Formed for Mission: Building Spiritual Practices toward a Missional Identity

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This ministry focus paper entitled

FORMED FOR MISSION: BUILDING SPIRITUAL PRACTICES TOWARD A MISSIONAL IDENTITY

Written by

THOMAS JACK PEEBLES

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

Doctor of Ministry

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

Tod Bolsinger

Kurt Fredrickson

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

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

BY
THOMAS JACK PEEBLES
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ABSTRACT

Formed for Mission:
Building Spiritual Practices toward a Missional Identity
Thomas Jack Peebles
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2019

This project created a ministry plan for a six-week course in which participants embraced their identity as children of God, participated in spiritual disciplines, and developed practices unique to their giftings, rhythms, and relationships in life in order to engage missionally. The project and related course materials were utilized during a Sunday School class at First Presbyterian Church of Orlando, Florida. A recent congregational health survey revealed a disconnection between congregants and the church’s mission, as well as a lack of purposeful relationships within the church. This class was created as an experimental short-term version of what the church leadership hopes will become a long-term plan for individuals searching for a deeper connection to God and God’s mission in the community.

The project was founded on Scripture and literature relevant to developing a formation process toward a missional identity. Learning to exercise spiritual disciplines, beginning with the formational reading of Scripture, and the development of practices in everyday rhythms of life, the course work guided participants through a process of transformation, discovering who they are and how God might use them in his mission. Participants wrestled with identity—with the assumption that knowing whose they are would inform who they are.

Participants completed a spiritual health self-assessment on both the first and last Sundays as a tool to measure whether or not daily spiritual disciplines and practices led to a greater embracing of missional identity. The results of the survey showed a positive connection and provided a clear path forward to offering a longer option in the near future. The course work created for this project will be expanded to develop this long-term class that will delve even deeper into identity formation disciplines and practices that connect individuals with God’s larger mission.

Content Reader: Tod Bolsinger, PhD

Words: 292
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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

It began with an observation. In every church I have served over the past twenty-eight years, including fourteen years in an ordained capacity, a common struggle existed among the people. Numerous counseling sessions and intimate conversations afforded through my role as pastor offered glimpses into the struggle. They grappled with pride, guilt, success, and failure. They dressed up in their Sunday best, put on a façade, entered into the church building, and engaged others in a relatively superficial way, giving little hint of their brokenness. In fact, they sought to conceal that brokenness, hiding behind their accomplishments, work, possessions, stations in life, and any other moniker of achievement or success. Still, others were so riddled with defeat, loss, and other challenges in life that led to the opposite moniker—failure.

In digging deep with congregants and staff through everything from premarital or marital counseling to grief counseling to coaching to supervision and everything in between, the people I served wrestled with underlying matters related to value, meaning, and purpose. In other words, they believed they were defined by either their success or failure. In many instances, that success or failure hindered them from engaging in the ministries of the church for varying reasons from time constraints to feelings of inadequacy. This tension between success and failure is evident in a story conveyed by a mentor of mine several years ago. When the economic recession of 2008 occurred, and many people lost their jobs, the men of the congregation he served stopped attending church. At a time when they needed the family of God the most for encouragement and prayer, they simply disengaged. I proposed the reason for this was rooted in identity.
The struggle of identity has existed as long as humans have been in relationship with God. Adam and Eve’s rebellion in the Garden of Eden, as they consumed the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, introduced sin into the world in Genesis Chapters 2-3. They rejected God as they sought sustenance elsewhere. According to Timothy Keller, “Sin is the despairing refusal to find your deepest identity in your relationship and service to God. Sin is seeking to become oneself, to get an identity, apart from God.”¹ The first of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:2-3 states, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.”² Thus, finding one’s identity in anything other than God is a form of idolatry.

Further, Jesus draws a connection between the first four and subsequent six of the Ten Commandments, summarizing them in Matthew 22: 37-38 when he says, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” The issue of identity cuts to the core of humanity’s relationship with God and others. People continuously attempt to construct their identities on aspects of their lives other than God. It is the foundational challenge in everyone’s lives and the source of broken relationships. The path to a healthy Christian identity is experienced and formed through a process of integrated, reflective spiritual formation and a life of missional engagement.


² All Scripture quoted is from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.
Because of the siloed way that ministries had been organized and offered at First Presbyterian Church of Orlando, discipling efforts were disconnected from any missional engagement. Thus, the challenge of identity found in this intersection was accentuated at FPCO in several ways. First, historical attempts at discipleship and spiritual formation consisted primarily of exhortation through preaching, teaching through catechetical instruction, and discipline. Discipling efforts largely only focused on the God-and-me (vertical) relationship with no reflective process that would strengthen Christian identity and, therefore, produced no obvious spiritual growth. Content, whether biblical, theological, or otherwise, was presented as information, and the objective of those efforts was to acquire what one might call head-knowledge. Besides attendance numbers, no other evaluation of engagement was attempted. After participating in these discipling efforts, people returned to their everyday lives, no follow up occurred, and thus, there was no evidence of identity transformation.

Second, attempts at missional engagement have amounted to quarterly service days designed to largely focus on the neighbor-and-me (horizontal) relationship. Most entailed volunteer opportunities to help with community projects, including construction and beautification efforts. In participating in these projects, many volunteers had little or no interaction with others and, therefore, no ability to find or deepen relationships. Also, these once-a-quarter projects were disconnected from everyday life and have not produced missional people who are actively engaged in daily missional living and the identity formation that a life of service brings. Besides attendance numbers, no other evaluation of engagement was attempted. After participating in these missional efforts,
people returned to their everyday lives, no follow up occurred, and thus, there was no evidence of identity transformation in these efforts, either.

Within this project, I set out to demonstrate that identity is intrinsic to any spiritual formation plan as well as missional engagement, and is that element which connects spiritual growth to missional purpose, ultimately facilitating transformation. In Christ, one is adopted into God’s family as his child (vertical). As his child, one is called to envelop others into God’s family (horizontal). It is at the point of identity that the vertical nature of one’s relationship with the God intersects the horizontal nature of one’s relationships with others. As a child of God, one is afforded the love of, and intimacy with, God. This gives one true value and meaning. As a child of God, one is also an heir of God the Father’s promise to bless all people. This gives one true purpose. My theory of change is that it is through disciplines and practices that are both spiritual and missional that the transformational encounter is discovered: through embracing one’s God-given identity—a child of God who is invited and expected to participate in the “family business,” or God’s mission.

Intended to be a short-term experiment, this project produced results that provided helpful insights for the development of a long-term discipleship course. Those insights included revelations on the common challenge of identity, the formative practice of reading Scripture, an increased understanding of the missional calling in everyday rhythms of life, the fulfilling nature of knowing and embracing creation gifts, the importance of community and accountability, and the desire for adequate time to form new habits. Each insight ultimately pointed back to the foundational issue of a Christ-centered, missional identity.
Although formation toward missional identity was the central focus of this project, the energy and discussion around the topic was surprising. All participants had previously attended FPCO’s Bible survey class, Casket Empty, which featured a predominantly lecture-based format with little to no time devoted to discussion. Therefore, I anticipated participants would not be conditioned to speak candidly or transparently about their struggles with identity. On the contrary, given the opportunity to voice their struggles, the ensuing conversations were enthused and animated.

The class began the section on identity by exploring how one’s challenges in life can lead to an inaccurate perception of one’s value and meaning. People were forthright about how failures and trials through various seasons of life had contributed to negative perceptions of self, even to the point of shame or guilt. Additionally, the group discussed how a person’s successes in life led to an equally inaccurate perception of one’s value and meaning. People shared how certain educational and career triumphs contributed negatively to perceptions of self, as they led to pride, arrogance, and unhealthy rivalries.

Whether shaped by failure or success, all recognized that those perceptions informed, not only how one viewed self, but also how one interacted with others.

Understanding and embracing the identity of child of God, as explored in Scripture, gave participants a starting point of being loved graciously, regardless of failures and successes. Knowing that one is loved unconditionally allowed people to begin to share that love with others. One participant, reflecting months later, found the “child of God” identity to be a powerful and necessary building block for all that followed. Planning for the development of this short-term experiment into a long-term formation effort, it will be imperative in future iterations to create more space for people
to engage specifically with one another on the topic of identity, especially as it pertains to their value and meaning. Knowing that God has adopted them as his beloved children, to be with God in God’s mission in the world, radically transforms their understanding of themselves and those they encounter each day.

Another significant insight learned from this project related to the practice of reading Scripture. Again, all participants had previously attended a Bible survey class in which they were taught the larger narrative of Scripture over a two-year academic cycle. The primary focus of the class was to give as much content as possible so that the entirety of the biblical story could be covered. As the instructor delivered content, the participants in the class were expected to acquire and retain that content. Specifically, they participated in the informational reading of Scripture. In this project, participants were expected to engage in the formational reading of Scripture, lectio divina. Whereas informational reading entails mastering and even controlling the content, formational reading is about giving up control as one subjects oneself to be shaped and molded by the content. As the class discussed the topic of identity, the formational reading of Scripture proved essential. Key passages helped participants understand that their value, meaning, and purpose was not wrapped up in their successes and failures of life, but in the reality that they are children of God. I learned that many in the class did not know how to read the Bible in this way and needed instruction and practice. It was several weeks before the class found a good rhythm of reading Scripture with the intent of formation. Planning for the development of a long-term formation plan, the importance of teaching and training people to read Scripture with an intent on formation will be important.
The project also afforded a better understanding of the perception participants had regarding church and secular activities. As participants were challenged to see their everyday lives as times and places where missional engagement could happen, their understanding of God’s mission was radically expanded. Mission work was traditionally viewed as a separate activity from family, work, and neighborhood comings and goings. When they began the class, many assumed that the point of the class was to find a place to serve either in the church or through traditional service projects. Most participants were surprised by the challenge to think missionally about the places they were already spending their time and the people with whom they were already interacting. They soon went from a church-centered mindset to a Kingdom-focused mindset. In short, they began to understand that God was sending them each and every day to the people they regularly encounter. As children of God who are loved unconditionally and intimately by the Father, they began to understand that their task was to share that love with others. Based on the responses of class participants, connecting people to God’s mission in the everyday will be a dramatic shift for the larger congregation and something to develop intentionally.

As much as I was surprised at the energy and discussion around the topic of identity, I was equally surprised at the same level of energy and discussion around the topic of giftedness. This section allowed participants an opportunity to explore and reflect upon their unique giftedness, especially as it pertained to their participation in God’s mission. As greater recognition was achieved by participants, they were then encouraged to think through how the sharing of God’s love might be manifest using their unique gifts. In some cases, the response was relief, as some determined their participation in
God’s mission could be shaped by their natural inclinations, and they did not have to mimic others whose natural gifts were different. Another way to put it, anxiety over sharing God’s love subsided once participants realized they could leverage their natural abilities to share God’s love. I cannot overstate the positive feedback from this section as people discovered that they were, not only children of God, but also children who were special and inimitable in the way they have been created by God the Father for his purposes. Planning for the future of FPCO, helping congregants discover their God-given uniqueness is key in helping them discover their role in God’s mission.

Another insight from the class was related to the importance of community and accountability. Due to their previous class experience, I anticipated that adding intentional time for community and accountability would be beyond most participants’ comfort zone. To be sure, there were brief moments scheduled in each class when participants were expected to break up into smaller groups and recap how their disciplines and practices went during the week, reflect on how God showed up in those practices, and also discuss content as it was presented. However, it was clear that these moments were important to the group, and many expressed that they would have liked to have had more small group time to encourage people to share deeply and to connect as prayer partners. In some conversations, participants would remind others that their identity was founded as a child of God and not whatever event that had occurred over the week. I learned that not only did people need to meditate in the Scriptures to embrace their identity in Jesus, but needed the love and support of others as they were reminded within community. It is worth noting that, although this class was always intended to be a short-term experiment for what will eventually become a long-term formation plan,
several people said that they could have benefited from a longer duration for two reasons. First, a longer course would have allowed them to build deeper relationships and greater accountability with others in the class. They found that toward the end of the six-week timeframe, the conversations became more transparent and authentic, and just when people were beginning to engage in a vulnerable way, the class ended. Second, the practices developed during the class did not turn into habits for some of the participants. When asked what could have helped the practices to become more ingrained, the answer was a longer class. It is clear that facilitating more time for relationships to develop was a miss in the project. Planning for the future, the formation plan must incorporate a more significant relational component among the participants.

In this project, I set out to demonstrate that a person’s identity as a child of God is crucial to understanding and embracing their true sense of value, meaning, giftedness, and purpose. Through the development of disciplines and practices, one discovers and embraces this identity and related missional calling. This challenge necessitated the shift from an attractional strategy of program-development, where the ultimate objective was to bring people to church and create members, to a more missional model of Kingdom-building people-development, equipping participants for missional witness. More specifically, the hope of this doctoral project was to create a class experience that went beyond the classroom and facilitated a direct connection between spiritual growth and participation in God’s mission, while helping people discover their identity as beloved children of God, uniquely talented and gifted for God’s loving purposes in their rhythms of life. The specific objective was to help a group of people who already had a certain
level of biblical literacy adopt spiritual disciplines and build unique spiritual practices so that they might grow in their missional identity.

Part One of this paper will examine the historical context of Orlando and First Presbyterian Church and the impact of the ending of Christendom on the church. An exploration of early membership growth and adopted spiritual practices revealed how those same practices did not lead to success in the way that they once did. Particular consideration was given to current external and internal challenges that hindered FPCO’s efforts at spiritual formation and missional engagement, with special attention given to the fact that culture is largely individualistic, self-focused, and intent on self-actualization and happiness. This section will conclude in illustrating the need for a strategy of spiritual formation toward missional identity that moves into the realm of everyday living.

Part Two will identify relevant literature that addresses the process of spiritual formation as beneficial to others, the role of Scripture in that process, the challenge of identity in culture and in Scripture, an exploration of missional church movements, and the impact of a rule of life that entails practices that shape missional engagement. A theological examination focuses on the sending nature of the Trinity and how this has enlightened the understanding of the Church as God’s sent people. This encompasses sharing the alternate culture of God’s Kingdom to the people they encounter, both in word and action. This engagement with culture is personalized around a person’s identity as a child of God with unique gifts and talents. Formational reading of Scripture, spiritual disciplines and practices outside of Sunday morning, and accountability to other participants were key components in this process.
Part Three will describe the goals and plans for implementing the project. This project incorporated several components of a holistic spiritual formation journey into a six-week course. Those components included *lectio divina*, exploring one’s identity in Christ as a child of God, discovering one’s uniqueness through the exploration of natural talents, identifying one’s mission field, and utilizing spiritual disciplines and practices to facilitate missional engagement. Finally, a timeline, descriptions of preparation and leadership, a post-class analysis, and an original spiritual health assessment were utilized to evaluate progress and growth.
CHAPTER 1

EARLY YEARS OF FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ORLANDO

Like many churches, the congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Orlando can attribute its origin to a number of men and women who sought to establish a worshipping and witnessing Christian presence in a newly settled community. Orlando and the larger Central Florida population grew significantly during the post-Civil War era, as many moved south, believing the warmer climate served as a “cure-all” for illnesses, while citrus growing provided an attractive alternative to cotton.\(^1\) With city limits extending one square mile and a residential count of eighty-five, Orlando was established through incorporation in 1875.\(^2\) In the years preceding, the Presbyterian Church in the United States (PCUS) had expanded its efforts to establish Presbyterian communities south of Jacksonville. Thus, the groundwork for the formation of the church can be traced back to the 1850s and 1860s.\(^3\) Finally, through a joint-effort between William Brazelton Telford and W.H. Dodge, the church, consisting of eleven adults and

\(^1\) Nancy Hardy Abberger, *Heart of the City: History of the First Presbyterian Church, Orlando, Florida 1876-1987* (Orlando, FL: First Presbyterian Church, 1988), 2.

\(^2\) Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 2.

\(^3\) Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 3-4.
five children, was established one year after the city of Orlando: “In lovingly-preserved handwritten session minutes, we read that First Presbyterian Church of Orlando was born on March 18, 1876, in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Gould.”

Early records of the church’s history demonstrated a snapshot of its rhythms and practices, including the ordaining and installing of ruling elders and deacons, regular worship, and weekly session meetings. Because the people of the church did not have their own building, the meeting location rotated from several settings, including the courthouse and Opera House. The history further showed that between the years 1876 and 1883, the church did not have a regular minister. Nevertheless, First Presbyterian Church of Orlando continued to grow as people began to migrate south, most of whom were Christians. Candidates for membership into the church were thoroughly examined by the session, and as early as 1880, the congregation recognized the need for its own gathering place or building. Finally, a sanctuary was constructed in 1883, measuring forty feet by sixty feet, for a cost of $4,600 and was dedicated on February 2, 1883. Shortly after, the session voted that a Sabbath School, or Sunday School, be organized and a superintendent hired, and with that, a season of growth and outreach began. These

4 Abberger, Heart of the City, 4.
5 Abberger, Heart of the City, 5.
6 Abberger, Heart of the City, 6.
7 Abberger, Heart of the City, 10.
8 Abberger, Heart of the City, 12.
9 Abberger, Heart of the City, 14.
10 Abberger, Heart of the City, 15.
early seeds germinated a recurring vision and core values and evolved into strategies of growth and outreach that continue today.

**Early Spiritual Formation and Outreach Practices**

The records of First Presbyterian Church of Orlando gave insight into their efforts at and practices of spiritual formation: “The 1888 *Narrative of the Session* . . . lists thirteen points regarding growth of the church, such as family worship, catechetical and Bible instruction, observance of the Sabbath and giving.” It was clear that participation in these key areas of the life of the church were important to church leadership, and certain practices were expected of its members for the purpose of spiritual growth. Early session minutes only recorded membership changes, references to synod and presbytery meetings, and matters of church discipline. However, it was precisely within the matters of discipline that the session revealed the high standards of membership, relevant practices, and the consequences of disobedience.

The practice of church discipline was utilized in addressing a wide range of offenses. A prospective transfer from Indiana was denied membership because of his refusal to close his stables for use on the Sabbath. A member of the church was visited by the pastor and one of the ruling elders after signing a petition to the city for continuing a liquor license to a particular saloon within the city limits. The member promptly withdrew his support of the saloon in writing and, upon review of the written statement

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12 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 22.

13 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 16.
by the session, was allowed to remain a member in good standing.  

Another member was reprimanded for his habit of attending parties and dancing. Upon learning that his dancing hindered “his usefulness to the church,” he promised to stop.  

Finally, one particular member was confronted for his excessive drinking, while still another was confronted for his use of profane language. Neither of these instances included record of the outcome.

The high standards of membership along with the strict consequences of noncompliance did not seem to translate to improved spiritual growth, by any subjective assessment. In the 1885 Narrative of the Session, the leadership of the church offered the assessment that “there is no marked improvement in the Christian growth in grace and deportment [or behavior] of the membership.” This prompted the pastor, on behalf of the session, to address the congregation during a Sunday morning worship service. The specific topic of the address was “on the subject of worldly amusements and Sabbath observance.” Within the address, the pastor sought to exhort and admonish the congregation, while warning them of the temptations associated with “the dance, the theater, and the card table.” The pastor recognized the importance of recreation and social fellowship, and did not want the congregants to see the leadership prohibiting them

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14 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 16.
15 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 19.
16 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 19.
17 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 16.
18 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 16.
19 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 17.
from enjoyment, but stressed the danger of participation in specific activities that might be a source of temptation for others and their own spiritual health:

[F]or the sake of charity toward those of your brethren who are grieved when a fellow disciple is seen thus conforming to the world—for the sake of the weak who may be led by your example to stumble and fall from their Christian steadfastness . . . for the sake of your blessed Lord whose word exhorts to abstain from the appearance of evil, and for the sake of your own spiritual interests, we beseech you in regards to these things be not conformed to the world.

Finally, it appeared that the leadership felt that the best way to facilitate spiritual growth and combat the temptations of “worldly living” was greater instruction within the family unit. Although the church practiced catechetical instruction with diligence, “Bible and doctrinal instructions in our families is too generally neglected.”

Although the congregation wrestled with the issue of spiritual growth and effective practices, emphasizing exhortation, catechetical instruction for families, and discipline in the early formative years, increased membership growth was more readily and easily attained.

As early as 1879, the congregation of First Presbyterian Church of Orlando recognized the need for intentional outreach in light of opportunities provided by the newly settled region: “We have in South Florida a wide and interesting missionary field that has filled rapidly within the last six years with people from all parts of the up country.”

No specific evangelistic plan for reaching non-Christians beyond the church was articulated in the church records. Over the early years, however, a number of people

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20 Abberger, Heart of the City, 17.
21 Abberger, Heart of the City, 18. Italicize author.
22 Abberger, Heart of the City, 20.
23 Abberger, Heart of the City, 8.
were welcomed into membership through official action of the Session as “each
candidate appeared before the session and after examination in regard to his (or her)
religious experience was received into membership.”\textsuperscript{24} This church growth was not
limited to adults. Through the Sunday School ministry, outreach to children and youth
proved particularly effective in terms of increased numbers. By 1886, the number of
officers and teachers had reached eleven, and the school had 110 students.\textsuperscript{25} There was no
mention as to whether or not the Sunday School effort was evangelistic in its efforts or if
the school simply attracted new Christian children who moved into the area.

It is worth noting that, in early years, the congregation remained largely
homogeneous in terms of its ethnicity. Specifically, the church recognized the African-
American and Native-American, particularly the Seminole, populations within the greater
Orlando community. While the African-American population was expected to increase
along with the greater population of Orlando, it was evident the Seminole population was
decreasing, as many from the Seminole tribe were already moving further south. In light
of anticipated growth of the African-American population, the records preserved an
acknowledgment of “their responsibility to reach out to those of the black race.”\textsuperscript{26}
Although the acknowledgment for needed outreach existed, at the same time, the church
seemed to acquiesce to its homogeneity as it stated, “We as a church are doing nothing
for their religious instruction.”\textsuperscript{27} Regarding the Native-American population, “the

\textsuperscript{24} Abberger, \textit{Heart of the City}, 12.
\textsuperscript{25} Abberger, \textit{Heart of the City}, 15.
\textsuperscript{26} Abberger, \textit{Heart of the City}, 20.
\textsuperscript{27} Abberger, \textit{Heart of the City}, 20.
Christian community was too occupied with nurturing its own members in a frontier civilization to consider this dwindling minority. 

Although the church tended to be mostly insular in its efforts and practices, with particular attention given to the spiritual formation and health of its members, the records clearly indicated the church had its eye on the surrounding community. Thus, an obvious conflict existed due to the competing values of providing ministry for church members and acknowledging the potential mission field in which the church was planted. Faced with a choice of either/or, the church adopted practices focused on providing for the members, and these practices were met with success in terms of continued membership increases. This choice to primarily serve its members laid the foundation for the future vision and efforts to align around that vision, but it also gave rise to competing values and relevant challenges that persist to this day.

**Early to Mid-century Expansion**

By the turn of the century, the church had experienced a sustained period of consistent growth, numerically speaking. The practice of offering Sunday School proved to be a particularly effective outreach to children: “The 1900 statistical report to presbytery lists 241 communicants, 130 scholars in the Sunday School, and nineteen teachers.” Records indicated that an intentional Sunday School recruitment effort was initiated, which proved successful as it “[led] toward formation of more and larger Bible

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28 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 20.

29 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 45.
classes.”30 Because of rising numbers, a congregational meeting was held in August of 1900 for the purpose of electing two additional elders to the session and three additional deacons to the diaconate.31

One of the most significant driving forces of outreach and mission in the early years of the church was the women of First Presbyterian Church of Orlando. In 1883, the Ladies Aid Society was formed for the purpose of raising money for whatever need the members thought most worthy, including the procurement of the church’s first manse.32 Branching off from the Ladies Aid Society was the Ladies Foreign Missionary Society, which not only raised funds for missionary activities, but also helped raise awareness regarding mission activities all over the world. By 1900, the Ladies Foreign Missionary Society regularly sought to further its mission to “send the Gospel into the dark places of the world,” as they studied and taught on topics and places related to China, Africa, India, Japan, and Korea.33 Clearly, mission activity was thought of as a necessary practice of the church—but one that was primarily carried out in foreign lands.

One of the most interesting meetings took place in 1903, as the women attempted “to determine whether Medical or Evangelistic missions, or the Printing Press [was] the most powerful factor in missionary work.”34 The women of First Presbyterian Church of Orlando were not content to simply foster fellowship, but rather saw the church’s and

30 Abberger, Heart of the City, 45.
31 Abberger, Heart of the City, 45.
32 Abberger, Heart of the City, 35.
33 Abberger, Heart of the City, 46.
34 Abberger, Heart of the City, 46.
their role as reaching out to all the world. They demonstrated their keen awareness of varying mission-related strategies. Through the Sunday School initiative and the Ladies Foreign Missionary Society, the church continued to build on its values of spiritual formation and outreach. Sunday School was effective in drawing in the churched people who migrated into the area, effectively increasing the number of people who attended First Presbyterian Church, and mission activity was accomplished through raising awareness of missions in foreign lands and sending money to support those initiatives.

This growth prompted the church to continuously modify its facilities, and new sanctuaries were built in 1883 and 1888 with a significant expansion to increase seating capacity to 1000 in 1912. New additions were made and buildings erected over the years, and a few highlights included a Bible School Building in 1926, the remodeling of that building in 1949, and the building of a new sanctuary in 1955, which serves as the present-day sanctuary. Building the sanctuary in 1955 proved particularly significant, as it was preceded by a meeting in which the congregation voted unanimously to stay in the downtown area: “This resolution was passed by a quorum of 272 without a dissenting vote. For the present, First Presbyterian Church would remain in the heart of the city.” The vote was the culmination of ten-to-fifteen years of debate as to whether or not the church building should be moved out of downtown. Again, church leadership demonstrated its commitment to the greater Orlando community by remaining centrally located, and membership continued to increase. The vision theme of “heart of the city”

35 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 386.
36 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 387.
37 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 217.
was firmly entrenched, as the practices adopted by the church led to significant numerical growth.

**Peak and Expansion - “All Things to All People”**

In 1982, Howard Edington was called to serve as senior pastor of FPCO. In many ways, the arrival of Edington ushered in a new season of the church and brought forth the peak years of membership and attendance numbers. Edington was revered by many and described in the records very favorably: “The new senior minister was a spell-binding orator, and an able administrator, and most importantly, a sincere and caring shepherd to his people.” At the same time, the church developed a heavy emphasis on programming and ministries, and many additional employees were added to the staff in order to meet the needs of the growing congregation. Most notably, two pastoral staff were added during this time, one of them was John Tolson.

Tolson began a Sunday School class called Basics “which outgrew its classroom, then the recreation room on the third floor of Yowell Hall, ending up in the Fellowship Hall. This no-frills Bible study applied to modern life has continued to draw large numbers, including many from outside the congregation.” This Sunday School class became one of, if not, the primary means through which Bible instruction took place. In 1995, Edington had an opportunity to reflect upon the thirteen years he had served the church and the membership growth the church had experienced when he wrote: “In 1982,

38 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 354.
39 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 360.
40 Abberger, *Heart of the City*, 360.
there were 2,300 members on the rolls, slightly more than half of them active. Today the church’s membership approaches 5,000, with 400 new people joining the church each year. That is just one indicator of the new vision, new hope, and new direction marking the life of this great, old, downtown church.”

While the church flourished in terms of membership, the challenges of catering to the desires of such a large and diverse group of people who resided all over the greater Orlando area prompted more programming and event planning. During this season, “[p]rograms raced forward to keep pace of members’ needs and interests.” Edington described his vision and philosophy this way:

People are forever saying to me, “You can’t be all things to all people. You need to find a specific area of ministry, concentrate on that, and do it well.” Not downtown. Downtown is even more pronounced that you have to be “all things to all people.” Furthermore, you not only have to be all things to all people, you also have to do all things, and you have to do them well. Why? Because every one of those 5,000 people at First Church goes to great inconvenience to get to church. They travel great distances; they pass who knows how many other churches; and they scramble to find a parking place. Therefore, the only way we can make it downtown is to provide such a variety of ministries, functioning at such a level of competence that people will suffer any inconvenience to be involved. There are, at present, 152 different ministries that originate from the base of First Church. When we say we are determined to be all things to all people, we are not simply playing word games.

As the church functioned at an exceedingly rapid pace, described as a 24-7-365 type of church or a church that operates all of the time, this marked one of the high


42 Abberger, Heart of the City, 361.

43 Edington and Schaller, Downtown Church, 105.

44 Edington and Schaller, Downtown Church, 104.
points in the church’s history for membership. Although Edington left the church in 2001, records indicated continued growth until 2003 when the church membership topped out at 5,637.

**Senior Pastor Conflict and Transition**

The church records were unclear as to why Edington left, but it was widely known that the church went through a few years of intense conflict. Many within the church were divided, as session members disagreed with Edington. The disagreement was between those who were loyal to Edington and those who were upset that the decision to go deeper into debt during a building and capital campaign was not fully supported by the session. The debt from building projects initiated by Edington exceeded $22 million. Additional pastoral positions were created and filled without the full consent of the session. Although he was expected to retire at First Presbyterian Church of Orlando, Edington left the church as a result of the conflict in 2002. After two years of interim pastoral leadership, David Swanson was called as the senior pastor in 2004, and he quickly set out to heal the wounds of division in Edington’s final years and eliminate the $22 million debt.45

**Shifting Toward Missional Discipleship**

The year 2004 marked the beginning of a fourteen-year season of membership plateaus and minimal increases. A purging of the roles to determine actual active membership took place twice—in 2004 and 2010. After the reported high mark of 5,637

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members in 2003, the first cleansing of the roles in 2004 reflected an actual membership of 4,594. Membership rose gradually until it reached 4,891 in 2009. In 2010, the second purging of the roles revealed that membership had dropped to 3,521. A slow and steady increase each year had FPCO membership standing at 3,719 in 2018. Although membership experienced a net gain of 198 between the years 2010 and 2018, and the church accepted 1,191 new people into membership, 993 left during that same time for a variety of reasons.

In 2013, Swanson was granted his first sabbatical after the culmination of an intense three-year period in which the church went through denominational discernment. First Presbyterian Church of Orlando ultimately left one denomination, PC(USA), for another that aligned more closely with its theology, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC). Further, the church sought to become more missional in its ministries. When Swanson returned from his sabbatical, he shared with the session and staff what he had discerned in his time away. Most significantly, he felt that it was time the church refined and intensified its efforts at discipling and incorporating faith into peoples’ work. This resulted in two initiatives—first, a pastor for discipleship was hired with the mandate to create a discipleship plan for the congregation that emphasized and sought to facilitate spiritual growth. Second, the church engaged in creating a faith and work ministry, the Collaborative.

Attempts at implementing these two initiatives were challenging. While the church had used language and upheld the aspiration for life-transforming discipleship and for its members to impact the community, it had continually defaulted to the practices that had historically sustained or grown membership. Membership numbers, worship and program
attendance, and the operating budget remained the primary ways the church measured success. Partly to assess where the congregation currently stood, and partly to address the challenges they faced, the session of the church entered into a relationship with TAG Consulting, led by Kevin Ford. Out of that consultation, the session articulated that the church could no longer be “all things to all people,” but rather needed to pursue an equipping strategy for missional living. Further, the leadership discerned that the church had a responsibility to the city of Orlando to be a witness through the church’s actions, both corporately and individually. As part of that witness, any action that aimed to bless the community should not be mutually exclusive from a person’s process of spiritual formation. Thus, the “heart of the city” vision was refined, and a connection between discipleship and mission was established. To help align these initiatives, this project was developed to help provide a spiritual formation plan for missional living.

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CHAPTER 2
EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL CHALLENGES

The world in which the Western Church finds itself has changed—it is now a mission field. Whereas the surrounding culture could, at one time, be described as largely Christian, today a very different reality exists. The period of history characterized as predominantly Christian is often described as Christendom. Christendom is over today, as communities feature the greatest levels of diversity society at-large has ever seen. Not only are people not Christian, but many have no religious affiliation at all. Additionally, the current strategies congregations employ to reach their communities are rooted in Christendom, and their primary purpose is to attract people into membership who are largely already Christian. Although these strategies could be characterized as successful in many ways at one point in the Church’s history, today the same strategies hinder attempts at identity formation through spiritual practices and missional engagement.

Therefore, the challenges FPCO and the larger Church universal face are both external and internal. Externally, the Church faces a rapidly-changing, pluralistic, self-focused, and consumer-oriented culture. Internally, strategies that govern the implementation of ministry at FPCO fail to equip people for missional living, do not
connect to a clear, shared mission or purpose, and do not allow for relational connections, either inside or outside the covenantal community. Both the external and internal challenges have exacerbated the difficulty in dealing with the topic of identity.

**External Challenge: The End of Christendom and the Rapidly Changing World**

Missiologists argue that the Church of the Western world, including the US, faces a new cultural reality, and it must reorient itself in light of the ending of Christendom. The reflections of Lesslie Newbigin upon returning to a very different post-Christian, and even anti-Christian, Britain, in 1974 after serving decades as a missionary in India, brought awareness around this challenge.¹ Christendom is the name given to “the system of church-state partnership and cultural hegemony in which the Christian religion was the protected and privileged religion of society and the church its legally established institutional form.”² Although this designation more aptly describes what transpired in Europe in terms of state-established religion, the disestablishment of Christianity in the US did not mitigate the impact of Christendom on American culture: “Even when the legal structures of Christendom have been removed (as in North America), the legacy continues as a pattern of powerful traditions, attitudes, and social structures that we describe as ‘functional Christendom.’”³ The Church has enjoyed a sort of home-field advantage or benefits associated with this functional Christendom, all relevant to holding

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a very prominent voice in public life and place at the center of society. Newbigin recognized a very different cultural reality than the one he had left, and this reality was not readily apparent to others who did not have the benefit of seeing the change from the outside.

Today, as Christendom is over and the world continues to change rapidly, the benefits of functional Christendom have largely come to an end. Reggie McNeal expounds on what he describes as the collapse of the “church culture” when he writes, “The American culture no longer props up the church the way it did, no longer automatically accepts the church as a player in public life, and can be downright hostile to the church’s presence. The collapse I am detailing also involves the realization that values of classic Christianity no longer dominate the way Americans believe or behave.”

The ending of Christendom marks a significant change, and in fact, change has become the one constant feature of the culture, the world, and the Church. As Tod Bolsinger points out, the ending of Christendom coupled with constant change has created challenges and opportunities for congregational leaders, especially as they prepare for the future:

The culture is changing, the world is changing rapidly, and churches are facing change on an unprecedented scale. Churches and church leaders are becoming increasingly irrelevant, even marginalized. Shared corporate faith is viewed with cynicism at best, downright hostility at worst. The cultural advantage we experience during the seventeen centuries of Christendom has almost completely dissipated. Seminary training for the Christendom world is inadequate to this immensely challenging—transformation-demanding—moment in history.

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As these challenges associated with the end of functional Christendom arise, they present an opportunity to rethink the ministry strategies of the Church, including how ministries are designed, implemented, and even measured. The next section continues to explore the Church’s external challenges related to identity, created by the societal response to Christendom.

**External Challenge: Modernity, Postmodernity, and the Modern Self**

The North American context has changed to the point that the US can no longer be called predominantly Christian. Consequently, the so-called Christian values that were once shared by Americans have dissipated, and other forces have filled the void left by the decline of Christendom. Modernity and then postmodernity have largely filled that void, shaping how people think about the world and their place in it. Modern and postmodern culture have impacted virtually every nation in the world and largely contradict the values of Christianity: “It has become what Lesslie Newbigin has called the most pervasive culture of the world and one of the most resistant to the Christian gospel.”\(^6\) This creates a significant challenge as assumptions about shared Christian values can no longer be made, but at the same time, it helps bring clarity to the challenges the Church, and especially FPCO, faces as it seeks to create a spiritual formation plan. Before one can understand the postmodern world and the relevant challenges individuals face as they contemplate their place in it, one must first look at the impact of modernity.

Largely a response to the authoritarian social structures of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, modernity was a reaction to the world of Christendom. Although

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\(^6\) Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 3.
various developments within social, political, economic, and religious spheres have all contributed to the modern way of life, modernity traces its beginning to the historical intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment. “The intellectuals of the Enlightenment were engaged in a noble effort to assert and foster a greater measure of personal freedom. To do so, Enlightenment thinkers searched for alternatives to the authoritarian constraints of established monarchies and religious hierarchies as well as an alternative to the claims of truth grounded in historical tradition and biblical teaching.”

This quest for personal freedom led to the development of a threefold alternate course, giving rise to the concept of the modern-self. First, one’s identity was no longer founded in the State or the Church or any other authority, but rather their thinking followed that “personal identity and destiny should be the self-construction of a rational, autonomous individual.” Second, the concept of the modern-self was founded on the rejection of absolute truth, as determined by the state or religion, and developed “a different approach for determining what is true, one specifically based on human reason or rationality.” Finally, having established their own truth, the natural result was to determine how the modern-self would relate to society, and “a new notion for what determined social order emerged.” In many respects, the quest for personal freedom created people who saw themselves as, and functioned as though they were, not part of a larger community or world, but rather individuals whose world revolved around them.

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7 Guder, Missional Church, 20.
8 Guder, Missional Church, 21.
9 Guder, Missional Church, 21.
10 Guder, Missional Church, 21.
This highly individualistic way of perceiving the world and one’s place in it resulted in the prioritization of self above all others. Just in the same way that the world of Christendom gave rise to modernity, modernity also incited a response.

The emergence of modernity eventually prompted the additional development of postmodernity. Within functional Christendom, certain foundations of society existed. The shift into postmodernity, or the postmodern condition, challenged those foundations and significantly shaped, and continues to shape, the world. Postmodern patterns include, but are not limited to, endless choices made available by technology, loss of shared experiences, transient relationships, plurality of approaches to sexual expression and experience, and personal spirituality without the necessity of organized religion.¹¹ These patterns are symptomatic of the postmodern developments of relative truth, the decentered self, and pluralism.

First, the notion of relative truth “recognizes that all persons live within particular contexts. Therefore, they possess specific cultural perspectives that are historically conditioned and shape the way they understand, see, and experience life. This tends to relativize every point of view.”¹² Next, while the modern-self eliminated state and religious constraints and led to the achievement of personal freedom, the unexpected effect was the creation of the decentered self. The decentered self was the natural consequence of removing common and shared understanding and content: “The bankruptcy of this effort became evident . . . when they failed to secure any normative

¹¹ Guder, Missional Church, 37.
¹² Guder, Missional Church, 40.
content common to all people. When ‘god’ died in the equation of modernity, it was only a matter of time before the modern self would also expire.”\textsuperscript{13} Lacking a shared commonality, the decentered self searched “for an individuality beyond the empty construct of Western individualism and for community greater than the social forces that influence it.”\textsuperscript{14} Lastly, increased ethnic diversity due to immigration, various religious and secular beliefs represented in this diversity, and technological advances that foster fewer shared experiences have all contributed to a radically pluralist society.\textsuperscript{15} These three components of postmodernity have eroded the former underpinnings of Christendom. Consequently, and significantly, commonality can no longer be found in face-to-face or shared experiences, but rather in ways shaped by media and individual consumer choices.\textsuperscript{16} The postmodern-self, then, is the product of the societal responses to Christendom, modernity, and postmodernity. The postmodern-self and condition creates significant challenges related to personal identity.

Today, Western society is comprised of individuals who largely do not identify as Christian, but rather find their identity in other dimensions of life. Those dimensions are as diverse as they are numerous. In his book, \textit{Known by God}, Brian S. Rosner wrestles with the issue of identity and identifies the traditional identity markers people view as essential. He lists them as race, ethnicity and nationality; culture; gender and sexuality;


\textsuperscript{14} Guder, \textit{Missional Church}, 42.

\textsuperscript{15} Guder, \textit{Missional Church}, 43.

\textsuperscript{16} Guder, \textit{Missional Church}, 43.
physical and mental capacity; family of origin; age, relationships; occupation; possessions; religion; and personality and character.\footnote{Brian S. Rosner, \textit{Known by God: A Biblical Theology of Personal Identity}, ed. Jonathan Lunde (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 41.} In his biblical assessment of these markers, he concludes that, although they are important, they are deficient: “[T]he Bible confirms the legitimacy of the standard personal identity markers, but denies their ultimacy. Many of them are indispensable, but they are an insufficient foundation upon which to build [one’s] identity.”\footnote{Rosner, \textit{Known by God}, 41-60.} An identity built on any of these markers may describe part of who a person is, but it falls short of affording one fulfillment in the form of value, meaning, and purpose. Rosner further notes that any one of these insufficient markers is problematic, as they can all lead to idolatry. Idolatry occurs “when we treat something other than God as ultimate. It is in this sense that the charge of idolatry may be properly applied to making a marker of identity the all-important thing in our lives. Inevitably, we build our sense of self, our value and worth, on something. If it is anything other than God, then we are guilty of idolatry.”\footnote{Rosner, \textit{Known by God}, 61.}

As this project sought to build a plan of spiritual growth and formation, the issue of sin was taken very seriously. Sin is intimately connected to the challenge of identity, and the sin of idolatry is a constant temptation. In \textit{The Reason for God}, Keller draws a connection between sin and identity as he reflects that sin is “the despairing refusal to find your deepest identity in your relationship and service to God. Sin is seeking to..."
become oneself, to get an identity, apart from him.”20 As sin is often defined as separation from God,21 staking one’s sense of self-worth on these insufficient markers will lead to further separation.

The culture in which the Church exists has incredible challenges. People increasingly have fewer shared experiences and values, define any form of truth as relative to the context that has shaped them, and are generally resistant to authoritative values propagated by functional Christendom. The society in which the Church finds itself is not only clearly and distinctly non-Christian, but also one in which the issue of self and topic of identity is intensely debated. This has led to the foundational challenge the Church must address in any plan of spiritual formation—the crisis of identity.

**Internal Challenge: Consumerism**

The internal challenges of First Presbyterian Church of Orlando are intimately connected to the external challenges of the larger culture. The external factors of living in a post-Christendom, postmodern society in which people are largely individualistic, self-focused, and intent on self-actualization and happiness have infiltrated the membership of the church and the people’s thinking about ministry. Consumerism is one of the most powerful forces that shapes attitudes and expectations, and this is especially true of the people of FPCO. Ford explains that consumerism “has roots in the dawning of the era of Enlightenment and the beginning of the modern world, with its attendant philosophy—

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modernism.”

He further clarifies the nature of consumerism as contradictory to the nature of community. If the nature of consumerism is unhealthy as it relates to the Church, then the nature of community would be on the opposite side of the spectrum. Ford explains that “consumerism is the idea that personal happiness is equated with acquiring and consuming products—usually alone. We choose our ‘community’ based on our ‘consumption.’ When our individual tastes or desires change, so do our friends.”

Consumeristic tendencies, coupled with the lack of a sense of community, are the foundational challenges the Church faces today, especially as it pertains to developing a plan for spiritual formation. Consumerism elevates self above all else:

The problem is not recognizing the importance of the individual. The problem is the glorification of the individual. When the individual self is glorified over the greater good for the community, rights begin to take precedence over responsibility, isolated pursuits replace the struggle for the common good, desires are twisted to resemble needs, and the imitation is presented as the real thing.

People seeking to be equipped for missional engagement are so deeply impacted by consumerism, yet at the same time, consumerism runs contrary to everything missional engagement requires. Ford sums up the challenge when he writes:

Consumerism is so deeply rooted in our culture that it has become part of the air we breathe. It’s one of the unchallenged assumptions that shape our way of believing, living, and relating. The journey from consumerism to community is not easy or obvious, but it is vitally important. Fortunately, the roots of community grow far more deeply than the roots of consumerism.

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22 Kevin G. Ford, *Transforming Church: Bringing Out the Good to Get to Great* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2008), 57.

23 Ford, *Transforming Church*, 58.


Ford’s conclusion outlined a path forward in developing a spiritual formation plan—moving from consumerism to community. Exploring the internal challenges of First Presbyterian Church of Orlando, it was evident that consumeristic tendencies, not only in the attitudes and behaviors of the people, but also in the ways in which leadership created ministry, were a significant underlying challenge that impacted everything. It was this foundational challenge that gave rise to all the other challenges within the church.

**Internal Challenge: The Attractional Church**

Related to the challenge of consumerism, First Presbyterian Church of Orlando had been largely attractional in its efforts. Reggie McNeal gives a description of the characteristics of an attractional church:

Traditionally, most churches have identified themselves as places where things happen and where congregants receive religious goods and services. As such, they produce worship services, programs, and events that attract people to attend. They provide club activities for club members who then rate the services they receive. In the members’ view of church, it is something that exists apart from them; it’s an organization, an institution. In this model, church is a place to frequent and to support by one’s participation and gifts of time, money, and energy.\(^{26}\)

Consumers want the best, and for the people of FPCO, this included religious goods and services. Everything the church created—from worship services to classes, from children to adult ministries—was designed to meet the desires of individuals and implemented at an exceptionally high level. The “all things to all people” philosophy from the days of Howard Edington was still evident. Consequently, the church’s ministries were largely internally focused, as the objective was to attract more people to

be part of the congregation. In fact, membership and worship attendance continued to be the dominant measurements through which the church evaluated success. McNeal reflects:

The scorecard for this kind of attractional church is attendance and participation, reflected in income it derives from satisfied customers. Since typical church members have spent their entire spiritual life in this system, it feels normal to them. Leadership for this model revolves around training people to operate this enterprise effectively. In many cases, the effectiveness of leaders relates to their ability to “grow” the church, meaning, of course, to improve its appeal and capacity to attract more people.27

The attractional church is very internally focused, and the objective is to get people connected to the church in the form of membership and attendance. FPCO had a congregation that primarily attended because they felt the church provided the best ministries and programs for their current desires. They were interested in “getting fed” so they had what they needed to make it through their week, not any kind of identity transformation. This way of thinking was very self-centered in the sense that congregants were mostly concerned with their personal benefit. They did not, consequently, see the church’s role as feeding them so that they could, in turn, serve and love others. This led to another challenge.

There was a disconnection between discipleship and mission in the minds of many church members who believed they were mutually exclusive. The church’s ministries resembled a buffet table, giving the people of the church an array of different opportunities from which to choose. Most congregants picked one ministry offering over another with no obvious process of discernment or conscious effort toward spiritual

27 McNeal, Missional Renaissance, 50.
formation. The areas of ministry were very loosely organized, and they lacked any control over the process of discipleship. Many ministries, including Sunday School and small groups, fell under the umbrella of “discipleship,” while other ministries, although they entailed some teaching and/or educational component, fell under different departments. There were numerous classes and small group expressions, but they were all studying different subjects and had different purposes. Some pursued topical studies while others analyzed Scripture. Further, some emphasized education while others highlighted fellowship. There was no sense of connection and certainly no sense of progression.

Silos existed between departments—the discipleship department and mission department struggled to work together, as did all the departments. This challenge of compartmentalization created competition over resources, as ministry efforts were not orchestrated in concert with each other. The existing structure and leadership culture valued autonomy over collaboration.28 Whether speaking of departments, ministries, committees, or even the governing board of the church, the current organizational structure hindered any type of collaboration.

This project hoped to create a spiritual formation plan that was less attractional, internally-focused, and church-centered, and instead more incarnational, externally-focused, and Kingdom-centered.29 Essentially, the spiritual formation plan needed to be missional:

In a missional approach, as the church engages the world, it finds Jesus, whose

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29 McNeal, Missional Renaissance, 41-66.
home is in the streets or wherever he has to go to connect with the people he is pursuing, meaning everybody. In a church-centered world, our responsibility is to bring people out of the streets into the church. A kingdom-oriented approach seeks to leverage the gospel into people’s lives right where they live, work, and play. The church is wherever followers of Jesus are. People don’t go to church; they are the church. They don’t bring people to church; they bring the church to people.  

Any transformative spiritual formation plan that deals seriously with identity must help people reorient their thinking and understanding not only about themselves, but also the places and relationships beyond the walls of the church where missional engagement happens. If the only benefit of spiritual formation is to improve one’s relationship with God, the point has been missed. On the other hand, if one engages in mission without an understanding of the purpose of serving—the spiritual transformation that should take place for all involved—then efforts are equivalent to any other service organization.

**Internal Challenge: Lack of Mission Engagement**

In the summer of 2017, FPCO contracted with Kevin Ford and TAG Consulting to engage in a visioning process as the session, pastors, and staff leaders prepared and planned for the future. The first part of the visioning process included a Discovery Report in which every member and visitor was invited to particulate in an online survey. Specifically, the survey was a self-assessment that allowed the congregation to

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evaluate the church on key markers of health. The results were then compared to other congregations, and based on a forced comparison, FPCO was rated against other congregations of various sizes, denomination, and geographical locations. Once those results were compiled, the consultant met with various focus groups within the congregation to add texture and clarity to the results. The results revealed that FPCO fell into the first percentage in the forced comparison on two key categories: mission ownership and relational connections. In other words, ninety-nine percent of the congregations TAG Consulting surveyed reported their churches did a better job of helping congregants engage in the mission of the church and engage with one another relationally.

First, the church leadership looked at the challenge of mission ownership. What was the mission of First Presbyterian Church of Orlando? Prior to this visioning process, the mission was to be “a covenant community making disciples who light the world.”\textsuperscript{34} This statement proved to be quite broad and largely undefined, particularly when it came to discipleship. According to the TAG Discovery Report, the congregation had little sense of corporate mission and purpose: “The congregation loves its church but struggles to define the church’s central purpose for existence aside from the basics: loving God and neighbor, worshipping God, etc. These are vitally important but we find that the healthiest and most impactful churches have an absolutely crystal-clear sense of identity and purpose that is unique to their context.\textsuperscript{35}


For a congregation that had historically emphasized the importance of discipleship and identified it as central to its mission, many of the members now struggled to comprehend exactly what that meant. If one had asked any ten members of the congregation to explain what it meant to make disciples or even be a disciple, she would likely have gotten ten different answers. FPCO had no unified spiritual formation strategy. Additionally, as there was little mission ownership, there was little sense of what it meant to “light the world.”

Lacking a common understanding, language, and definition, the congregation was confused about, and disconnected from, the mission of the church. FPCO did not have a unified, shared mission. Within the TAG-facilitated focus groups, one person offered, “I have tried to connect the dots as to our purpose and mission but I can’t. There is this expansive menu of programs and things to do but no central organizing theme.”

Another focus group participant provided insight, saying, “I have read Sinek’s Golden Circle and realized that we lack our Why. We do great with How and What—people love that, and the staff is great at programming that, but we don’t have our Why as a church.” Yet another added, “As a business owner I recognize that every successful organization needs a clear defined purpose that unites everybody and we don’t have this. I can’t get anyone to define it for me and I think this leaves people adrift and more likely to be consumers instead of contributors.”

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The results of the survey and the specific comments offered indicated that the church had significant consumeristic tendencies within the congregation. Corporately, there were a few significant mission projects, but those projects were managed mostly by the staff and did not involve the majority of the congregation. Despite this assessment, there was reason to be encouraged. The report concluded, “Our overall sense is that the people of First Presbyterian are ready and willing to be mobilized for mission but are not clear what they would be mobilized for.” Thus, there was good news, as the congregation appeared willing and ready for engagement. The challenge for leadership was to help the people understand how they might own the mission in their everyday living. However, this highlighted another challenge for the church.

**Internal Challenge: Lack of Relational Engagement**

The TAG Discovery Report brought to light the issue of facilitating relational connections. This was true within the church, and it was true in terms of encouraging relational engagement beyond the church. One example of this was that there were a number of classes and groups that were not receptive to new participants. People had expressed that they did not feel welcome when they entered into a class as a visitor for the first time. Groups were very insular—not outwardly relational toward others. While anyone in the church generally recognized the value of long-term relationships where trust was established through transparency and accountability, including and integrating new people into the church through these classes and groups presented a significant challenge. From the Discovery Report: “The lack of community at FPC is, we believe,

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the central issue that needs to be addressed. But we need to be careful to understand how community is formed in a large church and how people create a sense of attachment.\textsuperscript{40} The lack of community itself was a challenge, but facilitating relational connections for the sake of relationships would have missed the mark.

The survey results revealed a correlation between relational connections and mission ownership. Some of the lower scoring survey statements and the corresponding forced comparison percentages were as follows: “I am involved in a regular smaller group within the church” (fourth percentile); “I have a clearly defined role in the church” (second percentile); “My church is close-knit” (third percentile); “My church is relational” (third percentile); “I count around here” (second percentile); “All members are encouraged to discuss their opinions about change” (third percentile); “Everyone is motivated by the church’s vision for the future” (eleventh percentile and 44 percent negative); “Each individual member feels connected to the big picture of what the church is trying to accomplish” (seventh percentile and 45 percent negative).\textsuperscript{41}

As the leadership of the church began to talk through solutions to facilitate greater relational connections, Ford quickly dismissed the idea of simply putting every member into a small group, offering that a connection to each other was not enough:

Nearly ½ of survey respondents have no personal connection to the church’s vision! Relational connections in a church come not just from participating in a small group of some sort. They come from having a clear sense of vision, contributing to the creation of that vision, and personal ownership of their role in stewarding the vision. This is the greatest challenge for FPC—not creating a new

\textsuperscript{40} TAG Consulting, “Discovery Report FPCO,” 12.

\textsuperscript{41} TAG Consulting, “Discovery Report FPCO,” 12.
program for relational connections, but helping to connect each person to FPC’s vision.42

The challenge, then, was clear. As relational connections were encouraged within and beyond the church, those relationships needed to be organized around the mission that God had given First Presbyterian Church of Orlando. As part of the visioning process with TAG Consulting, the church leadership sought to listen for God’s guidance while reflecting on these external and internal challenges. This led to the discernment process of crafting a new mission statement and identifying strategic priorities for the next season in the life of the church.

**The Refined Mission and Strategic Priorities**

To address the lack of a unified, shared mission, the church leadership developed a revised vision that was multifaceted. It entailed a mission statement and strategic priorities. First, the mission statement was developed in response to the internal challenges of lack of mission ownership and relational connections. It reads as follows:

> Our mission statement should tell us what we do and what we don’t do. A good mission statement contains our reason for existence (our purpose), a specific beneficiary, and a desired result for that beneficiary. It should help leadership say “no” to certain things, even if they are good things. This will become the north point of our compass. Be Loved / Love the City | Know Truth / Live Truth.43

This mission statement was developed in tandem with the strategic priorities, so it is difficult to speak of one without the other. Like the previous one, this mission statement is largely general, without a clear focus. It does, however, represent the rhythm

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of what the leadership believes to be the life of the church. Congregants come together as a covenantal community to experience God’s love as his children, to worship God, to fellowship with one another, and to be equipped for missional living. Then, they are sent out into their respective lives and the people they encounter. Congregants are called to love one another and others beyond the church walls. They are called to know truth, that is the Bible, and to share truth with others—in word and action. This mission statement demonstrates internal and external dimensions. Again, the strategic priorities provide clarity about FPCO’s specific calling.

The strategic priorities of First Presbyterian Church of Orlando were developed to articulate the areas of focus for the church. As the mission statement was designed to have greater longevity, the strategic priorities were intended for a particular season. These specific strategic priorities align with the church’s mission statement, as they represent an internal-external rhythm to the congregation’s life:

A strategic focus is medium-term in nature, generally 3-7 years. It is our best attempt to “bet the farm” in order to fulfill our mission in the near-term future. A good strategic focus doesn’t replace a mission statement. Rather, it helps focus the mission statement in light of an ever-changing context. It should help the staff and Session make decisions about resources, staffing, approaches to fundraising, organizational structure, and strategic and operational priorities. Our Strategic Priorities: We create a culture of engagement where our actions preserve our values; we cultivate relationships of radical affection and accountability with one another; we strengthen and prepare each other to live missionally in family, vocation, and neighborhoods.44

Encouraging relationships of radical affection around missional living—within families, through vocations, and in neighborhoods—is FPCO’s focus for the future.

Conclusion

Reflecting upon the long history of FPCO, the challenges related to developing a process of integrated, reflective spiritual formation and a life of missional engagement toward a healthy Christian identity are clear. Like many large congregations, the church benefited from an era in American history in which Christian and American values coalesced. As Orlando grew, so did the congregation. Success was measured in terms of membership and worship attendance, and as more and more people were attracted to First Presbyterian Church, the church was highly successful. While the church struggled to identify any sign of spiritual growth or transformation, the ultimate objective was to get people to come to church. With the ending of functional Christianity in America, the culture changed and is still changing rapidly.

To compound the reality that people do not identify principally as Christian, they use other traditional identity markers to find their meaning, purpose, and fulfillment. In this post-Christian and postmodern world, self is elevated above the community and all else. Individualism has led to consumerism, and consumeristic tendencies and attitudes have infiltrated the church. Truth is relative to a specific environment and context, and no two truths are the same. First Presbyterian Church of Orlando was faced with the reality that the world had changed, yet leadership was still carrying out ministry as if it had not.

The purpose of this project, then, was to create an identity formation plan that addressed the issues of the changing culture. It centered on one’s identity as a child of God, and entailed unique giftedness, community, relationships within and beyond the church, and missional living in the everyday rhythms of life. Dealing largely with a congregation that was used to participation, exhortation, catechetical instruction, and
even discipline (to a lesser degree in recent years) as the primary ways through which spiritual transformation was pursued, this project needed to dig deep to the core of identity issues and move into the realm of everyday living. This project entailed spiritual disciplines and practices, conversation and action, support and accountability, and evaluation of spiritual growth beyond just attendance.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 3
LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will examine how the shaping of a missional identity occurs through an intentional process built around formational Scripture readings and practices that reflect one’s identity in Christ, utilizing their unique talents, lived out in relationship with others. The chapter will begin by exploring spiritual formation as a process. Robert Mulholland Jr.’s definition of spiritual formation as “a process of being formed in the image of Christ for the sake of others”\(^1\) served as the framework for this project. In this definition, he illustrates the connection between discipleship and mission and demonstrates that they are not mutually exclusive.

Additionally, this chapter will explore the role of Scripture in the spiritual formation process and how the Word of God shapes one in the image of Christ for the benefit of others. Rosner proved to be a beneficial resource as the project delved into the question of identity in Christ and why one’s identity as a child of God is so crucial in the spiritual formation process. Identity in Christ gives one a complete understanding of her

\(^1\) M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 16.
value, wholeness, giftedness, and purpose as opposed to traditional identity markers, which are insufficient. Keller identified the best elements of the missional church, providing clarity to a muddled understanding of what is meant by the term missional. Finally, Stephen Macchia provided a helpful, practical landing point for this project in the form of a personal rule of life. Each of these theologians, authors, and pastors help expand the perception of spiritual formation in a way that moves spiritual formation beyond the classroom and incorporates one’s everyday living. They each emphasize different components of the process, but together create a wonderful tapestry that enriches one’s understanding of the necessary connection between spiritual formation and missional living.

*Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation*

by M. Robert Mulholland Jr.

Mulholland advocates for a fourfold definition of holistic spiritual formation “as (1) a process (2) of being formed (3) to the image of Christ (4) for the sake of others.” His definition is helpful as it succinctly articulates the needed connection between discipleship and mission. Any spiritual formation effort must have a desired outcome of engaging God’s people in God’s mission. Not only is there an internal dimension (one that encourages growth of the individual), but also an implied external dimension that personal growth is not just for the benefit of self, but also for the benefit of others. This fourfold definition is decidedly missional and has largely shaped the development of this project.

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2 Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 19.
First, Mulholland unpacks what he means by process. He says that the “Christian journey . . . is an intentional and continual commitment to a lifelong process of growth toward wholeness in Christ.”\(^3\) Thus, this process is not brief and requires intentional commitment. In a day and age when culture is largely shaped by and expecting of instant-gratification,\(^4\) spiritual formation is intensely countercultural. Within the church, one expects that the right technique, program, or method will lead to the desired result. If one can simply “find the right trick, the right book or the right guru, go to the right retreat, hear the right sermon, instantly [she] will be transformed into a new person at a new level of spirituality and wholeness.”\(^5\) Although there are moments of rapid growth, Mulholland offers that spiritual growth is patterned on the slow process of physical growth.\(^6\)

Regardless of whether one is pursuing a process of spiritual formation or not, Mulholland resolves people are all being shaped by something:

*Everyone* is in a process of spiritual formation! Every thought we hold, every decision we make, every action we take, every emotion we allow to shape our behavior, every response we make to the world around us, every relationship we enter into, every reaction we have toward the things that surround us and impinge upon our lives—all of these things, little by little, are shaping us into some kind of being. We are being shaped into either the wholeness of the image of Christ or a horribly destructive caricature of that image, destructive not only to ourselves but also to others, for we inflict our brokenness upon them. This wholeness or destructiveness radically conditions our relationship with God, ourselves and others, as well as our involvement in the dehumanizing structures and dynamics of the broken world around us. We become either agents of God's healing and

\(^3\) Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 29.


\(^6\) Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 25.
liberating grace, or carriers of the sickness of the world. The direction of our spiritual growth infuses all we do with intimations of either life or death.\(^7\)

Thus, Christian spiritual formation is a long-term, intentional process and a counterintuitive, countercultural commitment.

Next, Mulholland explains the second part of his spiritual formation definition. It is important to note his precise wording, as he uses “being formed” and not “forming ourselves.” In this process, one has to consider the very challenging issue of control: “The difference between forming ourselves and being formed is the vital issue of control.”\(^8\) He suggests that one’s entire life entails this battle for control, and when it comes to spiritual formation, “there is nothing we can do to transform ourselves into persons who love and serve as Jesus did except make ourselves available for God to do that work of transforming grace in our lives.”\(^9\) It is God who forms his people, and Mulholland states that this runs counter to what he describes as “an objectivizing, informational-functional culture.”\(^10\) It is objectivizing in that individuals tend to view the world as an object to be used for self-fulfilling purposes. It is informational-functional in that people strive to attain information, “whether in the form of knowledge or in the form of techniques, in order that we might function more effectively to bring about the results we desire in the circumstances of our lives. We seek to be totally and completely in


\(^8\) Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 32. Italicize author.

\(^9\) Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 32.

\(^10\) Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 33
control of that process.”

He adds that another challenge is that for many, a person’s value, meaning, purpose and identity is found in what they do. A person’s “doing” is not what should give value, meaning, purpose, and identity, but rather it is in “being,” allowing God to act in one’s life, where one finds these things: “Being and doing are integrally related, to be sure, but we have to have the order straight. Our doing flows out of our being.”

He concludes his discussion on process by stating, “spiritual formation as ‘being formed’ brings its own spiritual work into our objectivizing, informational-functional, instant gratification modes of being and doing . . . It is a journey of learning to yield ourselves to God and discovering where God will take us.”

The third part of Mulholland’s definition of spiritual formation entails the image of Christ. Being formed in the image of Christ entails the fulfillment, wholeness, and completeness “of the deepest dynamics of our being.” He gives greater clarity to this when he writes, “We are created to be compassionate persons whose relationships are characterized by love and forgiveness, persons whose lives are a healing, liberating, transforming touch of God’s grace upon their world.” The image of Christ, then, entails a sort of realignment with the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors of Jesus. This does not mean, however, that individuals are all supposed to function in the same way. Rather it is “in Christ” that one finds uniqueness leveraged for a greater purpose: “When all of us are

11 Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey, 33.
12 Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey, 36. Italicize author.
13 Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey, 38-39.
14 Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey, 41.
15 Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey, 41.
perfectly formed to the image of Christ, we will not be a group of clones. In fact, we find our unique individuality only to the extent that we are fully formed to the image of Christ.”¹⁶ Focusing first on how the image of Christ addresses brokenness, Mulholland lifts up Ephesians 1:3-6 as he discusses spiritual blessings and how God created his people for “a particular kind of being.”¹⁷ In the parts of one’s life that are not like Christ, Mulholland advocates that those are precisely the points that the process of being formed in the image of Christ takes aim. Holistic spiritual formation allows one to have God enter into those places that need transformation. Finally, he offers an assessment on the image of God that connects intimately to the question of identity: “Even in our failure and incompleteness, in the brokenness and bondage that hinder our growth toward wholeness in Christ, it is still the good pleasure of God’s will that we should become God’s children.”¹⁸

Turning to the uniqueness afforded within the image of Christ, Mulholland offers a section framed around 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, in which Paul utilizes the metaphor of the body of Christ and the importance and interdependence of its many members or parts.¹⁹ The focus of this section is on what Mulholland calls “creation gifts”²⁰ rather than on the spiritual gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12, which are seemingly limited to ministry. Instead, he concentrates on the uniqueness and diversity of each individual. Creation gifts

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¹⁶ Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey, 41.
¹⁷ Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey, 44.
¹⁸ Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey, 45.
¹⁹ Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey, 59-60.
²⁰ Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey, 61.
are the “very personal and individual structures of our personality preferences that characterize our being and doing. These unique creation gifts are God’s means of grace for the enrichment of our community of faith, and our community of faith is the means of grace by which God nurtures the fullness of our creation gifts.” Mulholland utilizes Carl Jung’s four categories of behavioral preference: extraversion and introversion, sensing and intuition, thinking and feeling, judgment and perception. Highlighting the varying combinations and degrees to which someone might fall within these categories, Mulholland illustrates how the people of God are truly diverse.

The fourth component of Mulholland’s fourfold definition is for the sake of others. The beneficiary of the spiritual formation process is not just the individual undergoing the process, but also the neighbors of that individual: “All of God’s work to conform us to the image of Christ has as its sole purpose that we might become what God created us to be in relationship with God and with others.” Mulholland argues that growing in the image of Christ entails growing in one’s love and service to others. If one does not grow in this way, then one’s understanding of spiritual formation falls short:

This is the direction in which the Spirit of God moves us toward wholeness. If we forget this, if we short-circuit our definition (as many definitions do at this point), we don’t have Christian spiritual formation, we don’t have holistic spiritual formation. What we have is some kind of pathological formation that is very privatized and individualized, a spiritualized form of self-actualization.

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22 Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 61.
24 Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 49.
Love for and service to others is paramount in the spiritual formation process, and relationships are the vehicle through which growth is evident and takes place. Mulholland states that it is in relationship with others where spiritual development is tested and “growth toward wholeness in Christ happens.”

A key component of loving and serving others, he writes, is to pursue God’s agenda and not one’s own in various relationships. One’s own agenda coupled with controlling tendencies can lead to disruptive and destructive practices, for these are where unlikeness in Christ exists. Rather, one should pursue growth within relationships—becoming more loving, compassionate, patient, understanding, caring, giving, and forgiving.

Finally, Mulholland devotes a section to classical spiritual disciplines and the nature of spiritual disciplines. In reflecting upon the classic spiritual disciplines, he writes, “Somewhere between the extremes of avoidance of discipline and the imprisonment of discipline is the holistic practice of balanced spiritual disciplines that become means of God’s grace to shape us in the image of Christ for others.”

He then describes and unpacks the classical spiritual disciplines as prayer, spiritual reading, and liturgy. A discipline, by its very nature, runs counter to the larger culture in which one lives. Nevertheless, the importance of spiritual disciplines for one’s spiritual growth, obedience, and perseverance cannot be overstated:

The only pure motive for our spiritual disciplines is the motive of loving obedience to God. Only the motive of loving obedience will enable us to persist in

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26 Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 50.

27 Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 120.

28 Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 121-137.
the disciplines when the going gets rough, when nothing seems to be happening, when the old habit and attitudes of our brokenness seem unaffected by the disciplines that aim at their healing and transformation.  

Any serious effort at formation toward missional identity must move beyond the typical experience of a Sunday School class, challenging participants in everyday living with practices and disciplines that facilitate spiritual growth.

*Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*
*by M. Robert Mulholland Jr.*

Mulholland also explores the role of Scripture in the spiritual formation process. As he wrote at great length in *Invitation to a Journey*, Mulholland briefly defines spiritual formation again as “the process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others.” As one approaches Scripture in the spiritual formation process, he argues, a particular learning mode must be pursued. One must intently listen for the voice of God by asking the foundational question, “What is God seeking to say to me in all of this?” Second, one should respond to Scripture with “heart and spirit rather than . . . rational, cognitive, intellectual faculties.” He says that people are trained to be largely cognitive in the practice of reading; but that reading Scripture in the spiritual formation process demands that loving God with one’s heart precedes loving God with one’s mind.

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29 Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 120.


31 Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 20.

32 Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 20.

33 Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 21.
Finally, he suggests that adequate time must be spent in going deeper in one’s response, reflecting on questions such as, “How do I feel?” and “How do I respond deep within?”

In unpacking the way in which Scripture facilitates transformation in a person’s life, Mulholland explores the many ways in which words of God (separate from the Word of God or Scripture) shape the understanding of God, oneself, and others. He uses the term “word” in several different ways to describe how the Scripture shapes and forms individuals. Connecting the Genesis creation story with Ephesians 1:4 and Romans 8:29, people are “words” of God, as God spoke humanity into existence before the formation of the world. People are fashioned to be incarnate words of God, and the vehicle through which that word “speaks us forth to be in the lives of others” entails “[o]ur physical life, our psychological, mental, emotional life—our whole created being.”

He then explains the living, penetrating, transforming role of the Word of God, which is the term used to specifically reference Scripture and the Bible. He writes, “The focal shaping of our ‘word’ into wholeness in the image of Christ comes by allowing our ‘word’ to be shaped by the Word of God . . . When we begin to allow our ‘word’ to reverberate to the Word, we begin to experience increasing levels of wholeness in our being.” The Word of God is intrusive in the sense that it breaks into one’s life and

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34 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 22.
35 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 34.
36 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 35.
37 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 35.
38 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 37.
addresses one’s brokenness, it calls each person into wholeness in that brokenness, and it is the agent of transformation. Of particular interest, Mulholland examines 2 Timothy 3:16-17 in his conclusion on “Scripture as the Word of God.” He states that the phrase “God-breathed” teaches not only about the authorship or source of the Scripture, but also that God is very present in the actual encounter a reader might have with the text:

His pun indicated the possibility of a ‘God-breathing’—the breathing of God that brought the Scripture into being and what God is breathing you forth to be as you read it. The Spirit of God at work in our lives brings us into companionship with the text in such a way that the Word of God begins to shape the word that God speaks us forth to be in the word. When we begin to open to the Scriptures in this perspective, there is an openness for us to be addressed by the Word incarnated in what we call the Scripture.

When one encounters the Word of God in this way, Mulholland contends four things happen. First, encountering the Word of God benefits the reader with teaching. Teaching in this sense is not just any type of teaching, but specifically involves “the proclamation of the good news of what God has done and is doing through Jesus Christ.” Second, encountering the Word of God benefits the reader with reproof, moving her in the direction of what God wants her to become. Third, it benefits the reader with correction, leading her toward obedience. Fourth, it benefits the reader with

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39 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 42.
40 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 42-43.
41 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 42-46.
42 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 44.
43 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 44.
44 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 45.
45 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 45.
training for righteousness. This entails an outward dimension, as individuals are “equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:17). The text is saying, “When our word is shaped by the Word in our inner being, our life in the world will be shaped according to the same Word. Our word will become the word God speaks forth to be in the lives of others.”

Additionally, Mulholland says that the practice of reading has been largely shaped by a “lifelong, educationally enhanced learning mode that establishes you as the controlling power (reader) who seeks to master a body of information (text) that can be used by you (technique, method, model) to advance your own purposes (in this case, spiritual formation).” The discipline of reading Scripture requires a different approach. He advocates for a shift from informational reading to formational reading. In making a distinction between the two, he writes, “[I]n contrast to reading for information, the object is not to cover as much as possible as quickly as possible; reading for formation avoids quantifying the amount of reading in any sort of way. You are concerned with quality of reading, not quantity . . . The point is meeting God in the text.” The process of spiritual formation for the growth of a believer is not only mandatory, but also the ultimate, lifelong endeavor: “Spiritual formation is the primal reality of human existence.” The process of spiritual formation is one of being formed to a greater

46 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 46. Italicize author.
47 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 19. Italicize author.
48 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 55.
49 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 25.
50 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 25. Italicize author.
authority, not in a negative or abusive manner, but rather in a freeing and beautiful way that aligns with God’s will: “Genuine spiritual formation reverses our role as the controllers (who act to bring about the desired results in our lives) to beings who allow the spirit of God to act in our lives to bring about God’s purposes.” Thus, as one conforms, one must turn toward God’s Word—the authoritative source that reveals God’s purposes for a life lived out in relation to others.

Lastly, and quite relative and formative to this project, Mulholland introduces the concept of the kairotic existence. The kairotic experience is rooted in kairos, which is one of two words used in the Greek that is translated as “time.” Chronos is the traditional understanding of time and “is basically the sequential flow of seconds, minutes, hours, days, years.” Kairos is different and is utilized in Scripture in two different ways. First, it is related to God’s activity accomplished through Christ and intimately connected to God’s Kingdom: “In Christ, God’s decisive moment in human history has come to fulfillment. In Christ, God’s new order of being—the kingdom of God—has broken into human history.” Second, kairos time is intimately connected to the expected return of Jesus when “God will bring to fruition the work that was begun in the initial kairos, in the incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.” The kairotic existence is one in which Christians live within this alternate in-between reality: “We are to allow our

51 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 27.
52 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 73-82.
53 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 76.
54 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 76.
55 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 76.
daily life to be shaped by the dynamics of that new order of being—by its values and structures, by its pervading reality of the presence, purpose, and power of God.”56 The dynamics or characteristics of the kairotic existence entails obedience to “the will of the Lord, filled with the Spirit, harmony, thankfulness, humility, and submissiveness.”57 Finally, Mulholland speaks on the rhythms of the kairotic existence and specifically identifies the rhythm of spiritual discipline, community, and liturgy.58 They are important as they “thrust us out into the world. They are rhythms by which we bring the world that is in us into the presence of God so it may be transformed. Then, in that experience of God’s transforming grace, we as agents of healing, wholeness, reconciliation, and love bring the kairotic existence of grace and love into the world.”59

The role of the Word of God in the process of spiritual formation cannot be overstated. Scripture is that which draws one into “God’s new order of being in Christ . . . an order of being which, in many ways, is profoundly antithetical to the order being that garbles, distorts, and debases our word.”60 This is significant, as it introduces “an alternate reality that breaks into human cultures, disrupts them, and calls people to find their true identity, values, and purposes in this alternate reality.”61 Encouraging people

56 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 77.
57 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 79.
58 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 79-81.
59 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 81.
60 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 73.
61 Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 74.
into this kairotic existence became one of the primary goals of this project—helping people live into God’s Kingdom as God’s Word shapes them.

*Known by God: A Biblical Theology of Personal Identity by Brian S. Rosner*

Rosner reflects that it was a dramatic life event that shook the foundation of who he thought he was. Rosner writes, “I had lost my sense of self and was forced to revisit the question that you’re supposed to settle for good in your childhood and adolescence. That most personal question of all: Who am I?”[^62] He credits his journey with God through the Bible for providing him clarity around this question and giving him a “stable and satisfying sense of self, along with the blessings of significance, comfort humility and direction for living.”[^63]

Beyond the traditional identity transitions that entail adolescence and even the mid-life crisis, he suggests that many people feel significant confusion about their identity, and this confusion is accentuated by the challenge of this modern world: “These days, life-cycle dilemma experts believe that for many people, identity transitions occur earlier than midlife and much more often. The age of discontent can happen at any and every age, since the obligation to define or design yourself is always at hand.”[^64] He specifically mentions the challenges of a job loss, death of a loved one, inflated online identities, failed career aspirations, responsibilities for children and aging parents, and the


rapiddly changing world in general. Across the cultural spectrum, society is bombarded with the mantra to “be true to yourself,” and this entails acting “in accordance with who you are. Its appealing corollaries are to follow your heart, think for yourself, resist external pressures, and be willing to stand out from the crowd.”

He further adds that this crisis of identity is deeply rooted in a growing societal desire for greater authenticity in the world: “The call to authenticity is a broad movement calling for congruity between our inner and outer selves.” While this desire for congruence between the inner and outer self is not inherently bad, problems arise when it results in negative behavior. Rosner states, “The problem is that the appeal to authenticity can be just an excuse for questionable behavior . . . The problem with being true to yourself is that too often the self abuses the privilege.” Thus, Rosner launches into a biblical exploration of identity using three interrelated questions of “Who am I?” “What is a human being?” and “Who are we?”

Rosner begins his exploration by identifying eleven traditional markers of identity. Those markers include race, ethnicity and nationality; culture; gender and sexuality; physical and mental capacity; family of origin; age; relationships; occupation; possessions; religion; personality and character. Utilizing various verses of Scripture, Rosner concludes that these markers are not intrinsically bad, but rather they are

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69 Rosner, *Known by God*, 41.
insufficient: “[T]he Bible confirms the legitimacy of the standard personal identity markers, but denies their ultimacy. Many of them are indispensable, but they are an insufficient foundation upon which to build your identity.” Rosner further notes that any one of these insufficient markers is problematic as they can all lead to idolatry. Idolatry occurs “when we treat something other than God as ultimate. It is in this sense that the charge of idolatry may be properly applied to making a marker of identity the all-important thing in our lives. Inevitably, we build our sense of self, our value and worth, on something. If it is anything other than God, then we are guilty of idolatry.”

According to Rosner, the key to identity is not knowing oneself, but being known by God. He takes this concept and investigates it from three different angels. First, he studies what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God. He identifies a connection between image or likeness and being children of God: “Our very identity as human beings is tied up with being children of God made in the image of God. And the story of redemption is one of God choosing to bless Abraham and the children of Abraham as the restored children of God.”

Second, he explores what it means to be known by God in both the New and Old Testaments, arguing that it is in being known by God that one discovers three interrelated

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70 Rosner, *Known by God*, 41.


72 Rosner, *Known by God*, 84.
ideas about identity. These ideas entail belonging to God, being loved and chosen by God, and ultimately being a child of God. He concludes:

According to the Bible, in order to know who you are, you have to know whose you are. We are defined by our relationships, by who we know, and who knows us. And when it comes to personal identity, both the Old and New Testaments agree that being known by God is of critical importance. Being known by God introduces a belonging. We belong to God as his children. We are part of his family. But the New Testament brings that relationship into sharper focus. We are not only known by God, but also known in Jesus Christ.

Third, he investigates what it means to be in union with Christ, the Son of God. Rosner draws a connection between union with Christ and the doctrine of adoption found in Ephesians 1:3-6 and Galatians 3:26-29. These Scriptures “demonstrate that a link exists between union with Christ and the adoption of believers in Christ into God’s family.” This adoption as children of God affords a great spiritual inheritance, including God’s Kingdom and hope for eternal life. Regarding the question of personal identity for Christians, Rosner concludes that the Bible’s most complete answer is that God knows everyone as his children. The diagram below depicts the interwoven aspects of one’s identity as a child of God (made in the image of God, intimately known by God, and reconciled in Christ).

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73 Rosner, Known by God, 94-98, 116-119.
74 Rosner, Known by God, 137. Italicize author.
75 Rosner, Known by God, 146.
76 Rosner, Known by God, 156.
77 Rosner, Known by God, 39.
Finally, Rosner devotes his last chapter to offering guidance related to practices designed to help one embrace the identity of being known as a child of God. He says, “We need to take full possession of our new identity. We need to ‘put it on’ to enjoy the significance and comfort it affords, embrace the humility it promotes, and follow direction it provides. If we find our identity in being known by God, we need to know ourselves as we are known.” In order to do this, one must engage in certain practices and disciplines. He identifies various purposes for these practices and disciplines and highlights the importance of confirming one’s identity in Christ:

The basic disciplines of the Christian life are undertaken for a number of reasons. We pray, read the Bible, take communion, and so on to commune with God and to know him better, to align ourselves with what he is doing in the world, to please and obey him, to be built up in the faith, to serve and encourage others, and so on. However, a neglected function of such activities is self-knowledge. Establishing our identity is not the sole or main aim of these disciplines. But as it turns out, many of the regular activities of the Christian life also serve to confirm our true identity.

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78 Rosner, Known by God, 39.
79 Rosner, Known by God, 246.
80 Rosner, Known by God, 246.
Rosner lifts up eight practices or disciplines: receiving baptism, attending family gatherings or church, reading and hearing Scripture, praying, singing, reciting the Apostles’ Creed, participating in communion, and living the gospel.\(^1\) Relevant to this project are the practices of attending family gatherings or church, reading and hearing Scripture, praying, and living the gospel. In terms of family gatherings, people seek to “be reminded of the gospel, our shared memory of Christ’s death for us, and our defining destiny with him . . . Church attendance confirms and strengthens our identity as those known by God and his children.”\(^2\) Reading and hearing Scripture allows “the Bible . . . to shape our faith, life, worship, and service.”\(^3\) Furthermore,

. . . the Bible tells us who we are and also who we aren’t. From cover to cover, God tells his people who they are: made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27); a chosen people, a royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9); wonderfully made (Ps 139:14), the apple of God’s eye (Zech 2:8); the light of the world, the salt of the earth, a city on a hill (Matt 5:13-14); the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19), the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27); a new creation (2 Cor 5:17); a child of God (Gal 3:26), known by God (Gal 4:6-7).\(^4\)

Prayer also draws one closer to God, as “prayer is possible because we are known by God, so also our experience of being known by God is facilitated by prayer.”\(^5\) Lastly, Rosner says individuals are to live the Gospel. Patterning one’s life on the self-sacrificing love of Jesus is the most challenging of all the practices and disciplines. He concludes by

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\(^1\) Rosner, *Known by God*, 246.

\(^2\) Rosner, *Known by God*, 248.

\(^3\) Rosner, *Known by God*, 249.

\(^4\) Rosner, *Known by God*, 250.

saying, “Living lives worthy of the gospel means living according to the pattern of Christ’s life and thereby reminding ourselves that our true identity is found in him.”

*Serving a Movement: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City*  
by Timothy Keller

Originally included in *Center Church*, a textbook for church leaders, *Serving a Movement* is the third book of a three-book series that follows *Shaped by the Gospel* and *Loving the City*. Specifically, this project drew from the section that deals directly with the topic of the missional church. This book was chosen over other missional church books primary because of the clarity Keller provides. Today, there are multiple understandings of what it means to be missional, and any discussion within the church about being missional can be quite confusing. Because there are so many delineations of missional church since Darrell Guder and his colleagues coined the phrase back in 1998, Keller’s book is incredibly helpful in understanding the development of the term “missional” and how that understanding might inform practices for ministry. Keller ultimately arrives at a place where he articulates the six marks of a missional church. This provides a centered understanding of what it means to be missional, giving a helpful framework for this project.

First, the missional church must confront society’s idols. More specifically, Keller states that the church needs to “address how modernity makes the happiness and self-

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actualization of the individual into an absolute.”

This speaks directly to the issue of identity. Seeking value, meaning, and purpose in anything other than God is a form of idolatry. During this project, participants were encouraged to reflect upon the identity markers they gravitate toward, reflect upon whether or not those markers were in direct conflict with the identity of child of God, and allow the formative reading of Scripture to shape their understanding of this identity.

Second, the missional church must contextualize skillfully and communicate in the vernacular. Facing a society that lacks the basic concepts of sin, redemption, and God, the church must communicate these doctrines in a way to which the culture can relate. This project sought to challenge participants to think through their own expressions of the Gospel and the ways they might bless people in their daily living. While evangelism remains the core of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20, the process of evangelism unfolds through the vehicle of relationships. Thus, participants were encouraged to foster relationships through acts of blessing, demonstrating God’s love.

Third, the missional church must equip people in mission in every area of their lives. Keller devotes an entire chapter to this mark, giving practical guidance and instruction on what this might look like and how implementation might unfold. He emphasizes the importance of lay ministry and states that the church must equip lay people: “(1) to be a verbal witness to the gospel in their webs of relationships, (2) to love

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89 Keller, Serving a Movement, 52.

90 Keller, Serving a Movement, 57-80.

91 Keller, Serving a Movement, 60.
their neighbors and do justice within their neighborhoods and city, and (3) to integrate
their faith with their work in order to engage culture through their vocations.”\textsuperscript{92} For this
project, participants were specifically encouraged to examine the areas of family,
vocation, and neighborhood, as the places of their everyday living.

Fourth, the missional church must be a counterculture for the common good. This, he argues, entails becoming a “servant society, sacrificially pouring out its time and
wealth for the common good of the city.”\textsuperscript{93} Certainly, this is an element of the
congregational efforts toward faith and work. Some in the class chose to think through
how their contributions toward work benefited society and the common good for the city.

Fifth, the missional church must itself be contextualized. He explains that
nonbelievers, seekers, and inquirers must be actively involved in multiple areas of the
church, ready to “respond to the presence of people who do not yet believe.”\textsuperscript{94} Some in
the class chose to actively invite people into their small group or even to Sunday morning
worship. Corporately, FPCO is trying to grow in this area, as volunteers, elders, and
deacons are stationed in various locations every Sunday morning to direct people with
questions toward those who can help.

Finally, the missional church must practice unity with other churches and other
denominations. The church must contrast itself with the world, not other churches.
Although participants were challenged to think of their missional engagement as

\textsuperscript{92} Keller, \textit{Serving a Movement}, 52.

\textsuperscript{93} Keller, \textit{Serving a Movement}, 53.

\textsuperscript{94} Keller, \textit{Serving a Movement}, 54.
Kingdom-focused and not just church-centered, this topic was not specifically addressed in the class.

*Crafting a Rule of Life: An Invitation to the Well-Ordered Way*  
by Stephen A. Macchia

Macchia credits Benedict as the inspiration of this work, as Benedict “developed a rule of life for followers of Christ.”95 It provided a way through which Benedict’s community could discern the will of God through “listening in a safe, faith-filled community environment.”96 For Macchia, a rule of life is a way to cultivate a life in Christ as it encompasses every part of one’s life.97 He adds, “A rule of life allows us to clarify our deepest values, our most important relationships, our most authentic hopes and dreams, our most meaningful work, our highest priorities. It allows us to live with intention and purpose in the present moment.”98 A rule of life helps to shape and form the individual, guiding one toward growth until the whole life is encompassed. It facilitates that movement as it is holistic, Spirit-empowered, includes rhythms and relationships, humbly fulfilled for Christ’s glory, and follows the example of Jesus who is the embodiment of a Spirit-empowered rule.99

The key components of a rule of life for this project included the role one plays in primary relationships, spiritual gifts and natural talents, desires, vision connected to

96 Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 15.
97 Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 17.
99 Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 16-17.
passion, and mission connected to the will of God for one’s life.\textsuperscript{100} Within primary relationships, each person plays a certain role or roles. This project sought to challenge participants to examine those roles. Whether that be father, sister, employer, or child, everyone has a part to play in the lives of others. Macchia states, “as you and I consider our own roles and relationships, we do so out of our brokenness and our need for God’s amazing grace in all our interactions with others.”\textsuperscript{101} The love and grace one receives from God impacts the love one has for others.

In terms of spiritual gifts and natural talents, these are all to be used for God’s glory, building up God’s Kingdom and strengthening the covenantal community.\textsuperscript{102}

Macchia offers a very helpful distinction between spiritual gifts and talents when he writes:

\begin{quote}
All of us have spiritual gifts and natural talents. When our talents are used for the glory of God and the building up of his church, they are enhanced by the ministry of God’s Spirit. Do they turn into spiritual gifts as a result? Not really. Those special gifts that come from the loving hand of God are in this category. Talents are distinct from gifts. But when we use our talents for God’s purposes and for his glory, the result is often the same as when we employ our spiritual gifts. The key is to learn how to give back to the Lord all that we are and are becoming—living sacrifices holy and acceptable to God and fragrant offerings to the world he invites us to serve in his name.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

Macchia cautions against “splitting hairs” regarding the difference between spiritual gifts and natural talents, but encourages “instead to give all that we have and are

\textsuperscript{100} Macchia, \textit{Crafting a Rule of Life}, 23-43, 54-74.

\textsuperscript{101} Macchia, \textit{Crafting a Rule of Life}, 26.

\textsuperscript{102} Macchia, \textit{Crafting a Rule of Life}, 34.

\textsuperscript{103} Macchia, \textit{Crafting a Rule of Life}, 36.
back to our Maker, Redeemer and Sustainer, fully released for the glory of God.”104 This
was helpful in framing spiritual gifts and natural talents for the class. Several had come
from a background in which spiritual gifts, and not natural talents, inventories were the
only ways in which one could find their place of engagement. They had become
frustrated at the results, comparing their own spiritual gifts with others whose giftedness
manifested in a different way. As a result, they had doubted their own giftedness and
abandoned any further exploration of spiritual gifts. Natural talents added a component
that highlighted each person’s uniqueness to a greater degree.

He describes vision as the intentional passion God has planted within an
individual.105 He also speaks of mission as particular areas of service in God’s
Kingdom.106 Discovering that passion can be key in discovering one’s unique calling. In
determining a participant’s place of engagement, passion was one of the areas evaluated.
Participants were challenged to think through, not only how their talents could be utilized
for God’s Kingdom, but also where they experienced the greatest fulfillment, joy, and
passion.

Additionally, Macchia explores the framework of time in terms of how intentional
practices can occur daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annually.107 In doing so, he
reflects upon what relationships and responsibilities take up the most of one’s time,
asking how one might reorder their time differently. In thinking about intentional time

104 Macchia, Crafting a Rule of Life, 37.
105 Macchia, Crafting a Rule of Life, 54.
106 Macchia, Crafting a Rule of Life, 65.
107 Macchia, Crafting a Rule of Life, 81.
spent undergoing practices, Macchia says, “The key is un hurried, uncluttered, unhindered space…”

Macchia also writes on talents and frames them around missional priorities, asking questions related to “when, where, and with whom did you sense you were being Christ toward others . . . In what ways did someone else become for you a Christlike portrayal of missional focus and encouraged your heart?”

Conclusion

Each of these authors contributed an integral piece in this project’s creation of a plan for spiritual formation centered on identity as a child of God. Mulholland informed how one should approach Scripture as it shapes one’s understanding of self and one listens for God’s prompting to action. Rosner explained the importance of knowing who one is and whose one is, as a child of God, while not abandoning one’s uniqueness. Keller offered the six characteristics of a missional church. Macchia showed the importance of creating a rule of life in which all of the aforementioned aspects are incorporated into intentional living. The next chapter will reveal how key elements identified in the literature review were incorporated to construct a cohesive theological foundation for this project.

108 Macchia, Crafting a Rule of Life, 84. Italicize author.

109 Macchia, Crafting a Rule of Life, 125-126.
CHAPTER 4

A THEOLOGY OF FORMATION TOWARD MISSIONAL IDENTITY

This chapter will present a theological foundation for missional engagement centered on Christian identity as children of God. It will examine the importance of the sending nature of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and how that shapes an understanding of God and God’s people as the sent community. This chapter will then explore Jesus’ call to be a representative of an alternate culture, embodying the Kingdom of God as one engages others. Next, the chapter will focus on the role of Scripture in the formation of God’s sent Kingdom community. This chapter will then describe the biblical identity of being a child of God and the connection to God’s Kingdom. Related to identity, this chapter will use the metaphor of the body of Christ to explain the importance for each unique part of the body to function in representing the Kingdom. Finally, the chapter will examine the nature of God’s mission as God’s children are sent out into the world.

Missio Dei: The Church as Sent Children

In the Gospel of John, Jesus appears to his disciples after the Resurrection and offers to them words of grace in terms of peace and expectation in terms of his mission.
This interchange between Jesus and the disciples is helpful in understanding the nature of the Trinity and the calling placed on the lives of those who strive to be Jesus’ followers.

John 20:19-22 says,

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.

Jesus encounters his disciples who are hiding and immediately offers them the gift of peace. Dale Bruner explains this gift as he writes:

The Risen Lord’s initial gift to his assembled disciples is his peace, which means his love, his forgiveness, his favor, and his blessing. Thus the first words of the Risen Jesus and of his mission to his gathered disciples, significantly, are not a command, but a gift. There is no preliminary reminder of the disciples’ failure to support him in his crisis; no call for repentance or even for faith; there is sheer grace.¹

These gifts of love, forgiveness, favor, and blessing are not insignificant. The text describes how the disciples were fearful due to persecution. They have failed Jesus in the last moments of his life and ministry. In the midst of that fear, Jesus chooses to give them a gift of sheer grace, as Bruner describes it. That gift is quickly followed with expectation.

After giving the disciples evidence of his bodily Resurrection and repeating his gift of his peace, he then gives a key insight into the nature of God. In John 20:21, Jesus says, “As the Father has sent me, I am sending you . . . Receive the Holy Spirit.” This

text reveals the *missio Dei*—the sending nature of God in the form of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This concept of the *missio Dei*, the mission of God or the sending of God, was first introduced by theologian Karl Barth. In reflecting on the development of the *missio Dei*, David Bosch writes: “Mission was understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It was thus put into context of the doctrine of the Trinity . . . The classical doctrine on the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and Son sending the Spirit was expanded to included yet another ‘movement’: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world.”

This significant ecclesiological paradigm shift impacts the way in which people view the Church and its role in the world. It is not the Church that has a mission, but rather it is God who is missionary by nature, has the mission, and gives the mission to his disciples. Thus, the church should not simply have a mission department or program that handles mission on behalf of the larger Church, but rather the entire church must serve “as the instrument of God’s mission.”

Additionally, there is an important element of forgiveness connected to this sentness. Forgiveness is “the unmerited gift that Jesus grants to those who place their trust in him. Disciples do not make this gift for others; they simply share it with believers and, so, pass it on.” Forgiveness demands that one’s faith and forgiveness are evident in relationships with others. The Church is sent into the world to implement God’s mission

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through the vehicle of relationships. It is the quality of sentness to others that helps define God’s people. Any spiritual formation plan must be founded on this notion and work toward that end.

**Alternate Culture: Sent to Embody God’s Kingdom**

Additionally, the Church is sent into the world by the Trinity, not for the sake of being sent, but rather to offer a contrasting or alternate culture to the world. This alternate culture is manifested in several ways. First, the Church is sent with a particular message. In Mark 1:14-15, the narrative reveals how Jesus began his ministry, as he “went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he says. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” The word used here, translated as time (*kairos*), is not the same as sequential (*chronos*) time.

*Kairos* is a word that is used elsewhere in Scripture in conjunction with the Kingdom of God. Mulholland writes that *kairos* “means ‘the fulfilled time,’ ‘the crucial time,’ ‘the decisive time,’ that time when everything flows together and an opportunity is there which, perhaps, can never be seized again . . . In Christ, God’s decisive moment in human history has come to fulfillment. In Christ, God’s new order of being—the kingdom of God—has broken into human history.”

*Kairos* time is God’s time and signifies God’s intercession, especially the sending of his Son. Mulholland argues that *kairos* “has something to do with the context of God’s existence in the world.” Thus, God’s people are sent into the world with particular good news to share.

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5 Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 76.

6 Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 76.
This good news, or gospel, includes elements of both Jesus and God’s Kingdom. Both, according to George Hunsberger, entail the good news of the Gospel: “[T]he Jesus whom they announced as the risen Christ of God, the living Lord of the nations, embodied the message spoken from his lips. Jesus’ good news that the reign of God is at hand is clothed with meaning by his continuing presence as the risen, reigning and glorified Lord. Believing in Jesus Christ also means believing Jesus Christ about the reign of God.”

Although Jesus taught extensively on the topic of God’s Kingdom, utilizing parables to give his disciples little pieces of the larger puzzle, the concept of the Kingdom of God is not easily defined. Within the New Testament, the Kingdom of God is both “a gift to be received” and a “realm one enters.” It is a gift in that it is “of God’s making, freely given. It calls for a simple, trusting act of receiving.” It is a realm, as the Kingdom is “cast as a domain into which one moves. It meets everyone with God’s welcome and Jesus’ invitation . . . The reign of God is a realm—a space, an area, a zone—that may be inhabited.” The Kingdom is not something that can be achieved or attained. Receiving and entering into God’s Kingdom have everything to do with what God has done for his people. The is clearly and intimately connected to the purpose for which Jesus is sent into the world:

The reign of God most certainly arises as God’s mission to reconcile the creation accompanied in the death and resurrection of Jesus. “In Christ, God was

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7 Guder, Missional Church, 88. Italicize author.

8 Guder, Missional Church, 94.

9 Guder, Missional Church, 93.

10 Guder, Missional Church, 94.
reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19). “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17). “But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power” (1 Cor. 15:23-24). Ruling by way of a cross and a resurrection, God thwarts the powers of sin and death that distort the creation once good at its beginning. The future rule of God breaks in ahead of time as a harbinger of the world’s future to be fully and finally reconciled to God.\(^\text{11}\)

Thus, the Kingdom of God represents not only the here and now, as Jesus has already come and accomplished his atoning work through the cross, but also a future time in which creation will be fully reconciled to God.

Although it is clear that the Kingdom is not something that can be attained or achieved, Matthew 7:21 offers a word of caution: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.” Faith lived out is the evidence of one who has received the gift of and entered into God’s Kingdom. Additionally, living into the Kingdom entails elements of abiding in the power and presence of God’s Spirit. Paul writes in Romans 14:17, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit . . .” Living between the tension of the “here, but not yet” dimension of God’s Kingdom, one’s task is to participate in God’s Kingdom, representing the values and practices of Jesus, especially the righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit that Paul mentions. For the Christian, the reign of God’s Kingdom must shape all that one does: “Daily life becomes a discipline of asking how one may move more squarely into the realm of God’s reign and how one may welcome and receive it

\(^{11}\) Guder, *Missional Church*, 91.
into the fabric of one’s life this day more than ever before. Here as well one can find a more focused way of living together as the community of Christ.”

**Scripture: Formed by the Word of God**

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul illustrates the importance of Scripture in the spiritual formation process. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Paul is suggesting that Scripture has authority, and it is that which shapes believers in very specific ways. As the Church seeks to be God’s sent people, Scripture plays an indelible role in the process of sending. According to Bosch, God’s mission is founded on Scripture. A biblical foundation, with the intent of bringing its benefits forth for the sake of the world, is imperative for understanding the Church’s sentness. Bosch identifies the need for this biblical foundation, as he cautions that an “inadequate foundation for mission and ambiguous missionary motives and aims are bound to lead to an unsatisfactory missionary practice” 2 Timothy 3:16-17 teaches that Scripture has several foundational purposes.

First, it is God-breathed. Earlier, it was noted that Rosner suggests that this phrase not only establishes the authorship of Scripture, but also confirms that God is very

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present in the actual encounter with Scripture. Enacted by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, an encounter with Scripture is formational. It is active and alive and sharper than any sword, penetrating to the heart (Heb 4:12).

Second, Scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking and correcting. Simply put, Scripture teaches one how to live in relationship with God and with others. Paul adds that Scripture is good for training in righteousness. Training in righteousness entails an element of practice, and the goal of practice is to facilitate inner transformation. In reflecting upon 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Richard Foster writes that “the central purpose is not doctrinal purity (though that is no doubt involved) but inner transformation. We come to the Scripture to be changed, not to amass information.” Paul’s conclusion connects to the sending nature of God and the Church. Scripture equips the Church for good words. The practice of reading Scripture is intimately connected to the outward expressions of faith toward others. Good works are an outward expression of the inner transformation through an encounter with God. Thus, formational reading is a practice that helps facilitate transformation. Scripture does this first by teaching who God is and who people are in relation to God.

**Identity: Children of God’s Kingdom**

Scripture, specifically John, Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, provides instances of what is described as the doctrine of adoption, and that through God’s

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15 Rosner, *Known by God*, 44.


adoption, believers of Jesus become children of God. John 1:12-13 powerfully declares, “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” The connection between belief and the right to become children is noteworthy. Bruner makes note that the use of the English verb “believe” does not quite capture the essence of what is conveyed in the Greek: “[I]t is a believing, literally into (Greek eis) its object. We do not use the expression ‘believe into’ in English.”18 But believing into what? He further adds, “The biblical word ‘name’ (onoma) used here for the object of believing, means ‘person’ . . . in our time the word ‘reality’ is . . . a close equivalent to the ancient word ‘name.'”19 Thus, the right to become children of God is reserved “to those, namely, who are (simply) believing in his reality.”20 The term “children of God” is used to denote several benefits or blessings. Bruner begins to unpack those benefits as he uses the language of privilege. He writes:

“[T]he privilege of becoming the very children of God” is the beckoning promise of the gospel to all . . . who are simple believers in Jesus’ reality: an almost unimaginable adoption (and regeneration) for such an incredibly simple “price” or decision. The phrase “the children of God” signifies the members of “the dearly loved family of the Great God,” an almost unspeakable privilege when one stops to think of it. The Reformation recaptured the thrill of this “being dearly loved” for such a little “price” on our part . . . when it rediscovered the Pauline doctrine of imputed (“reckoned” or credited) righteousness.21

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The first benefit is clear. As one believes into the reality of God, her identity is no longer founded in works or doing, but rather in the grace of God and being. Assuming the identity of child of God, a believer has righteousness rendered to her, and the expression “born of God” entails a promise fulfilled by God: “‘Just welcome him!’ our text is bidding, ‘he’ll work the believing in you’ and ‘he’ll work everything else in you the rest of your life as well when you make the simple decision to believe him and to live with him believingly the rest of your life.’”\(^{22}\)

The Apostle Paul, writing in Galatians 3:26-29, adds to the understanding of what it means to be a child of God and the associated blessings or benefits. The text reads: “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

First, the identity of child of God is a gift of God through faith. Second, the state of adoption as a child of God is intimately connected to baptism and being clothed in Christ. John Calvin is helpful in understanding this dimension when he writes, “he means that they are so closely united to him, that, in the presence of God, they bear the name and character of Christ, and are viewed in him rather than in themselves.”\(^{23}\) The preeminence of Jesus is evident in children of God. Other identity markers, whether Jew


or Gentile, slave or free, and male and female fall aside and become secondary. The interdependence of the two is noted, as if one is a child of God, Christlikeness is evident.

Additionally, the benefits of this new identity are introduced in verse 29: “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” An examination of God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2-3 reveals the inheritance: “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” Abraham is blessed not for the sake of himself, but rather so that he might be a blessing to all peoples. Simply put, the inheritance Paul references in Galatians is for the benefit of others. Children of God are invited to take part in the sharing of God’s blessings with other people.

Paul’s writing in Ephesians 1:3-6 adds further clarity to the blessings afforded by God for God’s children.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.

Our adoption as children coincides with God’s will and choosing. God’s desire is to love and care for those who are called to be children. Additionally, those who are children of God are afforded spiritual blessings from the heavenly realm: “Paul speaks some of the Bible’s best words—‘chose’ and ‘destined.’ They contain volumes about God’s meticulous care for us . . . Behind Paul’s living vision is a loving God forming an
adoptive family.”24 God’s desire is to draw his children to him in love, and to offer spiritual blessings to them so that others may be added into God’s adoptive family. Hirsch writes, "All the redeemed are together, co-heirs with Christ, adopted into the family with full membership privileges…thus making God’s family a massive, culturally diverse collection of plain, beautiful, dumb, brilliant, weird, and wonderful people—God’s own redeemed freak collection!”25 These spiritual blessings, rooted in an identity as children of God, are many and unique to the ways in which God has created his people.

Lastly, Jesus’ teaching offers a connection between God’s children and God’s Kingdom. First, Jesus rebukes his disciples as the children attempted to draw closer to him. In Mark 10:14-16, the text says, “‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.’ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.” Clearly Jesus is speaking of actual children in this passage. However, the intimation on becoming like a child and their access to God’s Kingdom is noted.

While God’s reign can “belong” to the children, as something already possessed, it is also described as a gift that awaits our possessing. It will be inherited. On the final day of judgment the Son of Man will say, “Come, you that are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25: 34). James refers to the poor as the “heirs of the kingdom” (2: 5). The meek, Jesus said, “will inherit the earth” (Matt. 5: 5). Paul in turn speaks of those


who “will not inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6: 9-10; 15: 50; Gal. 5: 20; Eph. 5: 5).  

The children of God, along with the poor and meek, will inherit God’s Kingdom. Finally, the role of the children of God is illuminated in Matthew 13:38 (NRSV). Jesus concludes the parable of the weeds by saying, “the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom,” God’s children are to be mixed into the world, along with the weeds. The children of the Kingdom are not to withdraw from the world, but to engage the world. Again, each child is unique and has a distinct contribution to make for the sake of God’s Kingdom.

**Wonderfully Made: Uniqueness in the Body**

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul utilizes the metaphor of the body of Christ to describe how each part of the body, that is each person, is uniquely different but works toward a common goal. More specifically, 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 says, “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.” Once again, Paul speaks of the preeminence of Christ, as identities of Jew, Gentile, slave, and free are secondary. However, there is great diversity in terms of how the Christlikeness is visible. It is also important to note that Paul prefaces this discussion, acknowledging the spiritual gifts from God, with an emphasis on the individuality of each part of the body. Mulholland writes,

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With his metaphor of the body in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul emphasizes both the vital reality of the community of faith as a living organism (it is a body, even the body of Christ) and the uniqueness of each individual member of that community. The faith community is not a homogeneous collection of individuals among whom there is no distinction. Nor are the individuals in the community of faith isolated, independent entities without any essential reference to one another. Paul’s emphasis is on the interdependence of the individual members of the community of faith.\(^{27}\)

Paul’s discussion of spiritual gifts helps the believer to know that the Spirit distributes these gifts as the Spirit determines. While specific gifts are mentioned, they do not account for the wide array of gifts manifest in the larger Church, not the uniqueness of each and every member of the body of Christ. Paul creates a slightly different list as he writes to other churches. Although overlap exists between the places where spiritual gifts are mentioned in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 1 Corinthians 12:28, Ephesians 4:11, or 1 Peter 4:12, differences do exist and, therefore, no single list accounts for the total diversity in gifts. Thus, the diversity that Paul speaks of is not limited to spiritual gifts, but also includes natural talents. Macchia argues:

All of us have spiritual gifts and natural talents. When our talents are used for the glory of God and the building up of his church, they are enhanced by the ministry of God’s Spirit. Do they turn into spiritual gifts as a result? Not really. Those special gifts that come from the loving hand of God are in this category. Talents are distinct from gifts. But when we use our talents for God’s purposes and for his glory, the result is often the same as when we employ our spiritual gifts. The key is to learn how to give back to the Lord all that we are and are becoming—living sacrifices holy and acceptable to God and fragrant offerings to the world he invites us to serve in his name.\(^{28}\)

Macchia’s insight that God’s Spirit enhances one’s natural abilities is quite helpful. Perhaps having a greater understanding and awareness of these natural abilities

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\(^{27}\) Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 60.

\(^{28}\) Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 36.
can help one discover and understand how the Spirit has uniquely gifted the believer.

Furthermore, if God is the one who creates the believer’s innermost being, and the believer is wonderfully made as one of God’s own works (Psalm 139:14), it stands to reason that God is the giver of natural talents and abilities. Children of God, members of the body of Christ, are creations of God, gifted with unique natural talents that are to be utilized for God’s good purposes. Every person, utilizing their unique gifts and talents, is important for the community. Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflects:

In a Christian community, everything depends on whether each individual is an indispensable link in a chain. The chain is unbreakable only when even the smallest link holds tightly with the others. A community, which permits within itself members who do nothing, will be destroyed by them. Thus it is a good idea that all members receive a definite task to perform for the community, so that they may know in times of doubt that they too are not useless and incapable of doing anything. Every Christian community must know that not only do the weak need the strong, but also that the strong cannot exist without the weak. The elimination of the weak is the death of the community.29

Empowered by the Spirit, God’s children seek to share God’s blessings with others, representing the values and practices of God’s Kingdom, with the hope that others will be formed into God’s community and adopted family.

**Children with Kingdom Purpose**

As one reflects upon the sending nature of God and the sentness of God’s children and their representation of God’s Kingdom, one cannot help but question the purpose for which God’s children are sent. In Matthew 28:18-20, the Great Commissioning is revealed as the answer: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and

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on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

This text emphasizes several missional characteristics of the missional church. In the Great Commissioning, disciples belonging to Christ are instructed to go out into the world, and make more disciples, baptizing others into this community, while teaching them all that Jesus has commanded. Thus, the missional church, with a biblical foundation of Matthew 28:19-20, must seek to go outside of itself into the world, extending this community of believers through teaching and proclamation, as Christ has adopted them with His atoning work on the cross. The reality of Jesus and, consequently, his Kingdom represent a countercultural way of living in the world. This mission is founded on God’s love, as revealed in Jesus Christ, and there is an emphasis on community. It is important to note, once again, that it is not the Church doing the sending, but rather God.

Jesus’ authority is established at the beginning of the Great Commissioning in 28:18: “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’” This statement is important in that it confirms that the Church has been charged with a mission from a specific source. Jesus is established as the clear authority. This is the beginning point of the missional church. Guder states, “Mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation.”30 It is Jesus who

30 Guder, Missional Church, 4.
gives the Church its direction and sends his disciples out with a purpose. Jesus’ authority that is described in verse 18 is all-encompassing. The descriptor is “all” authority, not “some” authority, and that authority exists whether in heaven or on earth. Jesus is very clear that his authority is ultimate and comprehensive. Bruner writes, “he means that he is the Chief Executive Officer of the universe, in complete control of the world . . . All spiritual, metaphysical, philosophical, and religious power ‘in heaven’ but also all social, physical, political, and economic power ‘on earth’ are in his hands.”

Therefore, there is no mistaking whose mission and mandate is handed down. Correspondingly, Jesus then gives the disciples their mission.

The mission is unpacked in Matthew 28:19 as Jesus says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations . . .” The use of the Greek verb poreuthentes has led to a little translation confusion. While it is sometimes translated “as you go,” others suggest that, based on other uses, the proper translation entails command. Bruner even translates the passage not simply as “go,” but the more emphatic “get moving!” He writes:

It is notoriously hard to know how to translate this verb . . . Because the imperative of the verb (poreuthentes) is used three other times in this Gospel to mandate people physically to go somewhere…the “move” here is probably also a dynamic command and not just a casual auxiliary. (Thus poreuthentes should probably not be translated “as you go;” it is a constitutive part of the missionary command and means “get moving!”)32

Both translations are equally insightful. On one hand, the literal “as you go” is helpful in understanding that the mission of disciple making is to happen in the comings and goings of life. In other words, make disciples in everyday rhythms and relationships.


32 Bruner, Matthew: Volume 2, 815. Italicize author.
The “get moving” translation is helpful, as it conveys the importance and preeminence of the mission.

The charge given to Jesus’ disciples is to make disciples of Jesus. According to Bruner, a disciple is one who is mentored, taught, and apprenticed. Thus, to “make disciples” entails a process of mentoring, teaching, and apprenticing others. This multifaceted approach expands and enriches the understanding of what is expected and necessary. Making disciples is making followers of Jesus, plain and simple, and the process of making disciples goes beyond the typical Christian education and classroom setting that exists within many churches. Unfortunately, churches tend to focus on membership growth in terms of attendance numbers as opposed to disciple making. Mike Breen and Steve Cockram write, “If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.” Effective disciple making occurs through everyday rhythms and relationships.

The hope is that people become, not followers of the teaching of Jesus, but followers of Jesus himself in their daily living. Bruner gives insights into the process: “Work with people over a period of time in the simple educational process of teaching Jesus.” In order to teach Jesus, one must move beyond the mere dissemination and accumulation of information that has been so prevalent in ministry settings to a model that entails discernment, action, and accountability. Most especially, people must become


34 Mike Breen and Steve Cockram, *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People Like Jesus Did*, (Pawleys Island, SC: Mike Breen, 2011), 11-12.

aware of the active presence of God in their day-to-day living. Simply said, the goal of spiritual formation should be to help people know Jesus, rather than just know about Jesus.

The mission of making disciples is directed at a specific, yet far-reaching, target in verse 19. Disciples are to “make disciples of all nations.” This verse can be translated as “all people,” for that is the basic meaning. The command is not discriminatory in terms of cultural, ethnic, or socio-economic factors. Again, the “as you go” translation is helpful as one thinks about the many people with whom she comes into contact in her comings and goings. Without ambiguousness, disciples are told to make disciples of Jesus out of all people. To say it another way, disciples are to help all people become disciples of Jesus, regardless of their cultural, familial, and even religious backdrop.

Further clarity is given in Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Newbigin is helpful in describing disciples’ engagement with the culture as witness: “The day-to-day worship and word and witness of the local church has to be developed in relationship to all of these in such a way that it becomes credible to the inhabitants of the local culture as sign, instrument, and foretaste of that one universal reign of God that is the true origin and goal of this and every human culture.”36 Imperative to this witness is openness to the local community and culture in which the church is planted. Only through openness to the community and culture will a local church find credibility as congregants engage relationally and seek to make

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disciples. To put it simply, one’s faith must be shared with the community in which that person lives, works, and plays, and this faith must be shared in both word and deed. It is an all-encompassing vision Jesus gives simultaneously with the command. In effect, disciples of Jesus are to make disciples of any and all people, who then make disciples who make disciples.

Jesus further unpacks his mission as he gives follow-up commands that are intimately connected to the process of disciple making. These disciple-making commands are twofold. First, he begins with the sacrament of baptism in verse 19, saying disciples should be “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .” The role of the sacrament of baptism is significant. A spiritual connection is made between the baptized and the triune God. The baptized is communed with the one who has all authority of the universe. Bruner writes, “For in baptism, discipled people become the beneficiaries and children of a new Father, new siblings of the Son, and fresh companions of the Spirit.”37 The celebration of the sacrament is both empowering and connecting. A disciple, then, is one who is brought into the family of God as God’s child, through the Son by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. The mission Jesus gives to his disciples is to help others, not just become disciples, but become children of God with all of the spiritual blessings and inheritance that entails.

Jesus reveals the second part of the disciple making process as “teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20). The manner in which Jesus taught as a rabbi involved apprenticeship and mentoring. Therefore, when the subject of

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teaching is mentioned, one must understand that this is not in the relatively modern, traditional, lecture style of education. The relationship between a rabbi and his students was much more encompassing. It included elements of day-to-day living and required high accountability. This is instructive for the spiritual formation project. Jesus did not simply propagate information and expect the disciples to apply it to their respective lives. Those he discipled were apprenticed and mentored through a process in which they came to understand and live out his commands. While the teaching of Jesus is quite extensive, the articulation, summary, and even prioritization of the way in which he articulates the Greatest Commandments are central and foundational to the disciples’ understanding of that teaching.

In Matthew 22:36-40, the Pharisees attempted to discredit Jesus by ensnaring him with a difficult theological question in verse 35. Specifically, an expert asks him to identify the greatest of all the commandments. The text reads:

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.

Jesus offers a very powerful reframing of the commands and a teaching moment that will underscore the importance of love in any and all relationships. Jesus gives the first part of his answer in verses 37-38 as he says, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.” Quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, Jesus’ answer is simple and powerful in two ways. First, he does not offer to the Pharisees anything that could be misinterpreted as
idolatrous. Second, he emphasizes the importance of loving God first and foremost in all matters related to faith and life: “We are directed to ‘love the Lord your God,’ the God who has already done great saving things for his people and for the world in Israel and now, supremely, in Jesus.”38 The people of God are to love God with every part of their being, which includes heart, soul, and mind.

Jesus then offers part two of his answer which adds loving one’s neighbor. The command to love God and love neighbor are not mutually exclusive. In verse 39, he continues and says, “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” This second commandment is intimately connected to the first. One can surmise that if one truly has a love for God, that love should be reflected in the relationships with others. Love of God induces a love for one’s neighbors. This includes all those encountered in one’s regular rhythms of life. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13, emphasizes the importance of love in any and all aspects of life. Without love, people are, can do, and will attain nothing. Consequently, the ethos of love is foundational to the disciple making mission. In verse 40, Jesus concludes, “All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Conclusively, the commands to love God and neighbor are of highest importance. If disciples neglect these two, they have missed the foundation on which the way of following Jesus has been built. Thus, the way in which disciples are to carry out God’s mission is clear. In their comings and goings, disciples are to love God and others.

Matthew 28:20 concludes as Jesus says, “And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” This is a great assurance, as he reminds the disciples that they will

38 Bruner, Matthew: Volume 2, 412. Italicize author.
never be alone as they fulfill his mission. It is Jesus himself who empowers his disciples in their missional engagement. The Great Commissioning shows that it is Christ who is the authority and culmination of the coming Kingdom and, consequently, sends his believers out into the world to be proclaimers of the Kingdom in word and action. This assignment of disciple making is bookended by his declaration of authority and his empowering presence. Rather than give his disciples a powerless mission, Jesus offers himself to his disciples as they seek to make disciples of all the people. Thus, a critical theological insight is given. A disciple is aware of, and relies on, the active presence and power of Jesus as she seeks to make disciples of others.

**Conclusion**

The process of spiritual formation toward a missional identity is multifaceted and moves beyond the traditional educational experience. The sending nature of the Trinity as revealed by Jesus gives a starting point, helping people understand that they are God’s sent people, sharing the alternate culture of God’s Kingdom to the people they encounter, both in word and action. This engagement with culture is tailored around a person’s identity as a child of God with unique gifts and talents. Formational reading of Scripture, action beyond Sunday morning, and accountability to other participants are key elements in this process. The next chapter will outline the goals and plan that resulted in an opportunity for spiritual growth around missional engagement, utilizing these elements in the project’s six-week class.
CHAPTER 5
MINISTRY PLAN

Moving from FPCO’s current model, in which participation and expectation are negligible, to a formation toward missional identity and engagement model, which requires time and investment beyond the Sunday morning experience, was a significant challenge. The bar had been set so low for people that attendance and membership numbers were the primary, and sometimes only, ways through which any sort of engagement was evaluated. To attempt to revamp a congregation’s entire Christian education model steeped in over 140 years of history and inertia would have been counterproductive, as congregational change is never easily digested. Effective leadership entails “disappointing people at a rate they can absorb.”\(^1\) One must be attentive to congregational fears and anxieties when implementing any form of change. Thus, this ministry plan utilized the existing Sunday School model, which represented some of the congregation’s historic DNA, or “the particular pieces that make up the church’s identity and mission—the critical, essential elements that make a congregation who they are.”\(^2\)


\(^2\) Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 104.
This model was tweaked, however, to include higher levels of engagement and accountability in order to facilitate the desired goals and outcomes of this project. This included the development and exercise of spiritual disciplines and practices.

**Disciplines and Practices**

Participants were expected to take part in certain spiritual disciplines, specifically the reading of Scripture, prayer, and service to others. Richard Foster writes, “God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”³ More than anything, the hope for the class was to create intentional opportunities for participants to receive God’s grace as he transformed them. The discipline of *lectio divina*, which includes listening, submitting, reflecting, praying, applying, and obeying,⁴ was adopted. The expectation of engagement in these disciplines was universal to each person.

As the class progressed, each participant was also expected to develop practices relevant to their unique talents as they sought to live into their identity as a child of God. Different from disciplines, which are activities that are set apart from other activities of life for the purpose of God’s transforming work, practices are incorporated more into

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³ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 7.

one’s daily rhythms and relationships. The everyday practices of one’s life are important, as “the crucible of [one’s] formation is in the monotony of [one’s] daily routines.”

During the progression of the class, participants were asked to experiment with practices as they worked to develop their natural talents, and the culmination of those experiments manifested in the development of a personal rule of life: “[A] personal rule of life is a holistic description of the Spirit-empowered rhythms and relationships that create, redeem, sustain and transform the life God invites [one] to humbly fulfill for God’s glory.” Spiritual growth occurs when the “intervention of the Holy Spirit” combines with the “ordinary events of life” and “planned disciplines,” and all three are crucial to spiritual formation. In developing this plan for formation toward a missional identity, the hope was that participants would become “the leaven of transformation within the church.”

**Primary and Secondary Goals**

The primary goal of the project was to help participants not only understand, but embrace and live into their identity in Christ as children of God through disciplines and practices. I posited that it is this identity, and not the traditional and insufficient identity markers of society, that gives fulfillment in the form of meaning, value, and purpose. As

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6 Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 13.


8 Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 148.
participants explored identity through various Scriptures which expound on what it means to be known by God, to be made in the image of God, and what it means to be in Christ, they discovered a common center, and that “the reality of being a child of God…is the Bible’s best answer to the question, who am I?”

Through the discipline of daily formational reading of Scripture and reflection, participants were challenged to confront the traditional identity markers to which they subscribed, and replace them with the identity of child of God. This discipline proved to be powerful and meaningful for participants as they reported greater awareness of God’s gracious love, regardless of past successes or failures. This brought about greater intimacy with God, strengthening the God-and-me (vertical) relationship. Months after the class, one participant recounted how this proved for him to be a powerful building block for everything that followed, giving greater value and meaning to his life.

Additionally, the exploration of identity as child of God led participants to grasp the inherited spiritual blessings, including the promise of Abraham to be a blessing to the nations (Gen 12:2-3), and the unique talents with which one is created and gifted in order to share God’s blessings. This unique identity of child of God brought clarity to each participant’s role, function, and contribution in being sent into the world to love, highlighting the importance of the neighbor-and me (horizontal) relationship. And, thus, it was at the point of one’s identity as a child of God that the vertical nature of one’s relationship with the God intersected with the horizontal nature of one’s relationships with others.

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9 Rosner, Known by God, 39.
Participants discovered that as a child of God, one is afforded the love of, and intimacy with, God. This gives one true value and meaning. As a child of God, one is also an heir of God the Father’s promise to love and bless all people. This gives one true purpose. Transformation occurs through disciplines and practices that are both spiritual and missional in which one discovers and embraces one’s God-given identity—a beloved child of God who is invited and expected to participate in God’s mission.

In order to accomplish this main goal, two secondary goals were set. The first of these entailed reframing participants’ understanding of discipleship and highlighting the importance of spiritual formation as a process of growth and development. Using Mulholland’s fourfold definition, spiritual formation on the first day of class was defined as “(1) a process (2) of being formed (3) in the image of Christ (4) for the sake of others.”\(^\text{11}\) The project utilized the Sunday School class model already in place at FPCO.

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\(^{10}\) Image created by Thomas Jack Peebles to illustrate the God-and-me/neighbor-and-me intersection that leads to transformation.

\(^{11}\) Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 19.
Whereas the typical FPCO class required little (if any) preparation and/or homework, this class raised the expectations of participants. Progression through the class required participants to work beyond the class hour and hold each other accountable through weekly check-ins. There were a few who dropped the class precisely because of the homework component. For the majority of the class, they not only understood this requirement, but took the homework seriously. In short, they were diligent in adopting the disciplines and eventual practices as they pursued growth.

Another secondary goal was reframing the participant’s understanding of God’s mission, the church, and their role as part of it. I offered that the church does not exist for the purpose of functioning as “vendors of religious services” and providing “a range of services, from favorite music and fellowship options to sports leagues and travel opportunities.” Rather, the church exists as, and is called to be, God’s sent community into the world. Thus, all people of the church are to participate in missional engagement with the surrounding community. This was a challenge, as the ecclesiology of FPCO was born out of “Christendom thinking, which is attractional.”

As the church sought to provide as many attractive options as possible, it became compartmentalized into different departments and committees in ways that segregated the church’s ministry. Participants needed to understand that “mission is not just a program

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12 Bolsinger, Canoeing the Mountains, 65.
13 McNeal, Missional Renaissance, 23.
14 Guder, Missional Church, 109.
of the church. It defines the church as God’s sent people. Either we are defined by mission, or we reduce the scope of the gospel and mandate of the church. Thus, our challenge today is to move from church with mission to missional church.”

This shift from an internal focus (getting people to attend) to an external ministry focus (sending people into the community) was paramount. As the class grappled with this reframing through the formational reading and reflection upon key verses of Scripture, they began to see their role beyond the walls of the church in a different way.

Fourfold Components of the Ministry Plan

To accomplish the primary and secondary goals, the class was constructed with four key components described as The Word, My Identity in Christ, God’s Mission and Me, and My Rhythms of Life. First, the group began with The Word as Scripture as the most important component to the formational process. Before one can discover one’s identity as a child of God, one has to know how Scripture shapes and forms God’s people. Thus, The Word section focused on teaching participants the discipline of formational reading of Scripture. All participants had previously attended FPCO’s Bible survey class, Casket-Empty, a rapidly paced journey through the larger narrative of Scripture. The class spanned two academic years, with the first year focused on the Old Testament and the second year focused on the New Testament. The class had become the most popular class in the Sunday morning offerings. It featured a lecture format with little to no interaction between participants and very little time for question and answer.

In short, it was a typical Sunday School class at FPCO. The approach to reading Scripture

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16 Guder, Missional Church, 6.
was informational, or for the purpose of gaining knowledge. This project aimed to help participants find a balance between information and formation:

We must have a certain level of information about the biblical passage, some sense of the meaning of the text in its original context, some sense of what God was saying to the intended readers before it can become formational. This is the informational dynamic and it is important. But there is also the formational dimension whereby the text becomes an experience of encounter with God. The Word speaks to our “word,” and as we hear and respond to this encounter and address we begin to know experientially the presence and power of God in our own life. The “meaning” passes from information to formative incarnation of that meaning in our daily life.¹⁷

To facilitate this formational reading of the Word, the class provided participants opportunities to practice lectio divina, or “divine reading.”¹⁸ Class time and daily homework included the spiritual practice of lectio divina and its four elements of “lectio” (reading with a listening spirit), meditatio (reflecting on what we are ‘hearing’), oratio (praying in response to this hearing), and contemplatio (contemplating what we will carry forward in our lives).”¹⁹ In approaching the Word of God in class and in the homework assignments, participants were asked to read with their hearts, as Foster says, through the discipline of lectio divina—listening, submitting, reflecting, praying, applying, and obeying.²⁰

In an age in which the culture rejects absolute truth and various expressions of authority, one major component of this project was teaching how God and the Word of God have authority over the lives of disciples: “Jesus believed it was his mission to

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¹⁷ Mulholland, Shaped by the Word, 61-62.

¹⁸ McKim, Westminster Dictionary, 158.

¹⁹ Foster, Life with God, 63.

²⁰ Foster, Life with God, 12.
embody the reign of God by living under its authority. He was a willing subject of God’s reign.”

This discipline included morning and evening reflections and journal writing. When they returned to class the following Sunday, they were invited to share their insights with one another. For many, this practice was counterintuitive in the beginning, as they had questions about the passages of Scripture, wanting answers to questions related to content and meaning. In the end, their objective in reading Scripture became more formative, asking questions about how the Scripture was shaping them and acting accordingly. Once it was clear that the authoritative nature of Scripture serves to shape and mold, attention turned to the central focus of the project.

The second component focused intently on My Identity in Christ. This component was divided into two sections. In the first section, the class spent time discussing how many in the present culture, including class participants, garner too much meaning, value, and purpose from insufficient identity markers. Traditional markers—race, ethnicity and nationality; culture; gender and sexuality; physical and mental capacity; family of origin; age, relationships; occupation; possessions; religion; and personality and character—are important as they represent portions of an individual and their journey through life, but they are deficient in providing full meaning, value, and purpose. It is only in the identity of being in Christ, specifically a child of God who is known by God, that “gives our lives lasting value. Being known by God gives a solid foundation to our identities when all else fails.” Additionally, “we wake each morning as those who are baptized. We are united

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22 Rosner, *Known by God*, 41.

with Christ, and the approval of the Father is spoken over us. We are marked from our first waking moment by an identity that is given to us by grace: an identity that is deeper and more real than any other identity we will don that day.”24 This section produced the greatest enthusiasm and conversation in the class’ time together. Participants were incredibly candid about their struggles with identity. Each participant could name a traditional societal identity marker to which they subscribed. In their journaling, they reported on moments within their days when the adherence to those markers prompted certain interactions with people which proved to be unloving. They were convicted in those moments to repent and more fully embrace their identity as a beloved child of God, knowing and experiencing how that led to healthier, more loving interactions.

The next section on My Identity in Christ entailed the unique talents of each and every participant. It was essential for participants to understand that one’s uniqueness is important, as that uniqueness is relevant to the way in which God created her. Participants were encouraged to live into their natural talents, or a version of creation gifts, which are “those very personal and individual structures of our personality preferences that characterize our being and doing . . . These unique creation gifts are God’s means of grace for the enrichment of our community of faith, and our community of faith is the means of grace by which God nurtures the fullness of our creation gifts.”25 Participants used the StrengthsFinder26 tool to help them understand their natural talents.

24 Warren, Liturgy of the Ordinary, 19.

25 Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey, 61.

The StrengthsFinder assessment revealed each person’s top five talents in the form of named themes. Based on the way in which a person completed the survey, the top five themes were the ones that appeared most frequently within that person. The objective of StrengthsFinder is to help turn a natural talent (theme) into a strength: “A strength is the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity. This ability is a powerful, productive combination of talent, skill, and knowledge.” It is important to note that natural talents are not the same as the spiritual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 and elsewhere. However, they are connected:

If you look at the . . . Spiritual Gifts that Paul lists—teaching, evangelism, leadership, and such—you will see that these Gifts really describe functions of ministry within the Church. These Spiritual Gifts, then, perhaps more accurately can be called ministry areas, or areas of calling. Paul does, however, make it clear that these Gifts are to be used for the betterment and advancement of the Church: “to equip the saints [members] for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” Through the centuries, Christians have sought to identify and put into practice their unique Spiritual Gifts or callings. Identifying your talents isn’t intended to take the place of identifying your Spiritual Gifts, but rather, it can be a powerful way to enhance your Gifts and calling. Your Spiritual Gifts help you to find what the ministry is that God wants to see you accomplish; your talents are God’s way of showing you how you will accomplish it.

That last distinction is very helpful. The StrengthsFinder assessment is not intended, nor was the goal of this project, to help participants discover their spiritual gifts. While the Bible mentions about twenty spiritual gifts, specifically in the New Testament, the combination of the thirty-four themes in the StrengthsFinder assessment that could appear in a person’s top five are numerous. In fact, the chance that two people


would have the same talents in the same order are one in thirty-three million. As one goal of this project was to move participants toward a spiritual formation process, focused on people development and tailored to each individual, the greater the specificity, in terms of describing a person’s uniqueness, the better. Section two which focused on unique giftedness, like section one before it, was received with great enthusiasm. One participant reflected months later that this component allowed her to think more deeply about her talents and gifts, and impacted her opportunities to serve. This leads to the next component.

The third component was God’s Mission and Me. This component helped participants understand that the people one encounters in the everyday rhythms of life are potentially the people to whom God has sent them. Keller writes, “A missional church will affirm that all Christians are people in mission in every area of their lives.” FPCO leadership identified one of its strategic priorities as equipping people to live missionally within the three main spheres of life—family, vocation, and neighborhood. The missional understanding of family expands the traditional understanding of nuclear family and “seeks to recreate the oikos—the large, extended family of children, grandchildren, relatives, business associates, and neighborhoods that constituted most churches in the New Testament . . .”

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30 Keller, Serving a Movement, 52.


32 Keller, Serving a Movement, 43. Italicize author.
Participants were taught that as a child of God who is part of the church, others within the church could be viewed, not as mere acquaintances, but rather as members of the extended family of God. The mission is to invite others into the family of God, and this invitation begins with how the love of God is embodied through relationships. Missional witness begins in the home, and the importance of equipping people for missional living within spousal, parental, and even grandparental relationships cannot be overstated. Another sphere of relational focus was within vocations. Participants were urged “to integrate their faith with their work in order to engage culture through their vocations.” This objective encouraged participants to see and experience God and God’s redemptive purposes through the integration of faith and work. Participants also examined the relationships they had within their neighborhoods or communities. Missional living requires participants “to love their neighbors and do justice within their neighborhoods and city . . .”

As still another element to the God’s Mission and Me component, participants explored their particular seasons of life, giving thought to constraints on time, mobility, and all the blessings and challenges that particular season brought. This enabled each participant to really think about, pray about and for, and ultimately discern who it is that God sends them to each day. The response was one of relief, as the idea of participating in mission had been overwhelming. Framed around FPCO’s newly identified strategic priorities of family, vocation/school, and neighborhood, participants were challenged to

33 Keller, *Serving a Movement*, 52.

34 Keller, *Serving a Movement*, 52.
examine closely the relationships within those spheres, and identify the people God might be calling them to bless, using their unique gifts and talents. As they identified people, they developed proposed practices to employ, using their natural gifts and talents, in an attempt to share God’s love through words or actions. Living out the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20 to make disciples of all people, offering a witness through words and action as Jesus instructs in Acts 1:8, and sharing the love of God through love of neighbor in fulfillment of the Greatest Commandment in Matthew 22:34-40 are all key components of the blessing God’s sent people bring forth into the world. In essence, participants were encouraged to embrace the call to help others know and follow Jesus at the speed of their relationships. As Willard observes, “[T]he Great Omission from the Great Commission is . . . discipleship,” and all the Church “needs to fulfill Christ’s purposes on earth is the quality of life he makes real in the life of his disciples.”\footnote{Dallas Willard, The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014), xiv. Italicize author.}

The fourth component was My Rhythms of Life. This section was the culmination of all the disciplines and practices with which the participants experimented over the course of the class. Each participant was expected to develop his or her own unique mission statement and rule of life. This first entailed developing an intentional path forward, as participants were given an opportunity to put all the pieces together. The path was built around the collective progress of the class, including the Word of God and its authority over the lives of disciples, one’s identity as a child of God, the unique talents each participant offered, the specific relationships that made up one’s mission field, and the participant’s current season of life along with an awareness of all the blessings and
challenges that particular season brought. Because of all the components and their specificity to the individual, each person’s mission statement was unique. Lastly, participants wrote their rule of life. Based on the rule of Benedict, each person’s rule sought to make “God the primary informant of the heart and mind when believers learn to listen to his voice . . . Thus the ultimate outcome of living by a rule of life is joy. Loving worship and faith-filled service to God produces pure joy. This is the pathway to abundant life.” Each participant’s rule was to be holistic in its description, Spirit-empowered, inclusive of “both the rhythms and relationships of life,” “humbly fulfilled for Christ’s glory,” and reflective of Jesus’ life as “the ideal example of the embodiment of a Spirit-empowered personal rule of life.” It was the cumulative takeaway from the class, as participants built on their experiences over the six weeks.

**Conclusion**

This ministry plan for First Presbyterian Church of Orlando incorporated several components of a formation toward missional identity journey into a six-week course in order to accomplish the goals of the project. Those components included *lectio divina* (a formational reading of Scripture that included listening, submitting, reflecting, praying,}

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36 Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 15.
37 Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 15.
38 Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 16.
39 Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 17.
40 Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 17.
41 Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 17.
42 Macchia, *Crafting a Rule of Life*, 17.
applying, and obeying), one’s identity in Christ as a child of God, expressing one’s uniqueness through the discovery of natural talents, determining one’s mission field (relationships that exist through family, vocation, and neighborhoods), and utilizing spiritual disciplines and practices to allow God’s transforming work to occur. The next chapter will address the implementation and evaluation of this plan, assessing the strengths and weaknesses.
CHAPTER 6
IMPLEMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT

The final chapter will outline the implementation and assessment of this Doctor of Ministry project. First, participants were invited strategically using class rosters from the Old and New Testament survey class, Casket-Empty, as they already had a foundation in the content of Scripture and had acquired a certain level of biblical literacy. An email invitation to previous Casket-Empty participants communicated a brief description of the course content and set expectations of participants who chose to attend, namely that the class required a greater level of commitment, including daily homework. Once the participant list was finalized, informed consent was acquired from those who wished to, not simply attend the class, but also participate in the evaluation of the project.

Each week, the class practiced *lectio divina*—the discipline of listening, submitting, reflecting, praying, applying, and obeying Scripture. This formational reading of Scripture occurred on Sundays within the large or smaller breakout groups of the class and again each morning of the week as individuals began their day. Except on the first Sunday, the class engaged in small group conversations related to the homework.

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1 Foster, *Life with God*, 12.
assignments, essentially ensuring that each participant had completed the homework, but also providing an opportunity to share how they perceived God worked in and through them the prior week. Additionally, the group explored key Scripture verses relevant to key components of the formation toward missional identity strategy, including: an overview in week one of class goals, expectations, and desired outcomes; Scripture as the Word of God in week two; one’s identity in Christ as a child of God in week three; how each participant is incredibly unique through the expression of their natural talents in week four; their mission field in the form of the relationships that exist through family, vocation, and neighborhoods in week five; and spiritual disciplines and practices that allow God’s transforming work to occur in week six.

Participants were expected to complete homework that entailed intentional prayer and formational reading of Scripture in the morning, mental reflection on moments in which Scripture influenced their actions or thoughts throughout the day, and then journal reflection and prayer again before bedtime. The culmination of the class work yielded a written, unique mission statement and a personal rule of life. The class lasted six weeks over the summer, including seven Sunday sessions.

The main assessment tool used for this project was a Likert scale survey completed on the first day of class and again on the last day of class. One of the goals of this project was to reframe participants’ understanding of discipleship and highlight the importance of spiritual formation. This was a component of the larger shift from program development to people development. The expectation was that people would experience growth in their spiritual life as they “place [themselves] before God so that he can
transform [them].” This entailed engaging in disciplines and practices in their everyday living.

Thus, an evaluation tool was created that moved beyond attendance and participation numbers and provided a better gauge on a person’s spiritual health. The survey aspired to be holistic, as it allowed participants to evaluate different aspects of their spiritual growth. Specifically, the survey evaluated what a person believed about Scripture (The Word), who they were in relation to God (My Identify in Christ), whether one felt connected to God’s mission or not (God’s Mission and Me), and the practices and actions that shaped and engaged one’s life (My Rhythms of Life). Additionally, StrengthsFinder 2.0 was used to help identify participants’ natural talents. A copy of *Living Your Strengths* by Clifton, Liesveld, and Winseman, containing online codes for the StrengthsFinder assessment, was gifted to each participant. On the last day of class, participants were given an opportunity to share their experiences of this spiritual formation journey with each other.

**Timeline**

The timeline of this project spanned from November 2017 to August 2018. In November of 2017, FPCO leadership, including the session, senior leadership team, and all ministry directors, met with Kevin Ford from TAG Consulting. The purpose of that meeting was to reveal and unpack the results from the church’s recent health assessment, the TAG Discovery Report. Leadership discovered, among many things, that the people

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of the church were not relationally connected and felt little ownership of the church’s mission. As the visioning process began to formulate a refined mission and strategic priorities, the leadership decided that corporate movement toward missional was necessary. In early spring of 2018, the decision was made to work toward creating a track within the Sunday morning Christian education program that offered a more holistic and tailored approach to helping people grow spiritually while discovering their connection to the mission of the church. McNeal writes that missional strategy requires more nuance and subtlety than the typical once-size-fits-all strategy of Christian education:

The missional church takes far more seriously the challenge to help people shape their path for personal development. Some of the key ideas we will explore for making this shift will challenge prevailing notions of how people grow that have shaped much of the program-driven church. We must change our ideas of what it means to develop a disciple, shifting the emphasis from studying Jesus and all things spiritual in an environment protected from the world to following Jesus into the world to join him in his redemptive mission.4

The strategy sought to help people discover how they were uniquely gifted and how those unique gifts could align with the mission to live missionally within family, vocation, and neighborhoods. Because FPCO is a large congregation steeped in over 140 years of tradition, the discipleship team wisely chose to utilize the familiar Christian education hour by offering a class—specifically a class with higher standards of participation and accountability. Ideally, the track would span the course of at least one year, and possibly two. To test the goals and desired outcomes, a summer class was proposed to serve as an experiment prior to creating the potential long-term track. The short class would last six weeks during the months of June and July (June 10 – July 15).

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Once the decision was made to work within the existing Sunday School framework, the work turned to identifying key components of the proposed track. The course preparation included exploring the role of disciplines and practices in the spiritual formation process, examining the role of Scripture in the spiritual formation process, selecting appropriate Scriptures to be used throughout the course, and identifying family, vocation, and neighborhood as the specific spheres of relational connection and missional engagement. All of this was accomplished in the late spring and early summer of 2018.

**Preparation and Leadership for the Project**

As pastor for discipleship, I was the leader and primary teacher of the class and was assisted by two people on the discipleship team. The first was Rachel Rich, the discipleship coordinator at FPCO, and the second was Cameron Hughes, the director of connections at FPCO. In an effort to better prepare for facilitating the StrengthsFinder portion of this project, I traveled to Atlanta for the Gallup course “Successful Strengths Coaching” on March 13-14, 2018. Through the class, I gained a greater understanding of the StrengthsFinder tool and how to coach people in an effort to help their talents turn to strengths. Rachel covered the logistics of the class which entailed administering the Spiritual Health Assessment on weeks one and six, communicating with class participants on logistics and homework, making copies of all handouts and homework pages, and collecting the results of both the week one and six surveys. Cameron assisted Rachel in

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any additional administrative tasks, but also helped teach on week four, July 1, as I was assigned preaching responsibilities.

**Post-Class Analysis**

The class experience proved to be one of engagement and enthusiasm. All of the participants had previously attended Casket-Empty and other classes, so I knew that the experience of class on Sunday morning would not be completely foreign to them. Although they were used to a lecture-based class format, participants needed very little coaxing to share with the large group and in small groups. Twenty-five people attended and participated in most, if not all, of the weekly classes. Eighteen completed both Spiritual Health Assessments in weeks one and six, providing a solid number of participants for evaluating the class.

In terms of the format of the class, participants adapted quickly to the discipline of *lectio divina*. They demonstrated an openness to assuming a posture of receiving, sitting with feet flat on the floor, arms resting on legs with the palms facing up and eyes closed. They focused attentively and followed the progression of listening, submitting, reflecting, praying, applying, and obeying Scripture. On several occasions, participants asked questions about the content of certain passages, and I had to resist the urge to give all the answers. I refrained from allowing the experience to lean too much toward informational reading, and instead, found a balance between informational and formational reading. After the first couple of weeks, the tendency to ask questions about

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6 Foster, *Life with God*, 12.
content subsided. The discipline lent itself less to attaining knowledge and more to being a “means of receiving [God’s] grace.”

The small group time proved encouraging. People were more than willing to turn to each other and share their insights on various passages of Scripture and, more importantly, how they perceived God spoke to them through the Scriptures. In discussing the homework from the previous week, people learned quickly that, not only was homework necessary for the progression of the plan, as sections built on one another, but also that one of the main components of the class was the work done outside the classroom. Within the small group time, people shared with one another in ways that normally do not happen in the typical FPCO Sunday School class. They were more vulnerable and transparent.

As they learned what was truly involved in spiritual formation, several people even shared that their initial assessment of their spiritual health had been too generous. For a congregation that was evaluated as extremely poor in relational connection among congregation members, this was a step in the right direction. The small group component of the project could have been stronger. I did not anticipate the receptivity to the small group time, as most participants came from a class setting in which they had little interaction with fellow class attendees. In planning for the full-length track, it will be important to build out and even formalize the small groups more intentionally, encouraging small group participation over the course of the week as well. This will lead to even deeper and richer discussions.

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7 Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 7.
I was greatly surprised at the energy and conversation around the topic of identity. Many people shared the struggles they had around the question of what constitutes identity. Feelings related to value, meaning, and purpose surfaced. Some shared that they felt that their identity was rooted in their struggles and failures. Others shared that their identity was dependent upon their victories and successes in life. Abundance or lack of wealth, power, and success all wreak havoc on an individual’s understanding of self. The class discussed and reflected on the identity of child of God, and many observed the newness of the notion of being a child of God. Others expressed the comfort and peace this brought to them. The group examined how identity shapes everything one does—from one’s relationship with God to one’s relationships with others and how God is calling each person to participate in his mission. The collective class agreed that the question of identity, and specifically self-identification, is a significant issue in today’s culture, and one that the church should continue to stress and teach.

The element that produced the highest engagement was when the group explored the unique natural talents individuals possess, utilizing the tool of StrengthsFinder. People began to understand and value not only their own gifts, but also the gifts of others. The highlight had to have been when one of the participants, an eighty-one-year-old retired pastor, shared with the group that he read the descriptions of his top five themes (talents) and could not believe how accurately it depicted him. He further added that he wished he had access to the StrengthsFinder tool when he was in his twenties, as it would have saved him heartache and frustrations in trying to be someone that he is not. He concluded by saying that he finally knew who and how God created him to be.
Additionally, individual talents were connected to places of engagement in the lives of the participants.

The season of life conversation was helpful, too, as many thought through the places where they spent the majority of their time and the relationships associated with those places. The task was to challenge people to think how, using their natural talents, they can live into God’s mission. Or to put it simply, love God through loving and blessing those people. Related, the unique gifts informed the practices the participants developed. These practices were worked into the everyday rhythms of life and relationships. As people engaged in the practices, they began to reflect upon a greater awareness of God beyond the walls of the church. They shared examples of new awareness of kairos moments, as they allowed God to break into their daily lives.

The culmination of all of the work together was the creation of a mission statement and rule of life. The mission statement was a unique and personal statement, built around the distinctive aspects of the participant’s journey through the class. The purpose of the mission was to articulate who the participant was to bless and how they were going to bless them. The rule of life was the culmination of all the everyday practices throughout the course. The rule was the final takeaway from the class, and participants were encouraged to use the tool beyond the six weeks to grow in their spiritual formation.

A follow up survey six months later revealed that of the ten participants who responded to the survey, half continued to use their mission statement and rule of life. All reported that they continued the discipline of formational reading of Scripture with four continuing to journal. Each respondent offered that the component on identity as child of
God had a significant impact on their thinking of self and others. Nine reported that they continued to show God’s love with the people with whom they interacted on a daily basis. All reported that they would have benefitted from more small group time, and a longer class would have helped the practices become more ingrained in their daily living.

**Spiritual Health Assessment**

The Spiritual Health Self-Assessment utilized a Likert scale, evaluating varying degrees of a person’s agreement, indifference, or disagreement with each statement. Divided into four sections representing The Word, My Identity in Christ, God’s Mission and Me, and My Rhythms of Life, each section consisted of ten statements. The choices on each statement were as follows:

(1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Undecided (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

The totals of each question were added together for a possible fifty points per section. The higher the score on individual questions and the cumulative score, the higher one’s self-assessment of spiritual health. After the first day of class, the first round of Spiritual Health Self-Assessments were collected, and those results were uploaded into an excel spreadsheet. After the last day of the class, the second round of Spiritual Health Self-Assessments were collected, and those results were added to the original spreadsheet. Then, totals, averages, and the difference between Week One and Week Six scores were calculated for each participant and section.

Regarding the first assessment, I expected to see high scores in the first two sections on The Word and My Identity in Christ, as the participants had previously attended the Casket Empty Bible literacy class. It stood to reason that if a person had an
adequate level of biblical knowledge, they should know a thing or two about God and the relationships God has with his people. Conversely, I expected to see lower scores in the third and fourth sections pertaining to God’s Mission and Me and My Rhythms of Life. As the TAG Discovery Report indicated, people of the church did not feel connected to, nor did they make a significant contribution to, the overall mission of FPCO. I surmised that the third and fourth sections would be the areas of potentially the greatest growth and development. My hope was that by engaging in spiritual disciplines and practices, the scores on particularly the third and fourth sections of the Spiritual Health Assessment would increase.

The results of the second assessment did not disappoint. All four categories’ average cumulative totals increased. The following table includes data based on the eighteen participants (out of twenty-five in the class) who completed the Spiritual Health Self-Assessment on the first Sunday and again on the last Sunday (after six weeks of engaging in daily spiritual practices). The bar graph on the next page simply shows this same data in a different way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spiritual Practices Self-Assessment Categories</th>
<th>Week 1 Average Score</th>
<th>Week 6 Average Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Word</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Identity in Christ</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God's Mission and Me</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Rhythms of Life</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The average cumulative total for each section increased at the end of the six-week course, with the numbers rounded either up or down to reflect whole numbers. The average cumulative score for The Word went from forty-three to forty-six. The average cumulative score for My Identity in Christ went from forty-two to forty-five. The average cumulative score for God’s Mission and Me went from thirty-four to thirty-eight. The average cumulative score for My Rhythms of Life went from thirty-six to forty. Not surprisingly, both the God’s Mission and Me and My Rhythms of Life sections had a higher average cumulative growth with an average increase of four. Both The Word and My Identity in Christ sections saw an average increase of three.

Looking at the more detailed results in Appendix 6, the differentials for each question and section tell an interesting story. Some participants scored themselves lower
on certain questions in Week Six than they had in Week One. This was not too surprising, as it was mentioned earlier that several people said they realized after a few weeks of living into spiritual disciplines and practices that they scored themselves higher than reality on the first assessment. Participants did not have access to the Week One results before taking the final assessment, so the negative differentials likely indicated a more accurate self-awareness of spiritual health in Week Six. However, each category still had a significant increase in cumulative differential numbers. The God’s Mission and Me section had the highest increase in its cumulative differential total of seventy-two. The second highest, with sixty-six, was the My Rhythms of Life section. Both The Word and My Identity were tied with fifty-seven. Again, the self-assessment results illustrated that, through the exercise of spiritual disciplines and development of spiritual practices, the participants in the project experienced spiritual growth.
CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

“When we try to take shortcuts to costly discipleship, we end up with a
domesticated existence that is far from the liberated, untamed life [to which] Jesus calls
us.”¹ In many ways, FPCO has taken shortcuts in its efforts to disciple the people of the
congregation. Over many years, traditional Sunday School, adopted from the lecture style
of education, has served as the primary vehicle through which discipleship took place.
Small groups, with a slightly more intentional emphasis on conversation and discussion,
have largely followed the same format. The church has emphasized head knowledge and
the accumulation of information in these efforts, not requiring much from the
congregants beyond the one hour they spend in worship, a class, or a small group. This
project was created as an experiment and precursor to a potential long-term track as
FPCO embarks on a process to reorient its ministries around a missional vision. The hope
was to raise the bar for disciples, expecting that missional engagement beyond Sunday
morning would take place. Utilizing a person’s identity in Christ and the unique talents
they possess, a unique spiritual formation process has led to spiritual development and
growth.

¹ Hirsch and Hirsch, Untamed, 22, Kindle.
The experiment was proven successful in many ways, but it also revealed opportunities for growth and expansion. In terms of outcomes and insights gained, the project results revealed that moving beyond FPCO’s traditional markers of success (membership and worship attendance numbers) is not only possible, but helpful in terms of understanding the crucial role a spiritual formation process plays in the growth and development of God’s people. The Spiritual Health Self-Assessment gave participants the opportunity to track their own progress, and, consequently identify areas of desired growth. The results revealed that people, upon applying disciplines and practices to their lives, perceived spiritual growth did indeed occur throughout the duration of the class.

The project also revealed that moving beyond FPCO’s historic methods at facilitating spiritual growth through exhortation, catechetical training or Christian education, and church discipline into adopting certain spiritual disciplines and unique practices in their everyday living facilitated greater spiritual growth. The insight from this revealed just how important it is for one to engage in spiritual disciplines and practices as they are “means of receiving [God’s] grace.” Although God certainly works in and through Christians when they gather for worship, worship on Sunday cannot be the only time devoted to growth with God. It is through the disciplines and practices enacted in the everyday rhythms of life where God shapes and molds his people.

The project results also confirmed that there is a disconnection between discipleship and mission at FPCO, and they should not be treated as mutually exclusive to each other. In the self-assessments, the average score on the sections on The Word and

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2 Foster, Celebration of Discipline, 7.
My Identity In Christ were higher than the average scores on God’s Mission and Me and My Rhythms of Life. While the first two sections evaluated the personal connection one has with God, the third and fourth sections were related to how that connection to God is lived out. At the beginning, participants’ involvement in God’s mission in their everyday living did not exactly correspond with their knowledge about God. At the end of the six weeks, however, the gap between the personal connection to God and living out God’s mission was slightly narrowed. The insight was that a spiritual formation plan must be connected to participation in God’s mission. As the leadership of FPCO contemplates and plans for the future, integrated spiritual disciplines and missional practices will be critical.

The project also challenged participants to open their eyes to the people around them who constitute their everyday relationships and pathways in life. By focusing on family, vocations, and neighborhoods, participants began to see the people of their lives as the beneficiaries of God’s mission to bless and love others. Relationships with people beyond the church were established and enriched through the homework assignments, and participants began to view their Monday through Saturday activities through the lens of God’s Kingdom.

In terms of next steps, the project has illuminated the church’s way forward. This experimental project will be expanded into a long-term track over the course of two academic years. The track will be made available to all new and long-term members. Since the end of the class, I have taken the next Gallup class on StrengthsFinder called
Coaching for Individuals, Managers, and Teams. This class occurred from September 11-13, 2018 in Chicago. Cameron Hughes will also be trained in the Gallup StrengthsFinder tool to provide additional staff support. The leadership recognizes, however, that the staff cannot be the only ones leading the congregation through a spiritual formation process. Laypeople and volunteers need to be recruited. More specifically, in preparation for initiating the long-term track, leadership development must be a priority. The discipleship and spiritual formation strategy should be one of multiplication. Thus, the leaders who are selected will need to have the capacity to lead others in the journey toward spiritual formation. Additionally, there will be a more intentional emphasis on the small group component in the track so that participants are growing in their relationship with one another even as they grow in their understanding and ownership of God’s mission.

For other churches that are similar to FPCO in size and rich history—enjoyed great success and significant growth in membership and worship attendance in the heyday of the attractional church years, but now struggle to find a way forward in the uncharted territory in which the church finds itself—the outlook is hopeful. This experiment demonstrated that intentional spiritual formation is possible and that there are ways to measure success outside of attendance. Shifting toward missional, though difficult, is possible.

Living in a culture that is most decidedly a mission field, characterized as post-modern in which people are largely individualistic, self-focused, and intent on self-

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actualization and happiness, the challenge of spiritual formation is paramount. Like the rest of society, people in the church struggle to find value, meaning, and purpose. As they are sent out into the world, it is important to connect them to that value, meaning, and purpose found in their communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Both the issue of identity and a person’s unique talents are critical to the process of spiritual formation. My hope is to build upon this in the future discipling efforts of the congregation. Finally, I am extremely grateful to all participants who joined me on this journey. My hope is that they continue to grow in their own journey of spiritual formation toward a missional identity, and they impact others by becoming “the leaven of transformation”\(^4\) for FPCO and the community of Orlando.

\(^4\) Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 148.
From: Jack Peebles <jpeebles@fpco.org>
Date: Fri, Jun 1, 2018 at 10:30 AM
Subject: "Building Spiritual Practices for Missional Living" begins June 10th!

A class seven years in the making...

Dear Friends,

You are cordially invited to attend a special School of Discipleship class this summer: Building Spiritual Practices for Missional Living. The class is the culmination of a journey that began when I started my doctorate in 2011 through Fuller Theological Seminary. The main challenge I am seeking to address is how spiritual formation is the missing ingredient to most congregational efforts at becoming missional. As I will be collecting data from this class for this doctoral project, the expectation for participants, in addition to attending the class, is that you complete weekly “homework” to begin to adopt daily spiritual practices. We are not broadly advertising this class, as I am mostly interested in people who have some level of experience in attending a traditional Sunday morning class- i.e. Casket Empty.

Please know that I would love to have you participate, even if you cannot attend every class over the summer.

The six-week class will begin June 10th and will conclude on July 15th. We will meet in Edington Ministry Center Room 310 A&B. The class description is as follows:

Building Spiritual Practices for Missional Living

“Jesus said, ‘...As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’” (John 20:21)

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

“Missional” has become a buzzword that is often misunderstood by many in the church. Mission-minded (a robust mission program) is not the same thing as missional (where every member of the church understands that they are to be “missionaries” in their day-to-day living). Missional living flows from an intimate connection with God and a deep understanding of how God has matchlessly created you. Thus, the key to missional living is discovering how God has uniquely gifted you for the places to where you are sent. This
A six-week class is designed to help participants discover how God is calling them to be His “sent” people as they build spiritual practices intended to foster their God-given uniqueness into their daily rhythms of life.

I hope to see you all there! Please contact me if you have any questions about the class.

In Him,
Jack Peebles

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From: Jack Peebles <jpeebles@fpco.org>
Date: Tue, Jun 19, 2018 at 6:22 PM
Subject: WEEK 2 FOLLOW UP: Building Spiritual Practices for Missional Living

All,

1. If you have not emailed me the results of your StrengthsFinder assessment, please do so soon. I have additional resources I will email you when I get your results.

2. Hope you all are having a fantastic week! I really loved the Ephesians passage from this morning’s time in God’s Word and appreciated compiling a list of spiritual blessings that constitute my inheritance from God—just a great way to enter into the day filled with thanksgiving!

3. Great discussion on identity on Sunday, and I love how it was pointed out that our successes can contribute to a false notion of self just as much as our failures. I also loved how we discussed how our struggles facilitate and contribute to our growth journeys when we can turn to God:

"Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." (Romans 5:3-5)

4. Keep moving forward, thinking, and reflecting upon how the selected passages shape your thinking, actions, and relationships during the day.
5. Also, continue to think about your talents/strengths and how they are (or are not) being used. To remind/help you, here are several answers to questions you might have...

**What are strengths?** It should really be called "talent finders" because that is what we are identifying with this online assessment. With proper application, a talent can become a strength, and that is our hope for you! A strength is "the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity. This ability is a powerful, productive combination of talent, skill, and knowledge." *(Living Your Strengths, p. 7)* Please also read the descriptions on pages 7-10.

**Why are we exploring strengths?** Part of our ecclesiology (theology of the church) recognizes that God has uniquely gifted each of us, and we all have unique contributions to make in the church (1 Cor 12). My experience has been that most people do not have a clear understanding of their unique gifts, and that is a shame, because there is nothing quite as fulfilling as doing what God has designed you to do! A mentor of mine, Tod Bolsinger, used to say that when you are asked to do something that is not conducive to your strengths, it's like walking uphill with the wind in your face - it's exhausting and a struggle. However, if you are asked to do something that is conducive to your strengths, it is like walking downhill with the wind at your back - it is fun and energizing! We want you to discover that sense of joy and fulfillment.

**How do strengths relate to spiritual gifts?** "Your Spiritual Gifts help you find what the ministry is that God wants to see you accomplish; your talents are God's way of showing you how you will accomplish it." *(p. 30)* Another of our hopes in this class is that through the process of coming to a better understanding of your giftedness, the ministry to which you are called will become more apparent. Please read pages 29-31 and 42-46.

**What are the chances someone else has my same strength configuration?** The assessment you took online only gave you your top five, but the full report has all 34 strengths in the order they typically appear in you. The chance that someone else has the same configuration (all 34 in the order you have) is 1 in 33 million. Talk about being uniquely and wonderfully made!

Blessings,
Jack Peebles

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APPENDIX 2

BUILDING SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR MISSIONAL LIVING
INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS FOR 7 SUNDAY GATHERINGS
(6-WEEK COURSE)

Sunday, June 10 (Class #1)

Welcome
- Provide overview of course content:
  - Commitment level required
  - Daily work—time spent reflecting on God’s Word, Journaling, Praying
  - Beginning and ending spiritual health self-assessment survey for the purpose of Doctorate of Ministry Project
- Hand out copies of *Living your Strengths: Discover Your God-Given Talents and Inspire Your Community* by Don Clifton, Curt Liesveld, and Albert L. Winseman to each participant
- Show participants how to locate the unique code in the book to access the online StrengthsFinder 2.0 Assessment
- Give brief summary of what the StrengthsFinder 2.0 assessment will tell them and request them to forward their emailed results to Jack Peebles (jpeebles@fpco.org)—these results will be used to help facilitate later classes
- Have each participant introduce themselves to the larger group and say why they are interested in this course

What is this class?
This class is an opportunity for you…
- to do a little self-discovery
- to be intentional about your life…and maybe even simplify.
- to find your connection to God’s mission

Why this class?
- Something is missing in “missional.”
- Mission-minded ≠ missional
- Discipleship has been separated from Mission
- Video: *The Missional Church: Simple*¹

The challenge:
- God has a mission: Missional not mission-minded!
- We want to become missional, but we don’t know how

• The missing ingredient: Spiritual Formation
• Discipleship and Spiritual Formation are missing in most missional efforts!

What is Discipleship and Spiritual Formation?
“[A] fourfold definition of spiritual formation [is] (1) a process (2) of being conformed (3) to the image of Christ (4) for the sake of others.”
– M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.

Discipleship AND Mission!

Practice—“repeated exercise in or performance of an activity or skill so as to acquire or maintain proficiency in it.”

“We are shaped every day, whether we know it or not, by practices—rituals and liturgies that make us who we are. We receive these practices—which are often rote—not only from the church or the Scriptures but from the culture, from the ‘air around us.’”
– Tish Harrison Warren

4 Key Components for Spiritual Formation:
• The Word
• My Identity in Christ
• God’s Mission and Me
• My Rhythms of Life

Spiritual Health Self-Assessment (Appendix 3)
• Hand out the Spiritual Health Self-Assessment and pens
• Instructions: Please read each statement carefully and respond as honestly as possible. Use the Likert scale scoring method as follows:
  1. Strongly Disagree
  2. Disagree
  3. Undecided
  4. Agree
  5. Strongly Agree
• Allow ample time to complete the assessment, and then collect them

The Word
• The Word has authority over our lives
• The Word shapes us as we grow
• The Word comforts us, and gives us hope
• The Word is how God communicates to us

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2 Mulholland, Invitation to a Journey, 19.


4 Warren, Liturgy of the Ordinary, 28.
Lectio Divina (or “divine reading”) – The Word: Sermon on the Mount

- Pray together:

  Dear God,

  Help me to clear my mind of all that worries and consumes me this morning. Help me to not think about all of the “to-dos” and the tasks in front of me. Instead, help me be an empty vessel, ready to be filled by what you have to offer. With great expectation, I ask that you fill me with your grace and goodness this morning. Mold me and shape me into the new creation you desire. Help me be more like you this day. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

- Read Matthew 5:1-20

- Reflect and Discuss
  - What are one or two thoughts or insights you have had from these passages of Scripture? What stood out to you?
  - How can these passages shape your day?
  - What will you do differently, as a result of reading through these passages?

Homework Reminder and Closing Prayer

- Hand out Week 1 Homework packet along with a lined notebook for each participant to use a journal if they need one.
- Complete the Week 1 daily exercises in the homework packet—Listening and Responding to God
- Complete the online StrengthsFinder Assessment—the sooner the better!
- Forward the Top 5 Talents email from Gallup to the Discipleship Team (jpeebles@fpco.org)—these will be compiled and discussed next class!
- Pray for the group as they go out into their respective lives and begin a journey to deeper connections with God.

Sunday, June 17 (Class #2)

Welcome and Follow Up:

- Confirm that everyone has a book and was able to take the online StrengthsFinder Assessment and forwarded the results email to the Discipleship Team
- What did God reveal to you this week, and what did you learn?
- What did God do this week?
- Recap of the importance of The Word and how it shapes us
- Reminder of the 4 Key Components of Spiritual Formation

The Issue of Identity:

People go through their lives believing they are defined by their pain, struggles, failures, and broken relationships.

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McKim, Westminster Dictionary, 158.
**Lectio Divina – Identity: The Doctrine of Adoption**

- Read **Galatians 3:26-4:7**
  (also Romans 8:14-17, 23, 29; Ephesians 1:3-10; 1 John 3:1-3, and others!)
- Reflect and Discuss
  - What are one or two thoughts or insights you have had from these passages of Scripture? What stood out to you?
  - What does it mean for you to be a son/daughter of God?
  - What does it mean to be a heir of God?
  - How should your identity as a child of God, impact the way you live?

**The issue of Identity**

- In Christ, you have a new identity
- Knowing WHOSE you are leads to WHO you are
- Apart from Christ, I am (or feel I am)…
  - Unlovable
  - Spiritually bankrupt
  - Sinful and broken
  - A shadow of who God intends for me to be
  - …
- We have a new identity (new creation!)
- In Christ, I am…
  - Loved unconditionally
  - God’s heir
  - Forgiven and redeemed.
  - Uniquely and wonderfully made
  - …

**Lectio Divina – Identity: The Body of Christ**

- Read **1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27**
- Reflect and Discuss
  - What are one or two thoughts or insights you have had from these passages of Scripture? What stood out to you?
  - What does it mean for you to be a part of the Body of Christ?
  - What does it mean to be baptized in the one Spirit?
  - How should knowing you are part of Christ’s Body impact the way you live?
- You are uniquely created and gifted, and God wants you to discover who you are!

**An Introduction to Strengths**

- What are strengths?
  - The story of Rick and Liz

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• A strength is "the ability to provide consistent, near-perfect performance in a given activity. This ability is a powerful, productive combination of talent, skill, and knowledge."7

• Why Strengths?
  o God has uniquely gifted each of us, and we each have unique contributions to make in the church (1 Cor 12)

• Strengths vs Spiritual Gifts
  o "Your Spiritual Gifts help you find what the ministry is that God wants to see you accomplish; your talents are God's way of showing you how you will accomplish it."8

• You are Unique!
  o The chance that someone else has the same configuration (all 34 in the order you have) is 1 in 33 million.9

• Show Top 5 strength configuration for some members of the church leadership team, and ask if the class can identify the person
  o Learner, Connectedness, Responsibility, Maximizer, Harmony – Director of Congregational Care
  o Learner, Futuristic, Strategic, Input, Maximizer – Pastor for Discipleship (me)
  o Belief, Strategic, Relator, Connectedness, Responsibility – Senior Pastor

• Review the 4 Domains of Strength10 and the themes that make up those categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Executing</th>
<th>Influencing</th>
<th>Relating</th>
<th>Strategic Thinking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Those with dominant Executing themes know how to make things happen.</td>
<td>Those with dominant Influencing themes know how to take charge, speak up and make sure the group is heard.</td>
<td>Those with dominant Relating have the ability to build strong relationships that can hold a group together and make the group greater than the sum of its parts.</td>
<td>Those with dominant Strategic Thinking themes focus on what could be. They absorb and analyze information to help make better decisions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Achiever
Arranger
Belief
Consistency
Deliberative
Discipline
Focus
Responsibility
Restorative
Activator
Command
Communication
Competition
Maximizer
Self-Assurance
Significance
Woo
Adaptability
Connectedness
Developer
Empathy
Harmony
Includer
Individualization
Positivity
Relator
Analytical
Context
Futuristic
Ideation
Input
Intellection
Learner
Strategic

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7 Clifton, Liesveld, and Winseman, Living Your Strengths, 7.

8 Clifton, Liesveld, and Winseman, Living Your Strengths, 30.


Small Group Break-Out Discussion – divide into groups of 4 or 5
- Explore how your talents combine with each other to result in your unique combination.
- Write a paragraph that creates a description of your top 5 talent package.

Homework Reminder and Closing Prayer
- Complete the Week 2 daily exercises in the homework packet - Knowing Whose I Am leads to Who I am.
- Pray for the group as they go out into their respective lives and continue in their journey to deeper connections with God.

Sunday, June 24 (Class #3)
Outline

Welcome and Follow Up

Signature Themes
- Explain Signature Themes
- Using the compilation of the class participants’ top 5 themes, review characteristics of the most common Signature Themes/Talents within the group.

Lectio Divina – Identity: Exploring Your Talents/Gifts
- Read Ephesians 2:1-10 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
- Reflect and Discuss

Small Group Break-Out Discussion – divide into groups of 4 or 5
- Which domain is most dominant for you?
- In which domain are you least dominant?
- Have you been maximizing your dominant domain? (Are those around you aware of your talent and strengths in the domain?)
- Have you been “blind” to any of your less-dominant domains?

Homework Reminder and Closing Prayer

Sunday, July 1 (Class #4)
Outline

Welcome and Follow Up

Lectio Divina – God’s Mission and Me: The Places You are Sent
• Reflect and Discuss

Small Group Break-Out Discussion – divide into groups of 4 or 5
Dig deeper into your strengths. Discuss:
• The strength you are most excited in is your top 5 and how you use it.
  Example: I love using my Maximizer strength. I enjoy helping others recognize their strengths and use them to reach their full potential.
• The strength in your top 5 that can sometimes have a negative impact on you or on how others perceive you.
  Example: my Learner strength can also be my downfall, as I am easily distracted when something I read catches my interest and leads me down a rabbit hole into researching information that have nothing to do with the original topic.
• A strength that is not in your top 5 that you wish you had.
  Example: Woo (Winning others over) is #34 in my complete list of strengths, and I wish it were in my top 5! I love seeing how it works in others.

Homework Reminder and Closing Prayer

Sunday, July 8 (Class #5)
Outline

Welcome and Follow Up

“Nobody else can live the life you live. And even though no human being is perfect, we always have the chance to bring what’s unique about us, to live in a redeeming way.”

-Fred Rogers, to the Marquette University graduating class of 2001

Lectio Divina – God’s Mission and Me: The Places You are Sent
• Read Acts 1:1-9 and Matthew 22:34-40
• Reflect and Discuss

Season of Life
• Seasons of life significantly impact our missional living. Marital status, children, grandchildren, the pursuit of an education, career advancement, and retirement all require different amounts of time, and play a role in terms of who it is we interact. One of the key factors in considering how to live missionally is giving proper consideration to your particular season of life.
• When you think of your current season of life, what do you count as the greatest blessings?
• What do you count as the greatest challenge?
• In your current season of life, where do you spend the greatest amount of time?
  Daily? Weekly? Monthly?
• In this season of life, who are the people you encounter the most?

Homework Reminder and Closing Prayer

Sunday, July 15 (Class #6)
Outline

Welcome and Follow Up

Lectio Divina – Rhythms of Life: Your Unique Plan
• Read Romans 12:3-21
• Reflect and Discuss

Distribute and discuss all components for Building My Unique Plan
These worksheets will be completed for the Week 6 homework as the culmination of
everything we have learned.

Walk through these documents in detail, answer questions, and review the examples
provided:
  • My Unique Path to Spiritual Growth (Appendix 4)
  • My Unique Mission Statement (Appendix 4)
  • My Rule of Life (Appendix 4)

Homework Reminder and Closing Prayer

Sunday, August 12 (Class #7)
Outline

Welcome:
• Enjoy potluck breakfast
• Enjoy fellowship
• Thank participants for their commitment to this class.

Lectio Divina – Rhythms of Life: Fellowship
• Read Acts 2: 42-47
• Reflect and Discuss

Time of Sharing:
• Invite participants to share their personal Mission Plan and Rule of Life.
• Encourage participants to continue daily Scripture reading and reflecting how God will use them (with their unique gifting) for his purpose.

**Spiritual Health Self-Assessment** (Appendix 3)
Instructions: Please read each statement carefully and respond as honestly as possible. Use the Likert scale scoring method as follows:
1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

**Closing Prayer**
• Pray for the group as they go out into their respective lives and continue in their journey to deeper connections with God, using their new Rule of Life.
APPENDIX 3

SPIRITUAL HEALTH SELF-ASSESSMENT

The following assessment was administered to class participants on the first day and again on the last day of class in an effort to measure any perceived spiritual growth as a result of the 6-week course of initiating or digging deeper into daily spiritual practices—giftedness survey, Scripture readings, reflections, assignments, and group discussions.

Spiritual Health Self-Assessment

Name ____________________________________________  Date _____________

Please read each statement carefully, and respond as honestly as possible. Use the scoring method as follows:

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Undecided
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

I. The Word

1. The Scriptures are God’s own words to us and are sacred and holy.

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (John 1:1)

1._____  2._____  3._____  4._____  5._____  

2. I believe that Scripture comes from God, and it serves as the ultimate authority over my life, determining much of what I say and do.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (1 Timothy 3:16-17)

1._____  2._____  3._____  4._____  5._____  

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3. The Bible equips me for doing good in my life. It provides answers when I want to know if I am doing right or wrong.

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (1 Timothy 3:16-17)

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

4. In order to grow in my faith, I seek to listen to God’s voice each day.

“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.” (Romans 10:17)

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

5. God’s Word is timeless and conveys truth in any time.

“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” (Matthew 24:35)

“The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.” (Isaiah 40:8)

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

6. The Bible illuminates the path in front of me as I journey through life.

“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” (Psalm 119:105)

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

7. I believe the Scriptures are not merely words written centuries ago, but God’s way of communicating to me each day.

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

1. 2. 3. 4. 5.
8. Scripture provides me with daily nourishment for my soul, much in the same way food nourishes my body.

“Jesus answered, ‘It is written: Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:4)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

9. The Gospel (Good News) affords us the gift of salvation and eternal life. Therefore, it is the most important and precious gift we have.

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.” (Romans 1:16)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

10. I strive to put the Scriptures into practice each and every day, so that I have a solid foundation to my life.

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

II. My Identity in Christ

1. I believe that God is my creator, and I have been made in the image of God.

“God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

2. I believe that God the Father is not only the Father of Jesus, but my Father as well.

"This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven . . .’” (Matthew 6:9)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____
3. I feel confident of my adoption as God’s son/daughter and do not question His love for me.

“Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God- not born of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” (John 1:12)
(See also Ephesians 1:5, 1 John 3:1-2)

1.______ 2.______ 3.______ 4.______ 5.______

4. I believe that the Holy Spirit resides in my body every day.

“Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?” (1 Corinthians 6:19a)

1.______ 2.______ 3.______ 4.______ 5.______

5. I believe that my body belongs to God, and I am to honor God in all that I do with it.

“You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies.” (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20)

1.______ 2.______ 3.______ 4.______ 5.______

6. I believe that, since I professed that Jesus is my Lord and Savior, I have become or grown into a new creation.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Corinthians 5:17) (See also Colossians 2:9-10, Romans 6:6)

1.______ 2.______ 3.______ 4.______ 5.______

7. I know how God has gifted me through the Holy Spirit and how I am to share those gifts as a participating member of the church.

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.” (1 Corinthians 12: 7 and 11)

1.______ 2.______ 3.______ 4.______ 5.______
8. I understand that I am an important part of the church, or the Body of Christ, and that my contribution matters greatly.

“But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.” (1 Corinthians 12: 18-20)

1.____  2._____  3._____  4._____  5._____  

9. I strive to worship God every day through the way I live my life.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” (Romans 12:1)

1.____  2._____  3._____  4._____  5._____  

10. I turn to God for rest and sustenance and rely on Him for the strength I need each day.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11: 28-30)

1.____  2._____  3._____  4._____  5._____  

III. God’s Mission and Me

1. As a disciple of Jesus, I actively seek to disciple others.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20)

1.____  2._____  3._____  4._____  5._____  

2. I approach every day as though God is sending me out into the world to be a missionary.

“Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that he breathed on them and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” (John 20:21-22)
“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.’” (Luke 10:1-3)

1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  

3. Equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit, my life bears witness to Jesus Christ each day.

1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  

4. My love of God is evident in how I treat others.

“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  

5. When it comes to my relationships with others, the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control) is clearly evident.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  

6. I believe one of my greatest responsibilities is to love my neighbor, and I strive to treat everyone with love.

“The commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.” (Romans 13:9-10)
1. I know God has gifted me uniquely not for the sake of myself, but for the purpose of equipping others, and I strive to help others grow.

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:11-13)

2. I seek to love all whom I know, even the people I would consider enemies.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:43-44a)

3. I strive to show mercy with the people I meet in my daily routine.

‘Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?’ The expert in the law replied, ‘The one who had mercy on him.’ Jesus told him, ‘Go and do likewise.’” (Luke 10:36-37)

4. As a disciple of Jesus, I am concerned for the condition of and have a heart for others in this world.

“Jesus said to him, ‘If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’” (Matthew 19:21)

The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love.” (Psalm 33:5)

“The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.” (Proverbs 29:7)

“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8)
IV. My Rhythms of Life

1. I regularly study Scripture and will immerse myself in God’s Word on a regular basis.

“Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers.” (Psalm 1:1-3)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

2. I pray every day for everything I need and want.

“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.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

“Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” (Mark 1:35)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

3. When I pray, God grants me peace and comfort.

“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.” (Philippians 4:6-7)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

4. The Holy Spirit gives me what I need, even when I’m at my weakest.

“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.” (Romans 8:26)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____
5. Each day, I look for people I can humbly serve.

“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” (Ephesians 5:21)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

6. I live sacrificially for the benefit of others, valuing others more than myself.

“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one’s friends.” (John 15:13)

“When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ he asked them. ‘You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.’” (John 13:12-15)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

7. God is at work in all things, and I strive to fulfill His purposes each day.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

8. God shapes me through all experiences, even the times when I suffer.

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.” (Romans 5:3-4)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____

9. Each day, I seek to open myself up to the Holy Spirit, who equips and empowers me.

“If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” (John 14:14-18)

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____
10. I am on a path of spiritual development and seek to grow each day.

“Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly.” (1 Corinthians 3:1-3a)

1._____
2._____
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4._____
5._____
My Unique Path to Spiritual Growth

**Part 1:** Understanding God’s (and His Word’s) Authority over My Life

*God’s Word has authority over my life. Through Scripture, God tells me...*

**Part 2:** My Identity in Christ

*I am a child of God. God loves me, cares for me, equips me, and comforts me. Most especially, God blesses me (spiritually and materially) in the following ways:*

**Part 3:** My Gifting

*God has gifted me in ways that are unique to me. The greatest talents/gifts that I have to offer are:*

**Part 4:** My Mission Field

*God sends me to specific places each day/week. My mission field is:*

*The people to whom God calls me to disciple/minister are:*

**Part 5:** My Season of Life

*God has a plan for each season in our lives. My current season could be described as follows:*
My Unique Mission Statement

MISSION = (1) purpose + (2) result + (3) beneficiary

Personal Mission Statement = What God is calling you to do and who God is calling you to serve

Create a Unique Mission Statement

1. Think about the homework over the last five weeks and the My Unique Path to Spiritual Growth worksheet—how you have explored God’s authority over your life, your identity in Christ, your unique gifting, and your current season. Determine the three aspects of your mission statement.

   What is the purpose/what do you want to do?

   What is the desired result?

   Who will benefit?

2. Combining the responses to the questions above, take a few moments to craft your own unique mission statement:

Examples

“Glorifying God through equipping disciples (1) to love and serve (2) our neighbors (3).”

“Providing spiritual direction to my children (1) that they might grow in their walk with Jesus (2) and share God’s love with their classmates (3).”

“Giving wholistic financial guidance to my clients (1) so they can provide for their families and be generous (2) in their giving to others (3).”

“Being a spiritual grandparent (1) to the children of FPCO (3), so they will experience God’s love through their extended church family (2).”

“Training the Discipleship leaders of FPCO (1) to better equip others how to notice and respond to God in their everyday living (2) that they might bless the people to whom God sends them (3).”
My Rule of Life

Rule of Life = the practices that will help you grow—as you are available to God—into your unique mission

Practice = repeated exercise in, or performance of, an activity or skill so as to acquire or maintain proficiency in it.

“We are shaped every day, whether we know it or not, by practices—rituals and liturgies that make us who we are. We receive these practices—which are often rote—not only from the church or the Scriptures but from the culture, from the ‘air around us.’”

Tish Harrison Warren
Liturgy of the Ordinary: Sacred Practices in Everyday Life

“Your personal rule of life is discerned and framed within the context of your primarily relationships and your spiritual community and lived out in service to others.”

Stephen A. Macchia
Crafting a Rule of Life: An Invitation to the Well-Ordered Way

Create a Rule of Life

God’s Authority + Identity in Christ + Giftedness + Mission Field + Season of Life

1. Clarify/refine your responses from My Unique Path to Spiritual Growth for each element of the rule of life.

   God’ Authority:

   Identity in Christ:

   Giftedness (your top 5 gifts):

   Mission Field:

   Season of Life Blessings:

   Season of Life Challenges:
2. Incorporate the responses above to generate a sentence or two of how you want to live your life for God’s purpose.

   Guiding Statement:

3. Write a very simplified statement (5-10 words) that sums up your desired way of living intentionally for God.

   **My Rule of Life:**

4. Now, take some time and write down the practices (4-5 in each category) that you will commit to do in an effort to live according to your Rule of Life.

   Daily:

   Weekly:

   Monthly:

   Quarterly:

   Yearly:
Example (Jack Peebles)

God’s Authority: Jesus is my Savior and Lord of my life. I seek to follow Him as I live my life.

Identity in Christ: I am a child of God, and He loves me, extends His grace, and has called me into leadership within His Church.


Mission Field: My family, the leaders of FPCO, the downtown area, my neighborhood

Season of Life Blessings: The “glory years” with our kids headed into high school and middle school respectively. Finishing my doctorate.


Guiding Statement: “Under God’s authority, rooted in family, living into my identity (including my God-given abilities and gifts), equipping leaders, striving for a life of wholeness and balance, while listening and responding to God’s voice each day.”

Rule of Life: “Balance and Wholeness as I Lead”

Practices that will help me live into my Rule of Life

Daily:
- Read Scripture & Books/Podcasts on Missional Church/Discipleship/Spiritual Formation (God’s authority) (Input, Learner) 1-2 hours
- Journal/reflect on where I notice God
- Make a list of the things I need to do at the beginning of each day (Focus) ½ hr
- Intentionally walk around church office and encourage coworkers in their work (Maximizer) 1½ hrs
- Ask Margaret, Annabelle, and David about their day (Empathy) 1-2 hrs
- Work out – run/bike: Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday; lift weights: Monday, Wednesday, Friday (Competition)
Weekly:
- Attend worship (God’s authority)
- List of weekly discipleship goals (Focus, Intellection, Strategic)
- Prayer-walk around downtown – see to whom God leads me (mission field)
- Facilitate family movie/game & pizza night on Fridays
- Commit to study day on Thursdays (Input, Learner)
- Rest on Fridays (Sabbath)
- Lead a group of potential leaders (Maximizer)
- Visit with James – the homeless gentleman I see on Sundays (Empathy)

Monthly:
- Facilitate ongoing coaching with staff and key discipleship leaders (Maximizer, Input, Learner)
- Enjoy a family fun day away from home (Disney, Universal, etc.)
- Initiate a date night with Margaret
- Email (TBD) discipleship leaders with the purpose of equipping encouraging (Maximizer, Input, Learner, Intellection)

Quarterly:
- Teach a class in School of Discipleship (Input, Learner, Focus)
- Meet with each direct report for formal supervision (Maximizer, Strategic, Intellection)
- Attend a leadership gathering for equipping and information
- Assist in the Good News Breakfast – Sunday morning breakfast for the homeless

Yearly:
- Take a trip to the Mountains or beach – be out in nature. Completely disconnect from technology!
- Attend a class for enrichment through Fuller, etc.
- Run a marathon or half-marathon (Competition)
- Climb a mountain!
WEEKLY HOMEWORK

Week 1
The Word: Listening and Responding to God

Week 1 Instructions:

Please do the following exercises each day this week. In the morning, please do it before you look at your cell phone or newspaper or anything else that might impact your state of mind and impact the day’s outlook. If you need to grab a cup of coffee or tea, please feel free—this should be enjoyable!

The purpose is for this special time with God to set the course for your day. At the end of the day, please be sure that the evening journaling is the last thing you do before going to sleep.

Morning:

1. **Pray:** Offer this prayer. (You can certainly add to the prayer or change it to make it your own, but please don’t miss the point of the prayer.)

   *Dear God,*
   *Help me to clear my mind of all that worries and consumes me this morning. Help me to not think about all of the “to-dos” and the tasks in front of me. Instead, help me to be an empty vessel ready to be filled by what you have to offer. With great expectation, I ask that you would fill me with your grace and goodness this morning. Mold me and shape me into the new creation you desire. Help me to be more like you this day. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.*

2. **Read:** When you are ready, take a few moments to read through the assigned passages of Scripture. After each read-through, pause for a moment to reflect upon the passage. Write down the initial reactions and thoughts you had as you read.

   Read them once more, pause and reflect, and write down any final thoughts that come to mind.

3. **Journal:** Answer the questions to the best of your ability. God doesn’t care about perfect answers. God is more concerned with you and the condition of your soul, so please me as honest as possible.

During the Day:

4. **Reflect:** As you go about your daily routine, please take a moment to write down any and all thoughts, insights, or reflections you have, especially when you remember the passages during your daily routine.
Evening:
5. **Journal**: Before you to bed, please answer the one evening question.
6. **Pray**: Conclude the day with the following prayer (or one like it):

   *Dear God,*
   *Thank you for the grace of today. I know that each joy and celebration is a wonderful gift from you. I also know that each heartache and struggle is also a gift. Thank you for the way your Word has shaped my relationships, from my thoughts to my conversations and actions. Now, as I lay down to sleep, I ask that you give me rest and peace. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.*

**Monday, June 11**

**Morning:**
- Pray
- Read *John 1:1-5 & 2 Timothy 3:10-16*
- Journal
  - What are one or two thoughts or insights you have had from these passages of Scripture? What stood out to you?
  - How can these passages shape your day?
  - What will you do differently as a result of reading through these passages?

**Evening:**
- Reflect upon the activities, conversations, and events of your day. What did God teach you today?
- Journal
- Pray

**Tuesday, June 12**

**Morning:**
- Pray
- Read *2 Timothy 3:10-16 & Romans 10:9-17*
- Journal
  - What are one or two thoughts or insights you have had from these passages of Scripture? What stood out to you?
  - How can these passages shape your day?
  - What will you do differently, as a result of reading through these passages?
**Evening:**
- Reflect upon the activities, conversations, and events of your day. What did God teach you today?
- Journal
- Pray

**Wednesday, June 13**

**Morning:**
- Pray
- Read *Matthew 24:32-35 & Isaiah 40:6-8*
- Journal
  - What are one or two thoughts or insights you have had from these passages of Scripture? What stood out to you?
  - How can these passages shape your day?
  - What will you do differently, as a result of reading through these passages?

**Evening:**
- Reflect upon the activities, conversations, and events of your day. What did God teach you today?
- Journal
- Pray

**Thursday, June 14**

**Morning:**
- Pray
- Read *Psalm 119:105-112 & Hebrews 4:12-13*
- Journal
  - What are one or two thoughts or insights you have had from these passages of Scripture? What stood out to you?
  - How can these passages shape your day?
  - What will you do differently, as a result of reading through these passages?

**Evening:**
- Reflect upon the activities, conversations, and events of your day. What did God teach you today?
- Journal
- Pray
Friday, June 15

Morning:
- Pray
- Read Matthew 4:1-4 & Romans 1:16-17
- Journal
  - What are one or two thoughts or insights you have had from these passages of Scripture? What stood out to you?
  - How can these passages shape your day?
  - What will you do differently, as a result of reading through these passages?

Evening:
- Reflect upon the activities, conversations, and events of your day. What did God teach you today?
- Journal
- Pray

Saturday, June 16

Morning:
- Pray
- Read Matthew 7: 24-29
- Journal
  - What are one or two thoughts or insights you have had from these passages of Scripture? What stood out to you?
  - How can these passages shape your day?
  - What will you do differently, as a result of reading through these passages?

Evening:
- Reflect upon the activities, conversations, and events of your day. What did God teach you today?
- Journal
- Pray

Weeks 2 - 6

The homework packets for weeks 2 through 6 follow the same format with different Scriptures and reflection questions, each adding a new element of spiritual disciplines and practices leading to the culminating practice of creating a rule of life in the final week.
APPENDIX 6

SPIRITUAL HEALTH SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS

Spiritual Practices Self-Assessment
Perceived Growth

The following charts include data based on the eighteen participants (out of twenty-five in the class) who completed the Spiritual Health Self-Assessment on the first Sunday and again on the last Sunday (after six weeks of engaging in daily spiritual disciplines and practices).

Detail of Data Averages (out of a possible score of fifty)

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Spiritual Health Self-Assessment Results
Section 1: The Word

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### Spiritual Health Self-Assessment Results

**Section 2: My Identity in Christ**

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Spiritual Health Self-Assessment Results
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Breen, Mike, and Steve Cockram. *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People Like Jesus Did*. Pawleys Island, SC: Mike Breen, 2011.


