you to take a step of obedience.

Journaling: Some find it much easier to be present to our thoughts before God by writing them down and keeping record of our thoughts and recollections of God’s presence in the ordinary events of life. Consider Journaling:

• In times of transition
• As a record of prayer (and prayers answered)
• As you reflect upon God’s presence in the course of your day.

Mentoring: Faith is more easily caught than taught. Mentoring is a relational experience in which a person who is mature in the faith shares his/her life, faith, and experience with one who is learning. A mentor nurtures and challenges personal growth in faith.

• Find a person who is an example of the kind of faith you’d like to have. Ask them to meet with you over coffee once a month.
• Think on where you feel stuck in the spiritual life. Who do you know that can help you?
• Teach a children’s Sunday School class. The very act of teaching allows you to internalize the message you’re teaching and allows you to serve in the process.

Friendship

Join a Life Group: Life Groups are small communities of people who commit to experiencing life together and helping one another encounter Christ through intentional friendships. Since the beginning of the church, Christians have met in small groups to learn about the Kingdom, pray, eat, laugh, and enjoy Christ’s presence in each other.

• Fill out our Life Group interest form at sapres.org
**Practice Hospitality:** In a world that is frequently hostile, hospitality creates a safe space for others to enter, be welcomed, where their gifts can be recognized so they can offer the best of who they are.  

- Develop the habit of praying for the people who enter your home. Pray the day of their invitation, when they arrive, and as they leave. How does your heart change toward them?
- Offer to host a “Dinners for Ten” or a similar potluck where people from your neighborhood bring their favorite “comfort” food. Focus on the guests rather than the meal.
- Help your children grow to understand that hospitality is a gift from God. When they have play dates, ask them to think about how they can make the friend they are inviting over feel special.

**Participate in a service project:** Working with others for the common purpose of revealing God’s goodness places us on a level playing field and unites us in a common purpose. Serving others also exposes us to people with gifts and sensibilities quite different from our own and enlarges our heart toward others.

- See sapres.org/extendingthefamily for ways to get involved

**Practice Listening:** Providing others the space to share their stories, joys and concerns is a critical aspect of sharing hospitality. Listening involves a posture of prioritizing the needs and concerns of others above our own.

- Extend an invitation to catch up with a friend for the explicit purpose of listening to what God is doing in his or her life.
- Practice a “device free” dinner table with your family.
- Encourage others to tell stories.

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Joy

*Practice Celebration:* Celebrating is a way of orienting our hearts toward joyful recognition of God’s provision and goodness.\(^{24}\) Finding joy in God and in the goodness of God’s creation provide the passion for celebration. It also reminds us not to take ourselves too seriously!

- Identify the places where you connect with God (i.e. nature, in worship, solitude, etc.) What about the joy you receive there reminds you of God?
- For those with young children, choose to do something spontaneous that changes up your rhythm.
- Spend time with those whose presence brings you joy.
- Celebrate the birthday or anniversary of someone close to you. Plan your celebration in a way that shows them how special they are to you.

*Corporate Worship:* Since the first Easter Sunday, Christians have been gathering together to express the joy and wonder of God’s love and mercy. Worship is the principle language of expressing our joyful devotion to God.

- Reflect on the names or attributes of God as found in Scripture
- Celebrate the people in your church family who have nurtured you in your faith.
- If you regularly attend worship at St. Andrew’s, set aside one or two Sundays to worship in a different style or tradition. Or, if you attend one of the classical services, attend the modern (and vice versa).

*Prayer of Blessing:* Prayer and the practice of worship mutually reinforce one another. In blessing, we direct our gratitude toward God.\(^{25}\) This ancient Hebrew form of prayer reinforces our longing after God and our worship of God.

- Identify a particular attribute of God you wish to lift up in prayer.

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\(^{24}\) Foster, *The Celebration of Discipline*, 196.

• Give thanks for that aspect of God’s character. Describe how you have encountered God in that attribute.
• Present your requests, trusting in the goodness of God’s character.

**Generosity**

*Practice Detachment:* As the name suggests, the practice of detachment involves naming and confessing loyalties that take priority above God. It also involves surrendering outcomes to God rather than trusting in your own abilities.

• Make a list of all the material things you believe that you absolutely cannot live without. Pray over these things and offer them to God. Ask, how might God use them?
• Practice letting go of something with which you have a great personal connection. What feelings stir up inside you?
• Walk through your house and imagine giving away everything you own. Who are you without all of these things?
• Spend some time thinking through Jesus’s prayer in Gethsemane, “Not my will done, but yours.” Where in your like do you need to offer such a prayer?

**Simplicity:** The practice of decluttering helps grow our ability to let go of our attachment to own and have. Living simply reminds us that we are stewards of God’s resources and helps us grow in compassion toward those who are materially poor.²⁶

• Choose a few areas in which you would like to practice letting go. (consider going through your closet/garage, etc. and giving away items you haven’t used in a year. The St. Andrew’s Rummage Sale is coming up! Ask, does this feel freeing?
• Bring a sack lunch to work two days a week.
• Think through the list of gadgets in your home, which actually make you freer. Which can you remove from your life without any compromise?

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Serve others: Living generously is about more than our things, it involves giving of ourselves in terms of our skills, resources, and personality for the benefit of others.

Service is how we love our neighbor as ourselves.

• For the next two weeks, ask your spouse, a co-worker, children “What you I do to make your life easier today?” Then do it. In your conversations with God, tell him what this is like for you.
• Prayerfully consider serving with one of St. Andrew’s mission partners.
• Volunteer within your community.
• Bless someone in secrecy.27  

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Appendix C: Resources for Further Study

On the Spiritual Journey:


On Spiritual Disciplines:


The focus of this paper has been to develop a tool that enables Life Group participants of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church to actively reflect upon the story of their lives as a means of diagnosing the health of their spiritual condition, measured by relative growth in the six virtues of the congregation’s Mission Measures, and to facilitate a process by which they are guided in the creation of a personal rule that employs various spiritual disciplines aimed to address key areas of growth. Throughout, the approach has been bolstered by an understanding that narrative is the appropriate means of self-discovery and self-disclosure for expressing one’s spiritual journey. Simply put, if one is growing, there will be a story to tell. This project is critical to the mission of St. Andrew’s as it is seeking to move beyond measuring congregational health by the quantitative metrics of finances and worship attendance and toward discerning the faithfulness of its ministry in terms of the fruitfulness yielded in the lives of its people and in their passion toward revealing the goodness of God’s kingdom within the expanding circle of neighborhoods in which its members are located.

In the process of defining the scope of this project it has become clear that the practice of spiritual disciplines must be given greater prominence within the formative strategy of St. Andrew’s ministry plan. So too must the generative power of telling a good story. While St. Andrew’s has garnered a reputation for strong preaching and a high quality programmatic ministry, it is difficult to conclude that these programs have created a culture of disciple making or that they have been more than marginally beneficial for spiritual formation. Those entrusted with the leadership of the church must wrestle with
whether embracing the consumeristic tendencies of the surrounding culture in the most pragmatic manner will provide faithful principles for shaping the character of God’s people and orienting them toward the telos of the Kingdom. Instead leaders must “begin with the end in mind,” which requires those who would follow Jesus to pay attention not only to his words, but also to the narrative flow of his life and the concrete manner in which he committed to practices that were faithful expressions of his character.

In the process of fleshing out the theological considerations for these goals, this project has described the importance of narrative and imagination in the spiritual life. The life of discipleship is like a story in that it has a goal and a destination. There are various paths that one might take in leading to the destination thereby imbuing all of one’s life with a great deal of significance. Thinking about one’s life as a story and sharing that story with fellow travelers opens the possibility for a significant amount of insight regarding one’s actions and intentions. On that note, this project has sought to highlight the necessity of moving from a pedagogical methodology that conceives of the human person primarily in terms of the intellect without attending to the ways that desires shape one’s actions, habits, and thoughts. The rationalist assumption that a careful articulation of correct doctrine is enough to produce a cruciform people in the world does not adequately account for the lack of such obedience found in churches today. What is needed is a story that captures the imagination and stirs the heart. While it is indeed task of the church to communicate and disseminate the content of faith in terms of its creeds,

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histories, and doctrine, it is a much more critical task to shape a people who are defined by a particular story, possess particular virtues, and are aimed at a particular telos rooted in the reality of God’s in-breaking kingdom. Disciples of Jesus become who they are in large part through participating in embodied practices sustained by story-formed communities who are drawn by their desire for the kingdom of God and its righteousness as the central vision of the purpose and meaning of life.

This project has traced its various contours, including an exegesis of the culture that surrounds and penetrates St. Andrew’s, theological reflection on the process of spiritual formation and transformation, and the plans required to implement a curriculum designed to allow members to engage in sustained self-examination and engage in life-changing spiritual practices within the fellowship and support of a loving community. The curriculum was grounded in the reality that God gathers his people to participate in the work of transformation through ongoing spiritual training which then opens his people to the renovating power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the goal was never to simply provide more information for the congregation to ingest, but rather to ignite the heart. If in any small way, this work helps move the needle toward a richer experience of God’s love, then it will have accomplished its task.

This task was not initially conceived of as an academic exercise, nor is its current application limited to that pursuit. It was written from vantage point of one who has experienced first-hand the catalytic power of practicing spiritual disciplines within the bond of small group community. When it comes to forsaking old besetting habits in exchange for those that bring new life, humans are simply not meant to journey alone. This project is meant to challenge group members to explore new depths as they to spur
one another on to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24). In a culture marked by the myth of heroic self-sufficiency, the kind of vulnerability required to do the task well might just be the most revolutionary aspect of this endeavor.

This project—indeed the entire doctoral experience—has been pursued with the very goal of creating a descriptive tool that can be used to measure the effectiveness of St. Andrew’s ministry initiatives and offerings at producing virtue in the lives of its members. It began in pursuit of some very different but interrelated questions: How do people change? What do we mean when we use the word, “disciple”? How will others come to know the peace and joy of Christ if they don’t see these virtues in his people? Why is it that some stories linger around the corners of the imagination for so long? How do people who possess remarkable virtue come to be that way? How can I help my children “seek first the Kingdom of God” when there are so many rival kingdoms that want to claim their hearts and bend their wills toward a different conception of what us just and good and worthy of pursuit? In some way or another, all of those questions have been compressed into this four-year endeavor.

Sustained thinking about these kinds of questions has the effect of seeping into the subconscious. I’ve become a much different kind of preacher since I’ve begun reading Jamie Smith’s reflections about the power that a good story has on the heart. I’ve been increasingly drawn toward the arts and media when I speak and present. I’ve come to appreciate that a good story will stick far more effectively than a syllogism. As Smith writes, “we were created…for drama, not bullet points.”² I have become convinced that

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missional effectiveness in a postmodern world will require the church to immerse its people far more deeply in the story when they gather so that they can demonstrate the story when they are sent out. In the wake of his endeavor, I have also benefitted from crafting my own personal rule. In light of this project, I have become aware that I cannot be the pastor, husband, or father that is consistent with the telos for which God created me if I do not nurture my identity as the beloved in times of solitude. Part of my own story is that of a profound mystical experience that occurred during a time of deep solitude along the Columbia River in Montana when I was a teenager. Reflecting on that encounter in the process of testing out my own “Life Graph” reminded me of how deeply my soul yearns for solitude.

Much more can be written about the nature of the disciplines. Those listed in the curriculum are by no means meant to be an exhaustive list of the practices that were available to Jesus as he conducted his ministry. However, for a chronically frantic and hurried community such as St. Andrew’s, the Life Marks journal accomplishes its task of introducing a set of practical disciplines by which to experience God’s power. My prayer is that this will help a people I have come to dearly love in their journey toward the Kingdom so that as they reveal God’s goodness their love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight.
APPENDIX A: AGE DISTRIBUTION

[Graph showing age distribution for St. Andrew's vs. Surrounding Community over the years 2014 and 2016.]

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APPENDIX B: ST. ANDREW’S VISION FRAME

When do we know if we are successful in achieving our mission?
We see lives that about in: Grace, Peace, Faith, Friendship, Joy, Generosity

Why do we do what we do?
Relational Ministry
Extreme Hospitality
All-Generations Community
Living Biblically

What are we doing?
Following Jesus Christ to lead lives that reveal God’s goodness

How do we accomplish our mission?
Gather, Build, Send
APPENDIX C: RELATION OF STRATEGY TO MISSION MEASURES

- Gather to worship
  - Rest, Receive, Rejoice
    - Grace and Peace

- Build up followers
  - Heart, Soul, Mind
    - Faith and Friendship

- Send out leaders
  - Here, Near, Far
    - Generosity and Joy
APPENDIX D: PILOT GROUP FEEDBACK FORM

1. General Questions: for each of the following categories, please indicate how well the Life Mark Journal accomplished its task.

(1) Strongly Disagree || (2) Disagree || (3) Neutral || (4) Agree || (5) Strongly Agree

1) I found the curriculum easy to use.
2) I found the curriculum enjoyable
3) The questions promoted good discussion
4) The curriculum gave me a greater sense of how God was shaping me
5) The goal of the curriculum was clear
6) The approach was consistent from week to week
7) The curriculum helped me understand where I need growth
8) The curriculum helped me locate disciplines to aid in my spiritual growth

2. How much time did you spend in preparation each week?
   a. Less than 10 minutes
   b. 10-15 minutes
   c. 16-30 minutes
   d. 31-60 minutes
   e. More than one hour

3. Do you feel that the amount of time you spent in preparation was adequate?
   a. Yes
   b. No

4. Please rank the sections of the curriculum in order from most effective to least effective.

   a. Scripture
   b. Small Group Discussion
   c. Describing (Life Marks) in your Life
   d. Exploring your Journey
   e. Opening Story
   f. Life Graph
   g. Practices Audit
   h. Practical Disciplines for Growing in Life Marks

5. What do you think would make this curriculum more effective?

6. General Comments and Feedback
APPENDIX E: LEADER’S NOTES FOR STUDY

The Art of Leadership

You might think that leading a Life Group is incredibly complicated. Actually, when it gets down to it, leading a group is pretty simple, but it is more of an art than a science. Richard Peace, a veteran of small group ministry discusses four necessary attributes of the leader: 1

- The desire to lead;
- The commitment to familiarize oneself with all of the materials prior to beginning of the Life Group session (or during campaigns, to understand the scope and sequence of the entire curriculum);
- The sensitivity to others that will allow you to guide discussion without dominating it;
- The willingness to be used by God as a Life Group leader.

Don’t get bogged down by what’s not on the list, but prayerfully trust that God can and will use you to bring about meaningful conversation.

Characteristics of a Life Group Leader 2

The role of Life Group leader is different from that of a professional theologian or a teacher. You are not expected to be the resident Bible expert or clinical psychologist. More than anything you are a servant and a shepherd. The best leaders, therefore:

- Model vulnerability in a way that frees the group to be open and honest with one another;
- Help foster an environment where trust is foundational and where members can therefore risk self-disclosure in the confidence of a loving, accepting, and forgiving community.
- Humbly demonstrate how to minister, care for, and support others without calculating personal gain;
- Look for opportunities to “give away” leadership by recognizing potential in others;
- Participate as part of the group rather than trying to own the group;
- Draw people together;
- Cultivate an environment where group members are motivated to discover spiritual insight for themselves and translate insight into action;


• Always desire to learn how to lead more effectively and participate in training opportunities;
• Follow Jesus Christ and are committed to their own on-going spiritual formation;
• Pray consistently for their group and regularly set aside time to prepare for discussion.  

Leading your Life Group through the Life Marks Journal:

Prior to the gathering each week, communicate with your Life Group about the weekly plan. Refer to the schedule in the Journal for the weeks theme, reading and activities. Below is a general outline for how to lead discussion through the weeks. Refer to the Life Group Handbook 2.0 for more in-depth guidance on discussion facilitation tactics.

Week 1: Intro, Life Graph and Practices Audit.

Open with Prayer

Questions for Discussion:

• If your Life Graph told the story of your life as a five-chapter story, what would the chapter titles be?
• What trends did you notice about how God has shaped you?
• What overarching themes emerged?
• Refer to the questions from the practices audit for the remainder of the discussion.

As a group, read through Appendix A of the Life Marks Journal in preparation for the next six weeks, close in prayer for one another.

Weeks 2-7: Life Marks

Open with Prayer.

Have each person share their mini-story. After the first person shares, take the lead in offering words of affirmation and encouragement. After each person shares, proceed to the questions below.

Questions for Discussion:

• What, if anything, surprised you about the questions or your responses?
• Did you feel that your responses to the scale questions accurately describe the presence of the Life Marks in your life?

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3 George, Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership, 84.
• Which disciplines did you begin to incorporate into your life? Why did you choose those and how has the experience been thus far?

Week 8: Charting the Life Marks, Crafting a Rule for Life

This week is primarily dedicated to sharing stories. The most critical aspect of this week is that you provide the time and the space for people to express what they’ve experienced, what insights they’ve gained, and what God has laid on their heart to do in the future.

Make an event out of it. Open some wine, sit by a firepit. Celebrate what God has done in each person’s life and remind each person that the one “who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6). At the end of your sharing allow members of the group to covenant with one another to help upholding the rule they’ve each created. Depending on the size of your group, this may take more than one session. Don’t worry about that, take the time to ensure that each person is heard.

Finally, thank each person for allowing you to serve as a companion on your journey.

Thank you for leading and blessings as you take the first steps together!


