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# The Liminal Church: Why Navigating Thresholds Between Us Leads to Thriving

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

PROJECT PORTFOLIO:

THE LIMINAL CHURCH:

WHY NAVIGATING THRESHOLDS BETWEEN US LEADS TO THRIVING



IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF LEADERSHIP IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES  
PORTLAND SEMINARY

BY:

ANDREW HALE

PROJECT FACULTY:

DR. DIANE ZEMKE

PORTLAND, OREGON

FEBRUARY 2023



## CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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This certifies that the doctoral Project Portfolio of

Andrew Hale

has been approved by  
the Evaluation Committee on March 8, 2023  
for the degree of Doctor of Leadership in Global Perspectives.

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## Dedication

"We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be."

— Kurt Vonnegut, *Mother Night*

The ability to reach the summit of this doctoral journey stretches back beyond a three-year journey. For a kid who barely snuck into the backdoor of college and had no care for education, I must acknowledge the numerous mentors that inspired and instilled within me a love for knowing more and growing emotionally, spiritually, intellectually, and relationally. I am where I am today as a result of the people who, despite all pretenses to abandon the precarious nature of journeying with me, have provided me with ample opportunity for mistakes and adaptation, despite the myriad of difficulties that my personhood produces.

To my beloved parents, thank you for supporting every chapter of my life with your presence, love, and affirmation.

To my dear older brothers, all I really have to say is that I beat you to it. I'll forever be known as the first doctor in the Hale family. Your loving childhood torment pushed me to become gritty and resilient.

To my extraordinary children, Madison and Aubrey-Anna, that inspire me every day to be a better father and human being, I pray that your love for learning will carry you beyond what I have been able to achieve as you step forward into the bright future as leaders in your own right. And yes, you must now call me "Doctor Daddy!"

At the lead of this fellowship is my best friend and wife, Jennifer. Thank you for allowing me to be me, creating space and patience for the many adventures I attempt to drag you on, and for counterbalancing my endless supply of energy. Thank you for holding our lives together as I always attempt to juggle more than what is reasonable.

## Acknowledgments

The journey through this doctoral program would not have been made possible by the generous support of University Baptist Church of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship of North Carolina, and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Global.

To the numerous friends, mentors, stakeholders, and peer reviewers that gave of their time, energy, insight, and feedback on this labor of love, I give thanks.

Finally, the completion of this work would not have been possible without the patience, generosity, wisdom, and guidance of my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Diane Zemke.

## Epigraph

The Road goes ever on and on,  
Down from the door where it began.  
Now far ahead the Road has gone,  
And I must follow, if I can,  
Pursuing it with eager feet,  
Until it joins some larger way  
Where many paths and errands meet.  
And whither then? I cannot say.

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*

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# List of Abbreviations

CBF - Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

NPO - Need, Problem, Opportunity

## Research Method

This Doctoral Project utilized a blended research and design methodology called ‘Collaborative Design for Ministry and Nonprofit Contexts’. In Collaborative Design, practitioners work with stakeholder representatives to address a Need, Problem, or Opportunity (NPO) in their context. Using a combination of bibliographic resources, local knowledge derived from stakeholder Workshops, and an iterative process of continuous adjustment using ‘just enough’ feedback information at each juncture of development, practitioners produce an application-oriented Project that seeks to effect Christ-centered change.

## Abstract

Through the discovery, design, and delivery stages of the doctoral project, I centered my work on the following NPO: Churches can thrive when they understand, navigate, and leverage the liminality existing between people, the community, and where God is leading.

Despite the myriad of different contexts among local churches, whether polity, worship style, belief statements, and geographical locality, congregations are still composed of people living in relationship to one another and the community around them. Relationships, no matter their nature, are complicated. For the relationships within a local church to thrive, they require intentionality, coaching, effort, openness, and vulnerability.

My vocational calling drives my research and project to serve Christ's church. For over two decades, I have served as a local church pastor, congregational consultant/coach, and denominational leader within the Cooperative Baptist tradition.

I cultivated an interactive book to address my NPO. The book is *The Liminal Church: Why Navigating the Thresholds Between Us Leads to Thriving*. The book examines social and cognitive science through a theological lens to enhance the church's capacity for thriving. The book's goal is not to provide an anthological background of each topic but a starting place for healthy dialogue and exploration of how to navigate these challenges together as a local church.

The book currently consists of seven completed chapters, with a strategic plan to write ten more. There are four main facets of each chapter: (1) Primary learning content; (2) Chapter recap; (3) Personal introspection; (4) Group design exercise.

The remaining ten chapters will examine the role of differentiation, the psychology of fear and othering, the challenges that arise with personality types within a church, the social science of political tribalism, various communication and conflict management styles, understanding intergenerational gaps, the power of presence, and the essential ingredient of fun within a congregation.



## Introduction

Culture is rapidly changing and grows more divided. I began this doctoral program in a season of rapid change in the midst of the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic and the heightened tension of the 2020 national election. However, pandemic or no pandemic and election cycle or no election, human beings have an interesting relationship with change and our differences, especially within an organization like the church. Relational gaps or thresholds exist within local churches, more often than not, creating organizational stagnation. Therefore, throughout the doctoral program, I have been working through this NPO (Need, Problem, or Opportunity): Churches can thrive when they understand, navigate, and leverage the liminality existing between people, the community, and where God is leading. As a result, I wrote *The Liminal Church: Why Navigating the Thresholds Between Us Leads to Thriving* to provide ministers and congregational leaders a practical tool to understand, navigate, and leverage the relational gaps that exist within their church.

## Discovery

I entered into the Discovery stage of the doctoral program with the stated goal of providing Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) churches with practical and strategic resources for leveraging change to thrive. CBF is a Baptist denomination of 2,500 moderate to progressive expression churches throughout the United States and Puerto Rico. As I cultivated my NPO, I considered what resources, or lack thereof, existed for congregational thriving. I worked out of a built assumption that most churches have an outdated and antiquated way of defining thriving, centered on the number of people in the pews and the budget's health. My first attempt at an NPO was the following statement: Cooperative Baptist congregations and leaders are often unaware or unempowered to engage strategies for success in a rapidly changing world.

To test this perceived NPO and broaden its scope, I hosted a Discovery Workshop with ten stakeholders: five senior pastors, one associate pastor, two denominational leaders, and two church starters (or what some traditions call a church planter). The group participated in a series of group design thinking exercises geared toward four goals:

1. Articulate the boundaries of the primary audience.
2. Gain a better understanding of the NPO affecting my audience, CBF churches.
3. Identify potential root causes of the NPO.
4. Determine how a solution may impact CBF churches.

The workshop produced this Discovery statement, "Considering CBF churches, we have discovered that energized by the hope of the resurrection, they can pursue courageous vision(s) and sustainable strategies to thrive on mission in the world, which is caused by their feeling of declining relevance in the world. If solved, it would mean CBF churches feel reinvigorated and empowered."

Additionally, the stakeholders revised my NPO to read, "Energized by the hope of the resurrection, CBF churches can pursue courageous vision(s) and sustainable strategies to thrive on mission in the world."

Next, I presented the findings in a series of one-on-one interviews, including a professional consultant, an intentional interim pastor and coach, and a denominational leader. The one-on-one interviews were helpful as I processed what appeared to be a delineation from my original NPO to what the workshop stakeholders produced. Moreover, the interviews helped me drill down further to the root of what was behind my NPO, namely, the desire to help congregants understand the importance and challenges of relationships within a local church.

The next phase of the Discovery process centered on bringing clarity to my NPO statement and researching the biblical, theological, and psychological background of relationship dynamics. As I believed thriving comes from developing an authentic community within the congregation through spiritual formation, I came with the assumption that, at their core, churches are about relationships.

I focused on six critical biblical passages: Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37; 5:1-11; Philippians 1:3-11; and James 2:1-13. I was explicitly examining the intersectionality and difference between the two most common words for church in the New Testament, *koinōnia* and *ekklesia*. After a thorough biblical exegesis, I came away with the hope that congregational thriving might be a simple yet profound reminder of whom we are together, not in the institutional sense, but in a deeply held theologically-relational sense.

I next examined the family systems theories of Murray Bowen and Edwin Friedman, the community development work of Peter Block, the framing of relationships theologically by Andrew Root, the foundational Emotional Intelligence work of Peter Salovey, John Mayer, Daniel Goleman, and the transitional leadership research of John Kotter. After my research, I came to believe there are tremendous gaps between research data on organizational relational dynamics and the lack of resources in the church vernacular.

## Design

In between the discovery and design stages of the doctoral program, I was introduced to the concept of liminality. Liminal comes from the Latin *limen*, meaning "threshold" or "space between." It was originally associated with the stone placed at the threshold of a door, marking the crossing from one space into the other.<sup>1</sup> Often described as an inbetweenness, liminality is that space between where you are and where you are going, the present and the future, the old and the new, or the familiar and unknown.

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<sup>1</sup> "Limen," *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/limen>.

The concept of liminality helped me frame what I was trying to express about relational dynamics within a congregational organization. As I began the Design phase of the doctoral program, I revised my NPO to work within the liminality language: Churches can thrive when they understand, navigate, and leverage the liminality existing between people, the community, and where God is leading.

For the Design workshop, I wanted to bring more diversity to my research by incorporating a more incredible array of ministers and organizational leaders from different contexts, races, and genders, which included: nonprofit leaders, denominational leaders, missionaries, associate pastors, business owners, retired ministers, and senior pastors. So first, I led the stakeholders through group design exercises to better understand the scope of relational dynamics within a church. As a result, the group identified several key components, including a diverse set of beliefs, identities, cognitions, communication styles, and personalities.

The next step in the workshop was to explore potential means of solving the NPO, which included: a discernment process, a guide for churches to play and have hard conversations, a retreat curriculum, and small group material. The three big practical prototypes named at the end of the workshop were an interactive book, podcast series, and a discernment process.

The results and findings from the Design workshop were presented in three one-on-one interviews. Comprised of a grant director of pastoral thriving, a retired senior pastor, and a director of church engagement, the three interviewees identified that my biggest challenge was not in producing one of the three prototypes but in translating the challenging concept of relational dynamics for a local congregation.

Plunging into the final portion of the Design phase, I wanted to garner a deeper understanding and familiarity with the subject material to help me begin to think about it theologically. Therefore, I focused my research on liminality and organizational psychology, tapping into the disciplines of philosophy, cognitive psychology, social psychology, communication, and conflict management. In turn, I created two prototypes, an interactive book, and a podcast series.

Nine members of a new focus group evaluated the prototypes. I set up a diverse group of questions, allowing me to garner insight into the prototypes' effectiveness and usefulness for individual leaders and prospective leaders of each focus group member's organization. Overall, the focus group indicated that both prototypes offered insightful and balanced approaches to the challenges of relational dynamics within an organization. However, the focus group chose the interactive book when determining which prototype would continue to bear tremendous significance and usefulness to congregations over several years. Moreover, the group believed that writing a book would be the most worthwhile project, later expanding its ideas by creating a podcast series.

## Delivery

Expanding on the existing chapters from the interactive book prototype, during the Delivery phase of the doctoral project, I wanted to set the tone for the finalized book's look and feel. I did this in several key ways. First, I expanded the book's scope by outlying what the remaining chapters would cover in-depth. Second, I wrote an additional five chapters. Finally, I created group design exercises to accompany each chapter.

Building off the feedback I received from both Design focus groups, I wanted to write the book in a way that balanced depth and ease, psychology and theology, personal and communal, theoretical and practical. I also wanted to stay true to my writing and communication style by introducing the subject matter with a whimsical story or interactive exercise. Then, from chapter to chapter, there is a balance of examining social and cognitive science through a theological lens as it applies to a congregational organization.

I wanted each chapter to have an understandable and usable rhythm. Therefore, I built the chapters around four recurring facets: (1) Primary learning content; (2) Chapter recap; (3) Personal introspection; (4) Group design exercise. From an educational standpoint, repetition helps readers and participants add to their existing knowledge base and add new understanding.

*The Liminal Church* is not designed to be a static individual experience but a shared learning, conversational, and growing experience for a congregational organization. Written primarily for congregational leaders and clergy, the book introduces the reader to varying social and relational dynamics within a church, such as unconscious bias, communication types, conflict management style, the capacity of trust, and the power of presence. The book's goal is not to provide an anthological background of each topic but a starting place for healthy dialogue and exploration of how to navigate these challenges together as a local church.

I invited six peer reviewers to read six chapters of the book, personally reflect on its implications for their leadership context, and test-drive the group design exercise. Then, asked to evaluate the book anonymously through an online survey, the reviewers were given 17 questions centered on the following project benchmarks:

- Quality: The content has a professional and high-quality design and layout.
- My intended audience comprehends book content as indicated by five readers that represent the intended audience who will score an average of 80% or higher on a follow-up survey after reading the six chapters and design exercises. The survey questions revolve around the book's relevance, coherence, impact, readability, applicability, and sustainability.

- 3-5 congregational leaders and ministers express interest in committing to reading the book with their leadership teams for one year. Recognizing that it takes time for a leadership resource to make its way around ministers and congregational leaders, I want to measure the book's relevance over time.

## Evaluation

The journey from Discover, Design and Deliver was a remarkable experience. This process helped me build a new set of skills in identifying a need, problem, or opportunity, looking at it from all angles, drilling down to find its root cause, expanding its background through research, and testing possible solutions. Learning this process has helped me move from an assumption or platitude base to a healthy research and group-sourced base.

The most significant obstacle I continue to face as it relates to research is the need for more theological resources in my field of study. There is a wealth of resources on organizational psychology, but only some look at it through a theological lens. As a result, this required me to cultivate a new way of examining cognitive and social psychology as a theologically-trained and seasoned minister. In short, there were growing pains as I expanded my vocabulary and framing of these concepts.

One of my biggest challenges was understanding the specific and practical way I could approach my NPO. I recall a conversation with my supervisor. After hearing everything I would like to tackle through my doctoral project, she said, "Well, those are all really good. But what is the one thing you can practically do in the remaining year you have left in the program." Her advice moved me from the big conceptual to the resolvable practical.

I have big dreams and ideas of where my vocational journey will take me in the coming decade. I would love to launch a consulting business, working alongside various organizations, including the church, as they navigate the relational obstacles preventing thriving, launch another podcast series as a practical and relevant resource, and continue to write more books. However, I had to overcome the self-imposed obstacle of setting the bar too high for what was expected of me during this doctoral program.

Through the various stakeholder and focus groups, I have gained a deeper understanding of the value of diverse and strategically designed feedback. So often, in my work as a local church pastor and denominational leader, I have worked out of an assumption of a perceived need, usefulness, and practicality of an initiative. However, this program has taught me how to test these matters along the way, which builds anticipation and connections with your intended audience. As I turn to the launching of my project beyond the doctoral program, I will continue to model its stakeholder and feedback methodology to help build a more viable book.

## Launch

Even as I submit a sample of the seven chapters I have written for *The Liminal Church*, I have already begun researching and writing for the remaining ten chapters. Each specific chapter is a different topic around organizational relational obstacles, such as our capacity for trust, fear, and tribalism, the varying communication and conflict management styles, personality types, generational gaps, and the role of fun within thriving organizations. I will continue using my research and writing method to complete the book by September 2023.

My primary goals are to develop a marketing strategy (May 2023), submit a book proposal to several publishers (June 2023), continue to beta test the book material with local churches (present-August 2023), and launch a pioneer cohort and group (fall 2023).

## An Insatiable Appetite for Learning and Innovation

I have always had an insatiable appetite for learning and innovation. I do not know exactly what started it, but I have always felt this internal motivation to know more and to improve things, starting with myself. The Project Portfolio journey provided a cornucopia of growth, challenge, and creativity opportunities.

I take great joy in looking back at how this program empowered me with the tools to examine from a scholarly, scientific, and theological perspective the testing assumptions, analyzing supporting data, verifying ideas and solutions with contextual stakeholders, and cultivating practical resources to resolve the originating need, problem, and opportunity. Though there were times that the process and the required methodical documentation were met with frustration and the occasional eye-roll, I appreciate the great intentionality of it all. As a result, I am equipped to carry this process into my vocational journey.

As I look back at the discovery, design, and delivery process, my only regret is changing vocations between years two and three of the program. Before the change, I had developed a good writing routine to complete the entire *The Liminal Church* book over the summer. However, this is the reality of following one's calling and the natural byproduct of developing a new work and life rhythm nearly 1,000 miles from where the doctoral program started while in Louisiana.

In the coming years, my goal is to use this book as a catalyst to launch a new podcast series and consulting venturing geared towards equipping clergy and congregational leaders around the liminality that exists between members of a church, the church and the community around it, and the present and where God is leading them. Starting with Cooperative Baptist Churches, I hope these new resources will connect with a myriad of church expressions.

# Doctoral Project

## Introduction

*The Liminal Church: Why Navigating the Thresholds Between Us Leads to Thriving* is an interactive book that examines social and cognitive science through a theological lens to enhance the church's capacity for thriving. I want to briefly take you through the journey of writing this book as the most viable prototype for the need I am addressing. Then, I will tell the story of the book's cover design, give you a snapshot of how the completed book will take shape, and examine the book's four main facets. Finally, I will showcase four of the book's chapters.

## Presentation of Project

### The Journey to Writing a Book

Born out of my two decades plus of congregational work as a minister and consultant, I began this doctoral journey wanting to produce a helpful resource for local churches that goes beyond a singularly contextual project that only serves the usefulness of one particular audience for a specific set of time. At the same time, the research and design behind this book cannot be separated from the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent ways everyone's lives were upended by such a sudden and seismic shift to our way of thinking, living, and relating to one another. Like most, if not all, local pastors, I found myself processing these changes, not only personally but also for what it meant for our congregation. The journey of leading a congregation through this experience only amplified my desire to help local churches understand our response to change and why our relationship within a congregation ultimately affects how we adapt to change.

Through the discovery stages of the program, I cultivated the following NPO: Churches can thrive when they understand, navigate, and leverage the liminality existing between people, the community, and where God is leading. During the design stages, I produced three chapters of an interactive book and a short podcast series. Overwhelmingly, my stakeholders believed that a book would create more of a last effect and companion to congregational leaders seeking to help their church enhance their capacity for healthy relationships.

The book is built on liminality as a metaphor for the relational gaps or boundaries that exist between members of a congregation, the congregation and the community around it, and where the congregation exists versus where God is leading them. The church is in this in-between space of where we have been, where we are, and where we are going. Liminal comes from the Latin *limen*, meaning "threshold" or "space between." It was originally associated with the stone placed at the threshold of a door, marking the crossing from one space into the other.<sup>2</sup> Often described as an

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<sup>2</sup> "Limen," *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/limen>.



inbetweenness, liminality is that space between where you are and where you are going, the present and the future, the old and the new, or the familiar and unknown.

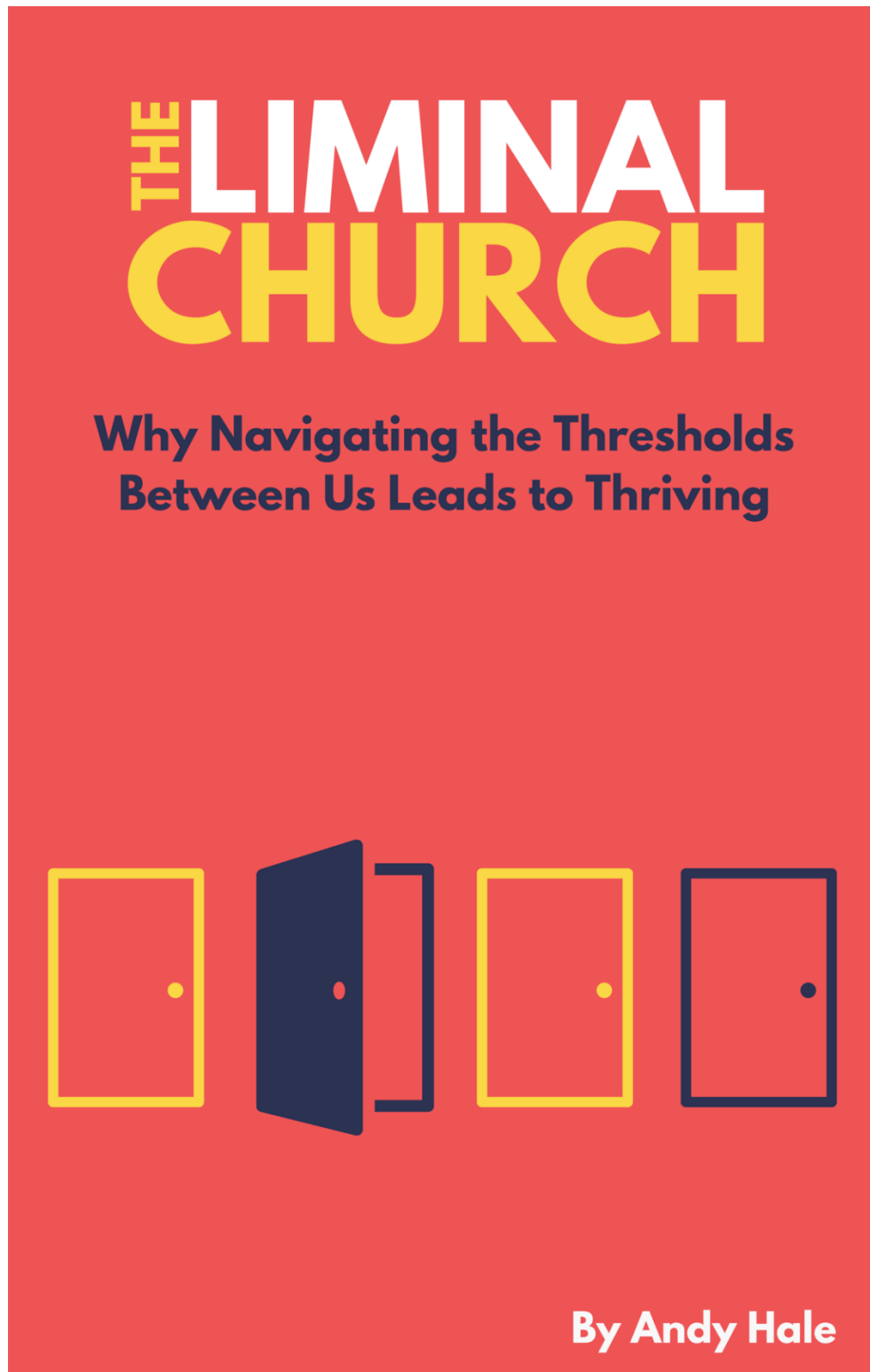


FIGURE 1: BOOK COVER

## Cover Art

For the cover art, I studied marketing research on how colors elicit specific responses. For example, within the colors I selected for the cover, red is associated with movement, excitement, and passion, blue is associated with calm and tranquility, while yellow stimulates the logic center of the brain and promotes enthusiasm.<sup>3</sup>

The art is designed to enlighten and illustrate the concept of liminality and organizational relational dynamics. Through a series of closed doors, we see the possibility of crossing a threshold into a new chapter, individually and collectively as a congregational organization.

Throughout my ministerial vocational journey, I have experienced people's inability to open themselves to other members of the congregational organization and the subsequent depletion of mutual respect, battles of wills, personality clashes, and the escalation of conflict. Yet, at the same time, I have experienced the thriving that comes when members of an organization open their proverbial emotional doors to others, developing more profound levels of trust, healthy dialogue, and empathy.

From the front page to the concluding words of *The Liminal Church*, I want to challenge readers to contemplate whether or not they are ready to cross the thresholds that often divide us and lead to organizational retrogression.

## The Book's Style and Functionality

*The Liminal Church* is not designed to be a static individual experience but a shared learning, conversational, and growing experience for a congregational organization. Written primarily for congregational leaders and clergy, the book introduces the reader to varying social and relational dynamics within a church, such as unconscious bias, communication types, conflict management style, the capacity of trust, and the power of presence. The book's goal is not to provide an anthological background of each topic but a starting place for healthy dialogue and exploration of how to navigate these challenges together as a local church.

The finalized book will have seventeen chapters. Seven chapters have been written and peer-reviewed by congregational leaders, clergy, and denominational leaders. For the to-be-written chapters, I have placed (TBW) in place of page numbers and provided a brief description to give a fuller perspective into the book's direction as part of the Launch Plan.

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<sup>3</sup> DigitalSynopsis.com, "The Psychology of Colors in Marketing," Digital Synopsis, October 6, 2016, Accessed October 1, 2022, <https://digitalsynopsis.com/advertising/psychology-of-colors-in-marketing/>.

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(Examining the psychology of othering and fear)

FIGURE 2: TABLE OF CONTENTS, PART 1

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*What Do You Mean Everyone Isn't Like Me? ----- TBW*  
 (Examining personality types)

**Chapter Eleven**

*The Greatest Single Cause of Atheism in the World*  
*Today is Political Idolatry----- TBW*  
 (Examining the social science of political ideology)

**Chapter Twelve**

*We Should Be Able to Accomplish Something by*  
*Screaming at Each Other ----- TBW*  
 (Examining conflict management styles)

**Chapter Thirteen**

*Sometimes It Feels Like I'm Talking to a Wall ----- TBW*  
 (Examining communication styles)

**Chapter Fourteen**

*Absences Strengthen Love, But Presence Sharpens It. ----- TBW*  
 (Examining the power of presence)

**Chapter Fifteen**

*Okay, Boomer! ----- TBW*  
 (Examining the dynamics of generational gaps)

**Chapter Sixteen**

*Congregations That Play Together, Stay Together ----- TBW*  
 (Examining the critical role of fun)

**Conclusion**

*The Liminal Church ----- TBW*

FIGURE 3: TABLE OF CONTENTS, PART 2

## The Book's Four Main Facets

There are four main facets of each chapter: (1) Primary learning content; (2) Chapter recap; (3) Personal introspection; (4) Group design exercise.

The primary learning content of the book typically begins with a whimsical story or interactive exercise to introduce the reader to the proceeding subject matter. Then, from chapter to chapter, there is a balance of examining social and cognitive science through a theological lens as it applies to a congregational organization.

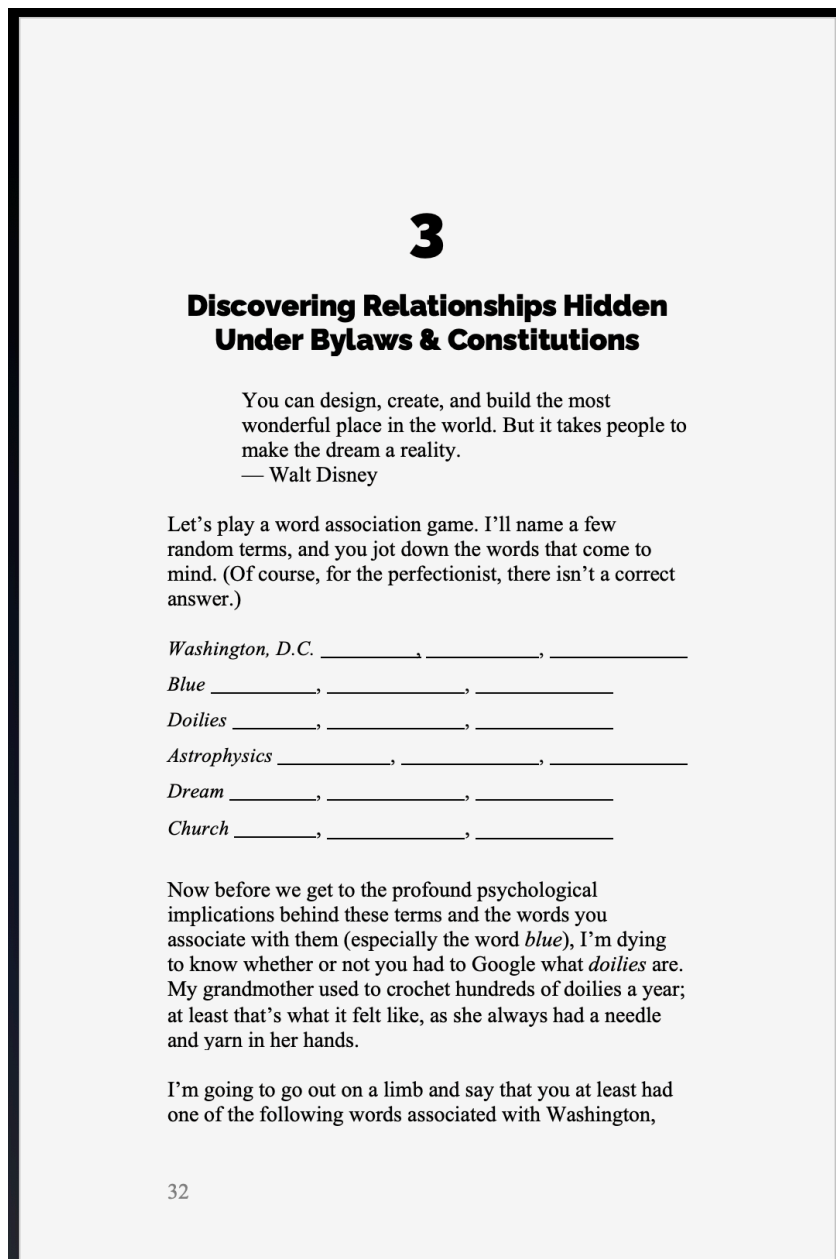


FIGURE 4: SAMPLE CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

The chapter recap provides readers with a brief summary of the chapter's primary content and introduces the next chapter's central concept. Recognizing that everyone processes information differently, I want to give readers the critical idea(s) to take away from a given chapter.

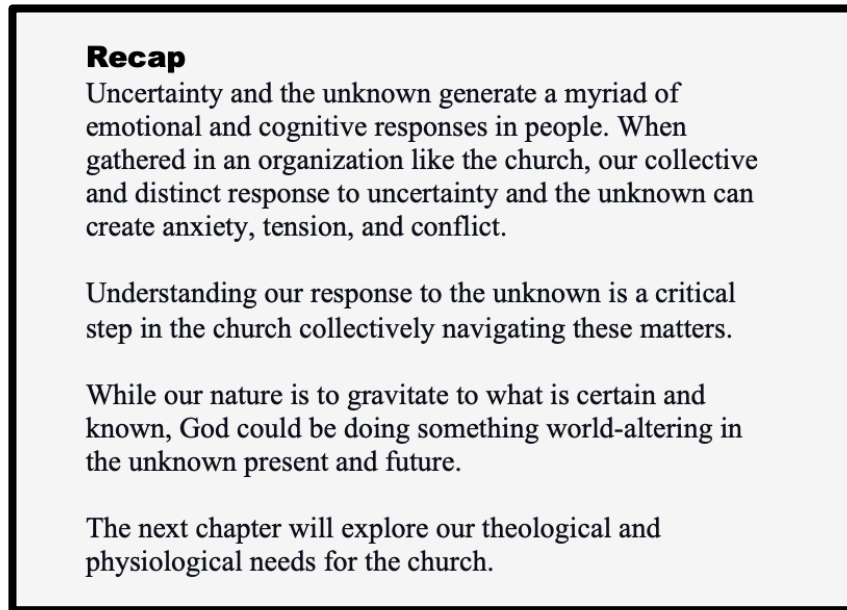


FIGURE 5: CHAPTER RECAP

Following the chapter recap, I have incorporated a section for personal introspection. Tapping into the various learning styles, I want to provide space for the multiple ways of processing information and a method for readers to begin to think about what the content means for them on a personal basis.

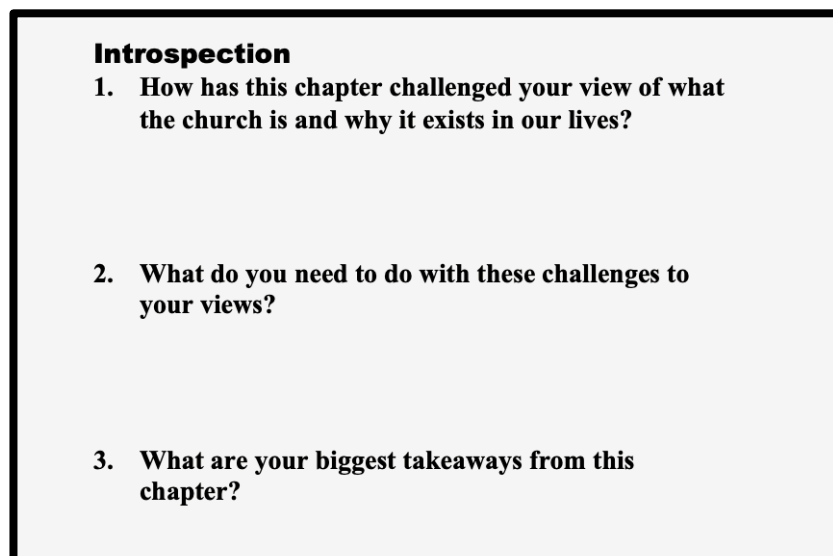


FIGURE 6: PERSONAL INTROSPECTION

Finally, incorporated into each chapter is a group design exercise to put into practice what the readers have learned, moving their church from the theoretical to the practical. Recognizing that

not every congregational leader has experienced leading interactive workshops, I provided a step-by-step guide from set-up to concluding the exercise.

Moving through each exercise, the congregation is building more robust and agile relational dynamics within your church. Participants ought to consider these exercises as equally crucial to the journey as the chapter content.

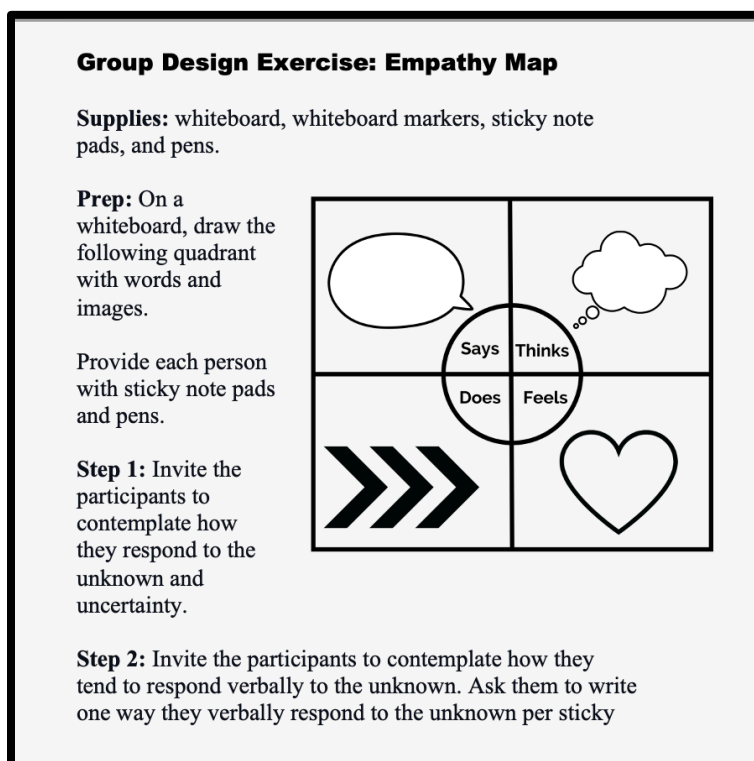


FIGURE 7: GROUP DESIGN EXERCISE  
SAMPLE

## How to Use This Book

Warning! This book is not filled with simple solutions or shallow platitudes. That would be too easy.

As you know from your everyday life, relationships take time and work. Our connection together as local members of the body of Christ is equally a labor of love, requiring intentionality, effort, openness, vulnerability, and grace.

For some congregational leaders, it might make sense in their context to read, discuss, and engage in the group design exercises with their church leadership team. While other church leaders can use this book as a churchwide study, committing to weekly conversations and creative design exercises.

## Chapter Samples

Incorporated into this project showcase is the front cover, title page, table of contents, preface, and four chapters that best capture the essence, purpose, and style of *The Liminal Church*.



# THE LIMINAL CHURCH

**Why Navigating the Thresholds  
Between Us Leads to Thriving**



**By Andy Hale**

# **THE LIMINAL CHURCH**

**Why Navigating the Thresholds  
Between Us Leads to Thriving**

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**Andy Hale**

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## Preface

### *Never Thought I'd Work for the Church*

When I received my calling to the ministry at the age of 14, there was one thing I knew with great certainty: I did not want to work in the church! After all, the church was made up of people. And I perceived people, well, as annoying and complicated.

Over the next six years, I lived out my calling in a myriad of expressions, whether preaching revivals, serving in global missions, leading worship, teaching rock climbing and rappelling at a Christian outdoor camp, or launching a campus ministry. I made it my mission to only work alongside the church rather than in it because I retained strong opinions about church people.

In the summer of 2005, I spent three months in Sri Lanka following the devastating tsunami on December 26, 2004. I lived with Pastor Marshall and his family, working alongside him to clear the catastrophic remains of people's lives and build new homes. Throughout the daily experience of seeing Marshall commit to a long-term presence, genuinely love people, and receive their love in return, I repented from my self-righteous beliefs that I was better than Jesus' church and its members.

When I returned home, I circulated my resumé to various churches, receiving my first calling from First Baptist Church of Clayton, North Carolina. For nearly two decades, I have served the church in diverse contexts and roles. And through its many expressions, joys, and struggles, I can still unequivocally say that I love the church. And in doing so, I have even come to love myself with all of my complexities, annoying tendencies, and fallacies.

Even now, as the church bears the aches and pains of transformation, learning from its past yet disquieting its future, I still hold hope for the church. After all, it is the incarnational manifestation of Jesus' body in God's beautiful world.

### *Congregations Need a New Set of Tools*

Culture is rapidly changing and grows more divided. The local church, comprised of various expressions and people groups, is dealing with these changes and divisions in equally diverse ways. How we see and deal with these changes and differences has a lot to do with the complexity and diversity as God's image bearers; something we will get to later on in chapter three.

Our tendency as the faithful is to pray about it. Yes, I believe prayer the first, next, and final step in figuring out what divides us. I believe in prayer and utilizing our God-given brains.

One way to understand our response to change, along with people different from us, is through cognitive and social psychology. Can we see these modern advancements as a gift from God to better understand how the human brain, emotions, and social interactions work?

This book attempts to look at social and cognitive science through a theological lens to enhance the church's capacity to **strive forward more faithfully together into a brilliant future.**

### ***How to Use This Book***

Warning! This book is not filled with simple solutions or shallow platitudes. That would be too easy.

As you know from your everyday life, relationships take time and work. Our connection together as local members of the body of Christ is equally a labor of love, requiring intentionality, effort, openness, vulnerability, and grace.

Each chapter is designed to introduce a distinct relational dynamic, providing critical background and looking at it theologically. At the end of each chapter is a space to personally reflect on what you've read.

Incorporated into each chapter is a group design exercise to put into practice what you have learned, moving your church from the theoretical to the practical. Each activity has a step-by-step guide for group leaders. Moving through each exercise, you are building more robust and agile relational dynamics within your church. Consider these exercises as equally crucial to the journey as the chapter content.

For some congregational leaders, it might make sense in your context to read, discuss, and engage in the group design exercises with your church leadership team. While for other leaders, you can use this book as a churchwide study, committing to weekly conversations and creative design exercises.

# 1

## Change Is Like Death, but It Doesn't Have to Be

Change is like death. You don't know what it looks like till you're standing at the gates.  
– Ian Malcolm, *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*

Do you remember exactly where you were and what you were doing when the COVID-19 stay-at-home order was issued?

I was in Washington, D.C., at an advocacy summit. Along with other participants, I had spent the last several days meeting with my representatives, talking to them about why it is past due to pass legislation that would combat our state's rankings as the worst in the nation on upward mobility, education, environmental degradation, and poverty.

The summit abruptly ended, with people scrambling to purchase hand sanitizer, medical masks, and book flights home. On my return flight I noticed one of the state representatives, who had just contributed to a cable news interview about the “overdramatization of the pandemic’s reach” hours earlier, wearing two face masks and sanitizing every inch of his seat.

I cannot recall another moment in recent history when it felt like the entire globe came to a screeching halt. Every person on this planet was affected by the virus, whether emotionally, psychologically, medically, economically, educationally, politically, socially, or spiritually.

Many dealt with these experiences in isolation. As we remained home, there was a deeply felt social, emotional, and spiritual separation from our friends, community, way of living, work, belief about how the world works, and the church.

### A COVID Closed-Door Policy

The church, much like many other sectors, was uniquely impacted, with the long-term effects not known for years, if not decades.

But for many churches, the COVID-19 pandemic revealed deeper issues that may have remained buried had such a moment not demanded abrupt changes to their way of existing.

Much like the rest of the world that was asked to go home and close its doors, far too many churches were already closing their proverbial doors to the new things God is doing, the greater community around them, and the relational connections among members.

### The Anti-Vaxxers of Congregation Change

For many congregations, ideas of adaptation, novelty, and innovation immediately flood their minds with feelings of apprehension, anxiety, fear, and a twinge of resistance. That’s a difficult

place to be in, grieving what once was, struggling to understand what is, and floundering in apprehension about what comes next.

Believe it or not, the complex nature of facing such things is why, for many churchgoers, their goal was just to survive the pandemic experience so that their church could return to doing precisely what it was doing before this whole mess started. But for anyone who has faced even the smallest of challenges, you know that things never go back exactly to what they were before.

But what if the tension that exists between what is familiar and what is unknown is exactly where the church needs to be?

What if it is right there that the church has an extraordinary opportunity to quantify what still works and open itself to the possibility of creating something transformatively new?

## **Liminal, a Threshold or Space Between**

The church is in this in-between space of where we have been, where we are, and where we are going.

One word that can define these experiences is liminal.

Liminal comes from the Latin *limen*, meaning “threshold” or “space between.” It was originally associated with the stone placed at the threshold of a door, marking the crossing from one space into the other.<sup>1</sup>

Often described as an inbetweenness, liminality is that space between where you are and where you are going, the present and the future, the old and the new, or the familiar and unknown.

From a theological perspective, the liminal journey is a spiritual process of letting go of what is known and familiar in order to discover what new thing God is doing. Moving through these spaces creates profound experiences of anxiety, worry, fear, formation, discovery, creativity, and hope. And yet, the liminal journey is one of faith, knowing that God’s Spirit is at work within and around us, guiding us into the unknown.

As people of faith, we might consider the story of the Hebrews, fresh off their liberation from servitude in Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, the promise of the land flowing with milk and honey, only to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. What happened along the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land? What happened in the period of the Wandering?

The liminal journey is not one of solitude but companionship through the church. Liminality is not only the threshold of where we have been and where we are going, but it also encapsulates gaps that naturally exist within a relational organization, such as the church.

The church is comprised of people. And last time I checked, people are a complexity of differing beliefs, identities, personalities, communication styles, cognitions, and so much more. Such dynamics create emotional, communicative, and social gaps, resulting in strained relationships,



competing interests, and mistrust. Therefore, it is no wonder why many churches cannot get from where they are to where God is leading.

Do you remember that inspiring passage from Paul's letter to the Galatians (3:26-29) in which he proclaimed that in Christ there is no Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, enslaved person nor free? With this statement, Paul declares that there is openness, dissolving of barriers, the tearing down of indifferences, and a call for unity within the Kingdom of God.

But you can only wonder what the circumstances were like in Galatia that compelled him to charge them with inclusivity and unity. Where did their relationship to one another fit on the scale of toxic to healthy? Imagine the tension in some of their conversations. And you thought your church's business meetings were unnerving and a journey through a minefield.

Churches and individuals cannot be forced upon the liminal journey. Instead, each congregation must decide whether or not they will step into the space between what is now and not yet. In turn, each church member must decide whether they open or close the relational threshold between self and others.

And like every relationship, when faced with stress, disagreement, anxiety, and uncertainty, church members respond uniquely and diversely based on their personality, conflict management style, communication habits, and unconscious beliefs about other people and circumstances.

The biggest asset of a local church is its people. However, its most significant challenge is how those people relate to one another and their circumstances.

Therefore, churches will either retreat or step toward a liminal space based on their recognition of their members' responses and any apprehension about discontinuity, disruption, and uncertainty. The liminal journey can unveil creative and innovative potential for the future by revealing and reaffirming unforeseen giftedness, assets, passions, resources, and ideas that the church once thought impossible.

## **Understand, Navigate, and Leverage the Liminality**

Simply put, churches can thrive when they understand, navigate, and leverage the liminality existing between people, the community, and where God is leading.

This interactive book is designed for ministers and congregational leaders as a think-tank resource to explore the relational dynamics that can lead to thriving within a church.

Each chapter will introduce leaders to a particularly challenging aspect of church dynamics and concludes with practical reflection questions and exercises designed to elicit action when navigating the liminal journey with their church.

As we peel back the layers of what makes people and their relationships so complex, such as our biases, communication styles, core identities, and conflict management types, we will also explore our capacity for belonging, connection, trust, and play.

This book aims to build a greater sense of confidence in your abilities to understand and navigate the liminality existing not only in the relationships between church members but also in the complex relationships you have as a leader within the congregation.

*In my two upcoming books, *The Liminal Church, Volume II* and *III*, I will navigate the threshold between where we are and where God is leading, and examine the threshold between our church and the greater community.*

By equipping congregations with practical resources to understand and navigate liminality, churches will experience enhanced relationships, leading to a greater level of trust and respect, more profound formation, enriched shared values, and clarity of vision to step forward into an undetermined future.

You are the church's liminal guide through this journey as it brings about the best and most anxious side of your people, leading them toward a brighter future in what God has in store for you all.

Are you ready to step across the threshold between where you are and where you are going? Are you eager to lead the congregation entrusted to your care from the familiar into the thrilling unknown?

## Introspection

**On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your confidence level in leading your church on this liminal journey.**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Complete Immobilization		Figuring Out a Way		Thriving in Chaos

**On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your congregation's potential ability to journey through liminal spaces.**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Complete Immobilization		Figuring Out a Way		Thriving in Chaos

**Circle which of the following relational dynamics might be a challenge for your church members:**

Communication  
Conflict Management  
Unconscious Bias  
Identity  
Self-Awareness  
Emotional Intelligence  
Theological Difference  
Belonging

Self-Differentiation  
Personality Differences  
Trust  
Practicing Presence  
Practicing Play  
Political Ideologies  
Confirmation Bias

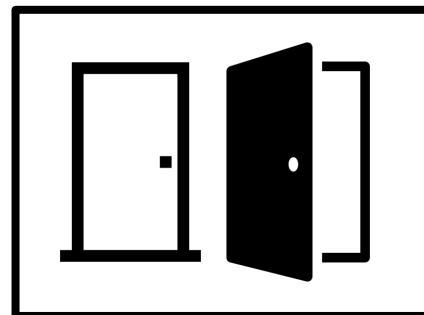
**Write a brief reflection of your apprehensions and hopes for the liminal journey.**

### **Group Design Exercise: Open & Closed Doors**

**Supplies:** whiteboard, whiteboard markers, sticky note pads, and pens.

**Prep:** On a whiteboard, draw two types of doors side by side: 1) Closed, 2) Open. Leave enough space on each side of the doors for notes.

Break the large group into small groups of three to four people, providing groups with sticky note pads and pens.



**Step 1:** Invite participants to contemplate the relational dynamics that cause people to close the proverbial door to others within your church and other churches. Ask them to write one relational dynamic per sticky note, inviting them to add their stickies to the closed-door side of the whiteboard.

**Step 2:** Review all the responses without giving commentary. Then discuss and sort the responses with the following:

- Commonalities
- Outliers
- Surprises

**Step 3:** Ask the participants to write a brief response to the findings, inviting a few volunteers to share with the group.

**Step 4:** Invite participants to contemplate how the process of understanding, navigating, and leveraging relational liminality can lead to thriving. Ask them to write one response per sticky note, inviting them to add their stickies to the open-door side of the whiteboard.

**Step 5:** Review all the responses without giving commentary. Then discuss and sort the responses with the following:

- Commonalities
- Outliers
- Surprises

**Step 6:** Discuss the following with the group:

- What is one takeaway from this exercise?
- What is one hope you have for our liminal journey?
- What are some action steps we can take as a result of this chapter and exercise?

**Step 7:** Enter into a time of group prayer, explicitly naming the relational challenges at work within your congregation and hopes for the journey ahead.

# 2

## Into the Unknown

I've had my adventure; I don't need something new. I'm afraid of what I'm risking if I follow you into the unknown.

– Elsa of Arendelle, *Frozen 2*

What never ceases to amaze me is how much can be learned from children's movies. I probably was not ready to admit that as the *Frozen 2* soundtrack was ringing in my ears on the 967th time played in our home by my daughters. Mind you, this was just coming off the heels of the first *Frozen* movie's soundtrack playing on repeat again, and again, and again.

And yet, Elsa is not wrong, as I share the lyric's sentiment along many points of my vocational journey.

I remember telling two search committees, “No, thank you,” when they extended an offer for me to serve as their senior pastor. I knew there was a strong enough dissonance to turn down their request, but I honestly didn't know what was next.

Apparently, starting a church from scratch was next. When you are starting something new, there is a simultaneous feeling of excitement and insanity when you know you are being called but have no idea what it will look like nor how you will provide financially for your family's basic needs.

Eight years later, when the decision to *leave* that new church to transition 951 miles away from our family and home and lead an established congregation into an innovative future, a well of complex emotions and competing thoughts swirled inside of me. Will this work? Can our family adjust? Is the church willing to go with me toward something new? Can I even lead them there in a healthy way?

In my role as a congregational coach and consultant, I have journeyed alongside hundreds of ministers who were discerning what the next chapter of their lives would hold, considering a transition out of the established church and into a new church start, shifting ministerial roles, or leaving ministry altogether. We haven't even gotten started on the countless clergy I have coached through unimaginable conflict and challenging circumstances.

I can imagine you have experienced this as a minister, whether through your sense of calling to this vocation, where to serve, when is the right time to transition, and leading even the slightest of change—let alone radical change—within the church.

As congregational leaders, I'm sure you have experienced this as well. You have committed your life to follow Jesus and his church, but little did you know that the church is a complexity of

bylaws and constitutions, committee meetings, budgets, long-range planning, and an interpersonal minefield of conflict, personalities, and agendas.

## **The Gap between Competing Emotions**

Have you felt it? Have you ever felt simultaneously anxious and elated, inept and creative, or uncertain and hopeful?

This is an ever-present tension for many pastors and congregational leaders about what was, what is, and what will be. Typically, this tension hovers around God's leading, how we relate to each other, and how deep we connect with the community around us.

And while the answers are unclear, it feels as if thriving waits just on the edge of these questions.

But what if that tension you are experiencing, those emotions you are expressing, and the exciting uncertainty you are anticipating are precisely what leads to thriving? Would you still move forward into the unknown?

Out of his work, *The Rites of Passage*, anthropologist, and folklorist Arnold van Gennep, coined the term *liminality*. Van Gennep was exploring the concept of the cultural and human experience of passing from one stage of life into the next through rituals.

He argued, "Life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and to rest, and then to begin acting again, but in a different way."<sup>ii</sup>

## **Existential Questions We Can't Blame on COVID-19**

Before the COVID-19 pandemic was a twinkle in our eye, the church was already facing remarkably challenging existential questions.

We have all seen the symptoms unless we are in blissful denial: The aging buildings, the declining worship attendance, the shrinking budgets, the once-thriving but now floundering ministry programs, the dissonant connection between the church and greater community, and/or the fraying familiarity between member relationships.

Of course, these existential questions were typically masked by theological disagreements over identity politics, debates over budgetary issues, tension between staff members and church bullies, or clashes over menial things, such as where the church van should be parked when not in use. I seriously sat through multiple monthly business meetings where the church van's parking spot was the most contentious thing on the agenda.

Some have called this era *post church* or *post-Christian*, while others have said we are in a new Reformation. Whatever you want to call it, the church is at a fascinating crossroads in its history. After nearly 1,600 years of dominance within Western culture, the church no longer sits at the center of society.

Society might have appeared to be Christian for nearly 1,600 years, but the relationship between the church and culture has always been reciprocal. One gives more at times while the other one takes.

Most church historians agree that Christendom began during the Edit of Milan, 313 A.D., when the Roman emperor Constantine validated Christianity. From that moment, Western culture and the church were interlocked in a relationship of mutual influence.

For most of us who grew up in the United States, the church was literally in the center of most of our towns. As a result, many city planners affixed the primary church or churches around the city center, allowing the hustle and bustle of everyday life to take place around the church.

Yet, the dynamics of our towns and cities have changed. New areas have developed while once thriving areas struggle. City planners talk about these things in terms of urbanization, suburbanization, urban sprawl, and blight.

Many churches are no longer in the middle of a town's hustle and bustle but are a long commute from the life of a city. These are extraordinary symbols of how many people have literally and metaphorically moved away from the church as the center of their lives.<sup>iii</sup>

Today, Christianity can no longer claim the same populous within the greater society. Instead, we live in a time of religious plurality and competing worldviews.<sup>iv</sup>

There is no more extraordinary evidence of this moment than the rate of church closures in America. According to researchers, more churches are closing their doors than new ones opening them. For example, from 2010 to 2020, 75 to 150 congregations per week permanently closed.<sup>v</sup>

Another study denotes that fewer than half of Americans say they belong to a church, synagogue, or mosque which is the first time membership has fallen below the majority since Gallup began recording in the 1930s.<sup>vi</sup>

Many experts predict that the COVID-19 pandemic will hasten the deterioration of churches already on life support.

There are many reasons why we are where we are regarding people's relationships to religious institutions. However, this is not that kind of book. Instead, I want you and your congregation to lean into how the reality of this moment and others like it have affected you emotionally, psychologically, physiologically, socially, and spiritually.

## **Take a Deep Breath. Others Have Been Here Before**

I'm reminded of a story from the Book of Acts, chapter 16, in which Paul and his companions—fresh off the Jerusalem Council—succeed in bringing about Gentile inclusion and head out on a commission from the Apostles to return to the churches he had established for encouragement and renewal.

However, a curious thing happened in verse 7: the Spirit of God would not let them enter the region of Bithynia. My imagination has always gotten the better of me when I try to figure out how the Spirit of God did not let Paul and his companions move forward. Was there unexpected road construction? Were they walking in place with full force but unable to move forward like a cartoon character running in place? Or did Gandalf stand there, staff in arms, declaring, “You shall not pass”?

Whatever the case might have been, we can only imagine just how much of a difficult place this might have been for Paul and his companions. They were doing precisely what the Apostles of Jesus had discerned, voted, and commissioned him to do. These were the very men who had walked with Jesus, heard his teachings, and were leading his church. But apparently, they had gotten it wrong. This is not what God wanted. So, Paul was stuck at the threshold of what was supposed to be and what was now uncertain, unknown.

Take a deep breath, others have been here before.

## **Understanding Our Response to the Unknown**

The unknown raises a gamut of emotions, from disappointment to frustration, egotism to timidity, grief to anxiety, doubt to fear, or depression to paralysis.<sup>vii</sup> What’s fascinating about the human body is that these are natural psychological responses to the unknown.

Physiologically, our bodies respond to the unknown in various ways, including and not limited to increased heart rate, unregulated breathing, avoidance of the moment and people associated with it, loss of sleep, intestinal discomfort, chest tightness, and a surge of adrenaline resulting in that famous flight, fight, or freeze response.<sup>viii</sup>

If these are the diverse ways our bodies respond, imagine the emotional and physiological response to an organization, such as the church, when facing the unknown.

Anxiety, both within individuals and an organization, is genuine and complex. Our anxiety tells us a lot, not just about how we feel about a set of circumstances but our abilities to manage them.

Human beings have a fascinating relationship with change. While many are resistant to it, our brains are hardwired to embrace and resist it.

Organizational leadership scholar John Kotter argues that we have a two-channel system for responding to uncertainty: the survive and thrive channels. “The Survive Channel is activated by threats and leads to feelings of fear, anxiety, and stress. By contrast, the Thrive Channel is activated by opportunities and is associated with feelings of excitement, passion, joy, and enthusiasm.”<sup>ix</sup>

We all handle stress differently with coping mechanisms critical to our cognitive process, emotional intelligence, communication and conflict management style, and social interactions.

Acclaimed therapist, rabbi, and leadership consultant Edwin Friedman noted, “Chronic anxiety might be compared to the volatile atmosphere of a room filled with gas fumes, where any



sparkling incident could set off a conflagration, and where people would then blame the person who struck the match rather trying to disperse the fumes.”<sup>x</sup>

Every relational organization, such as the local church, has its way of dealing with anxiety associated with the unknown. According to Friedman, churches will respond with instinctual drive, herd toward what appears to be the most substantial ideas and voices, displace blame instead of talking about the actual cause, assume a quick-fix mentality, and/or lack well-differentiated leaders.

You have probably experienced some of these tactics within the church, whether maintaining the same annual calendar and programs with an “It’s not broke, don’t fix it mentality,” punting an issue to the next quarterly business meeting, coasting on the pastor’s inevitable retirement and hoping the next one will solve the problems, siding with the most vocal group because “No one else has a better idea,” or attacking the character of the messenger trying to guide them through challenging paradigm shifts.

## **Disruption Can Lead to Innovation**

Looking back at Acts 16, Paul and his companions traveled to Troas to rest for the night and figure out what to do next. That night, Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia begging him to come and help his people.

Paul faced a pivotal moment of faith. He could return to Jerusalem, back to what was familiar and certain. And yet, he chose to step into this unexpected liminal space.

Paul’s faithfulness led to an extraordinary moment of innovation and exponential growth for the church, plugging the Gospel deep into the heart of Europe. Within the first few chapters of this unexpected journey, thousands would come to Christ—only to see hundreds of thousands more because of Paul’s willingness to follow God to go beyond what he could see and imagine.

That same Spirit that stopped Paul and his companions, spoke through a vision of a man from Macedonia, and guided Paul into new possibilities, is the same Spirit of God that abides around, within, behind, and ahead of the church today.

When the church finds itself on the precipice of a liminal journey, we remember whose church this is and who will guide us through these uncertain times. When moments like the Macedonia vision come, we can be certain God is doing something. However, what God is doing will not be made clear until we allow ourselves to be shaped and formed into a new way of responding, processing, understanding, and acting.

This will be a difficult process. This liminal journey will touch every facet of our existence, mentally, emotionally, physically, socially, and spiritually. It will destabilize and disorient us, lure us back to old habits and comforts, and tempt us not to venture into the unknown. This journey will bring out the best and the worst of us, giving us all a reason not to trust, respect, and work with each other.

What comes next in this liminal journey has no certainty concerning the outcomes but rather an openness to contingency where ideas, events, and reality can be carried in different directions.<sup>xi</sup>

I am reminded of an exchange from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, in which Gandalf the Grey responds to Bilbo Baggins of the Shire's question of whether he would return from this great adventure of danger, dragons, and treasure: "No. And if you do, you will not be the same."

Now this is where your role as a leader becomes absolutely critical.

Friedman believed that the congregational leader's role is to understand and manage the church as a complex emotional unit, measuring the pulse of the organization's needs, expectations, anxiety, stress, and change.

And so, here we are, congregational leader. We are invited on a journey of liminality with God. If we go, we most certainly will never be the same. But what will happen if we stay?

Will we follow God into the unknown?

## Recap

Uncertainty and the unknown generate a myriad of emotional and cognitive responses in people. When gathered in an organization like the church, our collective and distinct response to uncertainty and the unknown can create anxiety, tension, and conflict.

Understanding our response to the unknown is a critical step in the church collectively navigating these matters.

While our nature is to gravitate to what is certain and known, God could be doing something world-altering in the unknown present and future.

The next chapter will explore our theological and physiological needs for the church.

## Introspection

On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your anxiety about uncertain circumstances.

1	2	3	4	5
Complete Immobilization		Figuring Out a Way		Thriving in Chaos

On a scale of 1 to 5, rate your perception of your congregation's anxiety level about the unknown future.

1	2	3	4	5
Complete Immobilization		Figuring Out a Way		Thriving in Chaos

**Circle the words associated with how you tend to respond to anxiety:**

Impatient	Indecisive	Headstrong
Uninvolved	Permissive	Aimless
Pessimistic	Argumentative	Nervy
Withdrawn	Naïve	Domineering
Intolerant	Depressed	Manipulative
Doubtful	Indifferent	Short-tempered
Changeable	Reluctant	Critical
Suspicious	Compromising	Fearful
Hopeful Other: _____		

**Circle the words associated with how your congregation tends to respond to anxiety:**

Impatient	Indecisive	Headstrong
Uninvolved	Permissive	Aimless
Pessimistic	Argumentative	Nervy
Withdrawn	Naïve	Domineering
Intolerant	Depressed	Manipulative
Doubtful	Indifferent	Short-tempered
Changeable	Reluctant	Critical
Suspicious	Compromising	Fearful
Hopeful Other: _____		

**Write a brief reflection about how you led during an anxious time in the life of your church.**

## Group Design Exercise: Empathy Map

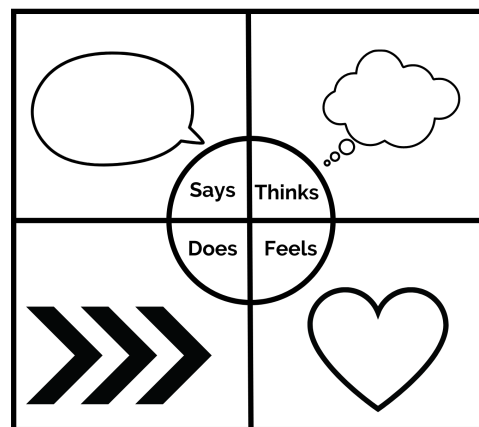
**Supplies:** whiteboard, whiteboard markers, sticky note pads, and pens.

**Prep:** On a whiteboard, draw the following quadrant with words and images.

Provide each person with sticky note pads and pens.

**Step 1:** Invite the participants to contemplate how they respond to the unknown and uncertainty.

**Step 2:** Invite the participants to contemplate how they tend to respond verbally to the unknown. Ask them to write one way they verbally respond to the unknown per sticky note, inviting them to add their stickies to the “Says” section.



**Step 3:** Invite the participants to contemplate how they tend to think in response to uncertainty. Ask them to write one way they mentally respond to uncertainty per sticky note, inviting them to add their stickies to the “Thinks” section.

**Step 4:** Invite the participants to contemplate how they tend to act in response to the unknown. Ask them to write one way they act in response to the unknown per sticky note, inviting them to add their stickies to the “Does” section.

**Step 5:** Invite the participants to contemplate what they tend to feel emotionally in response to uncertainty. Ask them to write one way they emotionally respond to uncertainty per sticky note, inviting them to add their stickies to the “Feels” section.

**Step 6:** Review each quadrant independently, examining each response without commentary. Then discuss and sort the responses with the following:

- Commonalities
- Outliers
- Surprises

**Step 7:** Discuss the following with the group:

- What is one thing you have learned about other members of our church?
- How might you respond differently knowing now the diverse ways our members respond to the unknown?
- What is one takeaway from this exercise?
- What are some action steps we can take as a result of this chapter and exercise?

# 3

## Discovering Relationships Hidden Under Bylaws & Constitutions

You can design, create, and build the most wonderful place in the world. But it takes people to make the dream a reality.

— Walt Disney

Let's play a word association game. I'll name a few random terms, and you jot down the words that come to mind. (Of course, for the perfectionist, there isn't a correct answer.)

*Washington, D.C.* \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

*Blue* \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

*Doilies* \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

*Astrophysics* \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

*Dream* \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

*Church* \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_

Now before we get to the profound psychological implications behind these terms and the words you associate with them (especially the word *blue*), I'm dying to know whether or not you had to Google what *doilies* are. My grandmother used to crochet hundreds of doilies a year; at least that's what it felt like, as she always had a needle and yarn in her hands.

I'm going to go out on a limb and say that you at least had one of the following words associated with Washington, D.C.: *Capitol, politics, politicians, representative, congress, president, Democrat, Republican, monuments, or Smithsonian*. You might also have a few expletives associated with these words that the publisher might not be fond of printing.

What's fascinating about each of these words is that there are dozens, and for some, hundreds, of things one can associate with them.

### Words Tell the Story of Our Beliefs

The great father of analytical psychology, Carl Jung, believed that word association gives us insight into an individual's worldview. He argued that words trigger an unconscious process that dictates our cognitive and emotional response associated with how we see and relate to ourselves, others, and the world. Called *Associational Method*, Jung developed a 100-question word association test to prove our unconsciousness' effects on our thoughts, emotions, and actions.

“These subliminal aspects of everything that happens to us may seem to play very little part in our daily lives. But in dream analysis, where the psychologist is dealing with expressions of the unconscious, they are very relevant, for they are the almost invisible roots of our conscious thoughts,” Jung emphasized.<sup>xii</sup>

So, with this deeper understanding of what’s at play behind word association, let’s examine your response to the term *church*.

*Congregation, pews, hymns, worship, tithing, God’s house, stained-glass, faith, the Lord’s Table, tradition, missions, or discipleship* are most associated with the word *church*.

Again, according to Jung, how we conceptualize something is deeply connected to our unconscious ideas, feelings, beliefs, and experiences, directly influencing our behavior toward ourselves, people, or organizations.<sup>xiii</sup>

Therefore, consider why *these* are the words we associate with the church. And why does our first impulse not include words such as *fellowship, community, family, or relationships*?

## **Here Is the Church, There Is the Steeple...**

Do you remember learning that funny hand gesture in children’s church that went something like: Here is the church, there is the steeple, open the doors and see all the people!

Theologically, we talk about the church being the body of Christ and God’s people. However, do not many, if not most, people treat the church as an institution, an organization, a building, or a place?

And rightly so, for the New Testament has a word for this way of addressing the church. *Ekklesia*, one of the more common words used to talk about “the church,” is a technical term that means assembly, council, or congregation. It describes the distinct local churches that are part of something bigger. The *ekklesia* is where people assemble to worship, pray, study, partake in the Eucharist, and minister together.

But the New Testament has another word for the church. Acts 2:42-47 might best capture it, as Luke describes the early church in this way:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (NIV)

Among the practices listed in Acts 2, a very distinct word is used here. It’s the word *koinōnia*, translated as fellowship.

Readers see the mutual participation in speech, listening, thinking, and experiencing togetherness, described as having everything in common (2:44) with one heart and mind (4:32) and everything in common. One might marvel at their togetherness by sharing their resources (4:32) and selling their property and possessions to give to those in need (2:45, 4:34).

The biblical picture is of a mutual sharing of self, with the group's welfare as the priority, reflecting the church's spiritual maturity. As a result of its *koinōnia*, the church grew daily (2:47).

One could argue that Luke was merely writing about the Jerusalem church in hyper-flattering language to create an ideal example for all his readers: "They were the best, and you should be like them too." It would not be uncommon for ancient Greco-Roman writers to create a utopian image of their society or community.

And yet, outside of this particular passage and similarly themed excerpts from Acts, we find instances of the mutual sharing of values, property, resources, beliefs, and life throughout the New Testament epistles.

Out of the rich history of Greek philosophy, we derive the term *koinōnia*, which was associated with equality through the idea of friendships that shared all things, including goods, mindset, and love.<sup>xiv</sup> That is why in the purest expression, the church's fellowship is about living life well together, breaking bread in each other's homes, supporting each other's businesses, enjoying shared interests, and responding to the needs around us.

For the church, it is not just a shared belief in Jesus that forms a community, but the incarnational expressions of life ordained by the Spirit of God for the excellent work of redeeming God's world. Through the Spirit, the mundane acts of breaking bread and conducting business transform into purposeful actions of fellowship among followers of Jesus.

From a theological perspective, *koinōnia* is an incarnational expression of God's presence in the world. As ministry scholar Andrew Root put it, "To follow the incarnate One is to be person one to another, trusting that when we indwell each other, when we are human beings one to another, we are sharing in the life of God."<sup>xv</sup> In this way, the fellowship comprises active participants in an open space of vulnerability, brokenness, restoration, suffering, healing, celebration, and growth.

But again, I return to my previous question: Why isn't this our first notion of how we define the church? And why is it, if we are brutally honest, that we can't even imagine our current church living out the type of *koinōnia* we see in Acts 2? We might even think it is absurdly impossible, don't we?

## **Nothing Unites the Church Like Zombies**

Years ago, when I was pastoring a new church start, our central focus was on trying to foster authentic relationships within the church. So, we decided to posture ourselves so that we were open to all the ways and possibilities of this vision becoming a reality.

One of the most unusual ways that happened was because of zombies. Yes, that should sound as strange as it was experienced.

After worship one Sunday, my wife and I were chatting with a new couple when the conversation turned to AMC's show, *The Walking Dead*. The couple was shocked to hear that a pastor and his wife watched the show religiously on Sunday nights.

On a whim, we invited the couple to join us that night to watch the show, and they accepted. And the next week, we asked another couple and then another. So pretty soon, there were 10 of us who faithfully gathered every Sunday just before the show aired to catch up on life and then watch it together.

We did this for nearly three years, resulting in some of the most meaningful friendships of my life, all thanks to zombies. So it is no wonder that this same group of people was the first to respond and be present when someone in the group was experiencing the struggles of infertility, a miscarriage, the sale of a home falling through on the closing day, toxic family dynamics, and so much more.

## **Made for Relationships, Theologically and Physiologically**

At its core, the church is about relational connection. We were designed this way, theologically and physiologically.

The opening chapters of Genesis reveal an incredible picture of God's creative power. Each day of creation closes with "God saw that it was good." In fact, at the end of it all, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good indeed" (Genesis 1:31 CSB).

The only thing God observed that was not good was the man living alone. "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper corresponding to him'" (2:18).

So too, as we are made in the image of God, we see the perfect relationship that exists within God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

But have you ever considered that bearing God's image goes far beyond its theological implications?

Physiologically, we are made to connect with others. In fact, over the last several years, there has been some fascinating research into the brain's response to social connection. Our brain is an entity ruled by a series of fundamental needs. Sociability is one of them.

One of the first areas to react is the medial prefrontal cortex. At the same time, this part of the brain is also associated with the pain related to being social creatures, such as rejection, loss, feeling unlovable or disconnected, and not belonging.

As one researcher noted, "But there's another much more profound, more mysterious, and fascinating part of the brain known as the temporal-parietal junction, a part of the brain where the temporal and parietal lobe come together. Neuroscientists tell us this is where our judgments



unfold. It's where our most abstract, most complex, and sometimes most inexplicable cognitive processes occur."<sup>xvi</sup>

According to cognitive researchers, when we feel strong, meaningful relational connections, ones of mutual sharing, our brain begins to light up like a Christmas tree.<sup>xvii</sup> What's happening physiologically within our brains is quite fascinating.

When we feel like we are around people we can trust, our brain releases the chemical oxytocin. This neurotransmitter plays a significant role in building stronger relational connections with others. According to organizational anthropologist Judith E. Glaser, "Sharing triggers the release of oxytocin — our bonding hormone, which activates higher levels of trust — and creates a positive, virtuous cycle."<sup>xviii</sup>

Until recently, we had no idea how the brain responds to healthy relationships, ones in which people have a strong sense of belonging. Researchers Tristen K. Inagaki and Naomi I. Eisenberger wanted to examine the neurological and physical effects of social belonging. And so, they had participants lie inside an fMRI scanner while reading notes about themselves written by someone personally connected to them and also reading statements of general facts describing themselves such as, "You have blue eyes."

As you can imagine, general statements of fact brought about no tremendous neurological or physical activity. However, when the positive messages were read, participants' neural and physical activity were highly activated. Together, these results suggest a potential mechanism by which social warmth, the contented subjective experience of feeling loved and connected to other people, has become such a pleasant experience and lends credence to the description of connection experiences as "heartwarming," concluded the researchers.<sup>xix</sup>

Despite our inherited understanding of the church as a place or institution, we are built for interconnected relationships. That's a little less poetic than John Donne's "No man is an island entire of itself," but it captures the same truth.<sup>xx</sup> Namely, God wired us to live in relationships with others.

## **Crossing the Liminal Divide Through Strong Connections**

We are created to be in strong and healthy relationships with one another.

And yet, the people of the church today can probably think of the many ways that the liminal spaces between us are formed and fortified, whether our political ideologies, core belief systems, theological bents, and doctrinal dogmatism. Then, when you toss in our lack of understanding of what makes each of us unique, there are clearly relational boundaries between us. This leads to the myriad of complications that come from our different ways of processing information, dealing with conflict, and communicating with one another.

What if one of the greatest obstacles for the church today was not the ongoing lack of adaptation to the rapidly changing world around it or even the amplified constraints of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, but the institution itself? The nature of the local congregation has so dramatically shifted from its original theological purpose in the lives of Jesus' followers that its current

organizational existence might hinder its ability to thrive. The ecclesial process of creating structure, policies, and procedures for ministries and programs can often overshadow the purpose of their existence in the first place—connecting people together.

The hope of congregational thriving might be a simple, yet profound, reminder of who we are together, not in the institutional sense, but a deeply held theologically-relational sense. Despite all the necessary complexities of the congregational organization, with all of our organized programs, traditions, policies, and bylaws, we are still called together to know one another, share life, and respond to our needs. The cosmic capacity of the church still comes down to *koinōnia*, authentic relationships bound in community.

What if what the church needs now more than ever is not a dramatic rebranding or some creatively innovative approach but a reevaluation of who it is and why it exists as a fellowship or community. And what if the first step of crossing the liminal divide begins with discovering the essential things that bring us together?

When looking back at Paul's urge for the Galatians to see that, through Jesus, there is no division of social or economic status, gender, race, or ethnicity, but a beautiful fusion of diverse individuals in the family of God (Galatians 3:27-29). This was not a call to ignore our intricate differences but to embrace them through our mutually binding connection found in Jesus. He made this same plea in Colossians 3:11, pointing to the centrality of Jesus above any relational obstacles.

We know we are called to unite in Christ. The problem, more often than not, is our inability to see each other through the eyes of Jesus as fellow human beings with an array of stories and experiences, likes and interests, contexts and cultures, wants and needs, passions and desires.

For some congregations, this lack of relational familiarity with one another might come as a result of their size and scope, while others due to their institutionalization, and for other churches it is due to their past conflicts and present trauma. Each church is a jumble of complexities that have created all the psychological reasons to embrace the thresholds between members.

Today, I'm not asking you to untangle these complexities but to lean into new possibilities, beginning with getting to know the other members of your congregation on a more profound level by becoming more others-aware. And what if, in the process of learning more about others, we also learn more about ourselves?

"Cultivating self-awareness is a skill, one that is particularly important, as self-awareness forms the foundation of all meaningful growth. An individual's understanding of their unique strengths emanates from self-awareness," noted organizational strategists Amy and Rick Simmons.<sup>xxi</sup> Therefore, if we can agree on the impact of self-awareness, can we embrace the possibilities of others-awareness?

And it is as simple as, "Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. Let me tell you about my favorite \_\_\_\_\_."

The great priest and author Henri Nouwen beautifully put it best when he wrote:



4. As an individual, how do these takeaways translate into action?

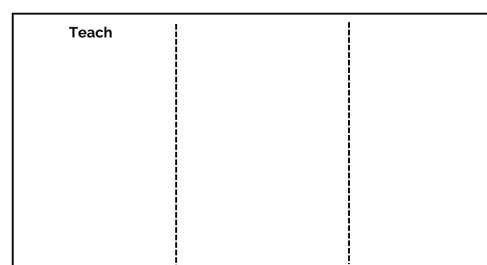
5. For your church, how might your takeaways translate into action?

### Group Design Exercise: 3 x 3

**Supplies:** whiteboard, whiteboard markers, sticky note pads, and pens.

**Prep:** On a whiteboard, create three sections using two dividing dotted lines, and write the word “Teach” at the top of the left section.

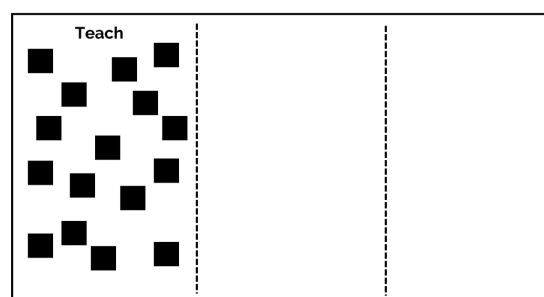
Break the large group into small groups of three to four people, providing groups with sticky note pads and pens.



**Step 1:** Invite the participants to contemplate things they know a lot about or love to do. Permit the group not to feel obligated to give a churchy answer, such as, "I know a lot about the naked prophet Isaiah." We all love Jesus here, but the point of the activity is to make new connections beyond our shared journey with Him.

For example, I dork out over Medieval European, Middle Eastern, and Western Asian history, or I know a great deal about the University of Alabama's football legacy, being that my father graduated from the school and I didn't have a choice in who I was going to cheer for collegiately.

**Step 2:** Invite the participants to now consider if they were to take what they know a lot about or love to do and were allowed to teach a class on these things. Invite the participants to write down the topic they'd love to teach in a class on sticky notes, one topic per sticky, and up to three stickies.



**Step 3:** After the three topics have been written onto their sticky notes, invite the participants to briefly share their ideas with their small group.

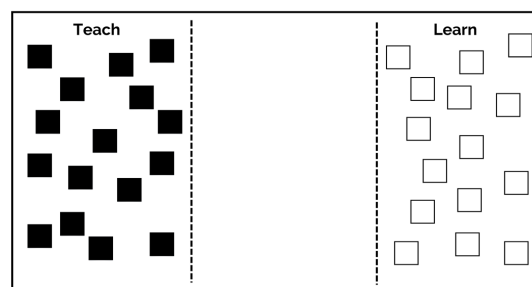


**Step 4:** Invite participants to place their stickies in the “Teach” section. Once all the stickies are set, briefly read them out loud to the entire group.

**Step 5:** Write the word “Learn” at the top of the right section, and invite the participants to contemplate now a topic, skill, or interest that they’d love to learn more about or learn to do. For example, I’d love to know more about the mysterious art of underwater basket

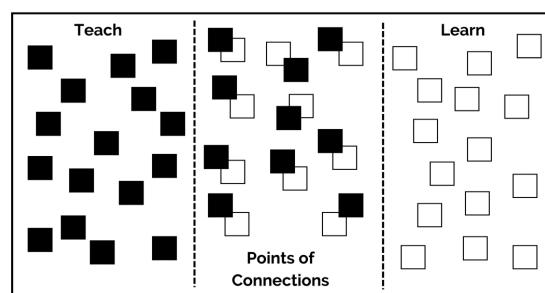
weaving. Trust me; it’s a thing.

**Step 6:** Invite the participants to consider now if they were to take what they want to learn more about and were allowed to take a class on these things. Invite the participants to write down the topic they’d love to take a course on sticky notes, one topic per sticky, and up to three stickies.



**Step 7:** After writing the three topics on their sticky notes, invite the participants to briefly share their ideas with their small group.

**Step 8:** Invite participants to place their stickies in the “Learn” section. Once all the stickies are set, briefly read them out loud to the entire group.



**Step 9:** Write the phrase “Points of Connection” at the bottom of the middle section, and invite the participants to help you bridge the points of connection between similar ideas shared, both in the “Learn” and “Teach” sections. Once the connection points are made, bring those stickies together, creating clusters of similar ideas. For example, someone might have expressed an interest in learning how to utilize their smartphone better,

while someone else expressed the ability to teach a class on changing technology.

**Step 10:** Discuss the following with the group:

- What can we take away from this activity?
- What is one thing you have learned about the other members of our church?
- What does this activity teach us about our points of commonality beyond membership in this church?
- What action steps can we take as a result of this chapter and exercise?

**Note:** This exercise is a tremendous building block for creating shared interest groups and events within your church that has the capacity to foster new relationships, strengthen existing connections, nurture intergenerational connections, and so much more. Later in the book, we

discuss how churches can learn to play together. The results from this activity have given you a blueprint for play moving forward.

# 4

## Excavating the Minefield We Didn't Know Was There

Most people are other people. Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation.

— Oscar Wilde

### LeBron or Michael?

It's a straightforward question: who is the greatest of all time, LeBron James or Michael Jordan?

I grew up in the era of the Chicago Bulls dynasty, when Michael Jordan's team won the NBA Finals year-in-year-out without much competition. Michael has six championships, while LeBron has four, but he played in the NBA Finals 10 times (at of this book's print date).

Is Michael truly greater than LeBron because of his number of championships? Could other things have influenced the generations that witnessed Jordan's run in the NBA? For example, Jordan was persistently on our TV screens and store shelves in the form of his endorsements from Nike, Gatorade, Hanes, Upper Deck Trading Cards, and *ProStars* (Yes, the 13-episode cartoon featuring Michael Jordan, Wayne Gretzky, and Bo Jackson, who used their athletic skills to save the world.)

Objectively speaking, the game of basketball is entirely different in the eras of Jordan and LeBron, and the level of competition has changed drastically.

If you grew up as a child of the '80s and '90s, can you remove the lens by which you see Michael in order to compare the players empirically? And what other bias might you have when it comes to this argument?

I'll use myself as an example. How does my propensity towards hating bandwagons teams coming into play with the Chicago Bulls and Michael Jordan? The evidence is clear through my disdain for teams, such as the Dallas Cowboys, the Atlanta Braves, and the New York Yankees? Would that not affect how I viewed the most extensive bandwagon team of the 1990s, the Chicago Bulls? Yes, I recognize there is a good chance that I just alienated some of my readers.

By the way, if we are indeed measuring the greatest of all time by championships, then King James and Air Jordan have nothing on the great Bill Russell, who retired with 11 titles.

### Becoming Consciously Aware of Our Unconscious

To avoid losing readers who could care less about sports, I have raised this very divisive topic to illustrate one of the most significant relational barriers within the church, our unconscious bias.

An unconscious or implicit bias is an unconscious association about a person, thing, or group caused by our brain's mental shortcuts.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Think about it this way. You are most likely familiar with your home and could go through it blindfolded. On the other hand, you are probably less or utterly unaware of how the house was made, what's going on behind the drywall, and where the plumbing runs. (Apologies to the builders and general contractors reading this book)

When you reframe it theologically, our unconscious bias is a byproduct of the cognitive system God embedded within us.

Psychology and cognitive science help us understand that we all have certain assumptions, prejudices, stereotypes, judgments, and predispositions that unconsciously shape how we see others, the world, and ourselves.

People's belief systems lurk under our visible communication and personality traits. "Humans are not naturally rational. Information overload is exhausting and confusing, so we filter out the noise. We only see parts of the world. We tend to notice things that are repeating, whether there are any patterns or outliers, and we tend to preserve memory by generalizing and resorting to type," argued Dr. Agarwal, a researcher who helps unravel the unconscious bias.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Humans are a complicated and complex system of neurons, muscle, flesh, blood, and water. According to cognitive and psychological research, we are so complex that our brain processes over 11 million pieces of information per second. And yet, our conscious attention has a capacity of about 40 bits per second.<sup>xxv</sup> So, 40 bits out of 11 million is 10,999,940 bits of information you and I process but don't notice every second.<sup>xxvi</sup> In other words, our minds make unconscious decisions to help manage that overload so that our conscious mind can process more meaningful choices.

Our unconscious biases, beliefs, and opinions were not formed overnight but were part of our rearing as a child in a particular context. Along the way, that unconscious bias is reinforced by our normative social groups, the media we consume, and the education we receive.

Therefore, our unconscious bias is primarily involuntary and independent of working memory. Agarwal labels this "System 1," which means we do not have time to access our cognitive rational thinking. It is rapid, more subjective, value, context, and domain-specific.<sup>xxvii</sup>

Our unconscious bias is continuously shaped by experience, background, culture, and specified religious orientation. Without realizing it, these things shape our beliefs, opinions, values, and thinking.

On the other hand, "System 2 is more rational and logical. It is mostly voluntary processing of information, detached from emotions and more controlled."<sup>xxviii</sup>

What is even more fascinating is evolutionary psychology has shown that the development of these systems is directly correlated with the need to survive and develop trust among a tribe or



community of people. This is where we get the concept and the social practice of tribalism, a gathering of like-minded people who tend to cut off those who do not fit in with the customs, traditions, and belief systems of the tribe.<sup>xxix</sup>

Agarwal argues, “Social norms underlie our gut instincts about people. Our default bias is associated with these social norms. Often bias is created when a particular object or person does not meet the normative standard in society, and our instinct is to view them with suspicion and to alienate or stigmatize them.”<sup>xxx</sup>

No matter how much we might like the idea of novelty, when immediately confronted with new ideas, our bodies kick in a stress response to this very unfamiliar situation.<sup>xxxi</sup> So long before you consciously think positively about the unknown nature of what you are experiencing, your unconsciousness responds with an alert system.

Our unconscious bias gives us instantaneous decisions and opinions on almost everything around us. The problem is that social and cognitive psychology has proven that our unconscious bias is often wrong, especially when it involves rational thinking. Our lives are a journey of walking completely unaware through a minefield of misconceptions and misjudgments.

### **How a Victim Became a “Terrorist-Sympathizer”**

In 2017, a man attacked 50 people on Westminster Bridge in London, killing four. The man was eventually shot and killed by the police.

In the days after the terrorist attack, a picture went viral. It wasn’t of the attacker or his victims but a woman walking across the bridge. The woman was Muslim and wearing a hijab, which bolstered anti-Islamic rhetoric on social media, declaring that this woman was indifferent, apathetic, and, at worst, enjoying the terrorist attack on the bridge. As you can imagine, for those who already have suspicions and distrust of Muslims, this woman’s image merely confirmed what they already believed.

Except, in the ensuing days when the woman was interviewed, the reporters found out the emotions the woman was expressing in the photo were of shock and abject horror as she experienced the attack’s violence, gore, and death. The image did not capture her strolling across the bridge but the bewildered stumble of a survivor, calling her family to assure them that she was safe but in shock.

If you are interested in the image that stirred so much controversy, visit <https://tinyurl.com/mv2aerct>.

### **Jesus Didn’t Get the Hometown Parade Most Expected**

Jesus ran into the unconscious biases of many communities and religious leaders he encountered. As a result, there are countless examples of Jesus healing the sick on the Sabbath, eating a meal with so-called sinners and tax collectors, setting the demon possessed free, and casting his lot with the town whore brought before him for condemnation. However, one of the places you least expect the display of an unconscious bias was Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth.

Luke 4:16-21 reports that right after the conception of his public ministry, Jesus returns home in which he gives an impassioned speech about God anointing him to proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and to set the oppressed free. This was Jesus' emphatic *why* statement that shaped the rest of the Gospel narrative around his ministry, words, and actions.

Except, not long after he finished it, someone in the crowd shouted, "Wait, isn't that Joseph's boy?" You can imagine the grumbles start to lift from the spectators, "You are going to do what?" "Proclaim what to who?" "Set who free?" "And how are you going to do all this? Didn't we see you recently making tables in your dad's carpentry shop?"

Luke 4:28-29 tells us that the grumbles turned to a heated debate which escalated to a lynch mob, as the crowd drove Jesus out of town intending to throw him off a cliff. Not exactly the hometown parade that most people expected for Jesus.

Mark makes a fascinating statement about this incident in Nazareth, stating, "Jesus could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith" (Mark 6:5-6). So, wait, Jesus was not able to do any miracles? And why is it that Jesus had impacted so many others but not those from Nazareth? Was it that he lacked the ability to do miracles in his hometown or that the people would not allow themselves to believe he could do miracles because they had fixed in their minds who Jesus was and what he was capable of?

But if we are honest, how would we have honestly responded if we were a citizen of Nazareth? If Jesus' hometown, consisting of peasants and marginalized folk, the very type of people his message was intended as a source of hope, could not get on board, how would the folks in the metropolitan areas respond? How would any of those who couldn't get on board with Jesus' theological shift respond?

Years later, Jesus ended up on a Roman cross because, to the first century Palestinian, he was a rebel heretic.

Do we have the same struggle with Jesus as the people from Nazareth? Are we so familiar with who we want Jesus to be and what we want his words to say that we cannot see him in a new way or allow him to do amazing things in our lives? Is that the tension we feel when someone says or does something that challenges our assumptions and deeply felt views?

Could it be that's why we have subconsciously alleviated the tremendous impact Jesus' words should have on our beliefs, economic worldview, political persuasions, opinions on social matters, and so much more?

And yet, Jesus' invitation is to follow him into continually changing our way of thinking and living. That's the literal interpretation of repentance.

## **And the Truth Shall. . .**

Sometimes, we struggle with the truth, especially when it unconsciously contradicts what we want to believe. At the moment that truth has the opportunity to change our lives, it is met with the full force of our unconscious bias against certain people based on their age, gender, sexuality, nationality, religious affiliation, political allegiance, or economic status. Our unconscious biases influence so much of the way that we view ourselves and others.

Have you ever thought to yourself, “I wonder why I look at those particular people that way,” “I wonder why I side with that political party without hesitation,” or “Why did I automatically assume that about those people?” Moreover, have you ever considered why certain people, contexts, and perspectives cause your anxiety level to rise, without much effort at all? For many people when their worldview is challenged, it feels like an attack on their personal identity, even causing them to harden their position.<sup>xxxii</sup>

But remember when Jesus said that you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free (John 8:32)? So how can we become more accustomed to a broader sense of truth in hopes of excavating our biases?

## **Does Anyone Ever Remember the Valedictorian's Speech? Yes!**

Several decades removed from my high school graduation, I could not tell who our class valedictorian was, nor what they spoke about at graduation. Does anyone remember the valedictorian's speech except their parents and best friends?

For the graduating class and their families of the Bell County High School, Kentucky, many are never to forget Ben Bowling's speech. After giving a memorable address, he concluded with this quote from Donald Trump, “Don't just get involved. Fight for your seat at the table. Better yet, fight for a seat at the head of the table.”

The crowd erupted in applause. But then Ben corrected his citation, reinforming the audience that the quote was, in fact, from Barack Obama. Jeers and boos rose from the crowd.

"I just thought it was a really good quote," he said. "Most people wouldn't like it if I used it, so I thought I'd use Donald Trump's name."<sup>xxxiii</sup>

## **The First Step Is Admitting We Have Biases**

We don't even have to comment on the graduation audience's response to Ben's quote and correction because our response to reading either of those former Presidents' names most likely brought about an emotional response. And you passed the test with flying colors. We just nudged an unconscious bias.

The first step in excavating our implicit biases is to recognize we have them. And as simple as it sounds, many people are unwilling to do it. As organizational psychologist Adam Grant put it, “My favorite bias is the ‘I'm not biased’ bias, which people believe they're more objective than others. It turns out that smart people are more likely to fall into this trap. The brighter you are, the harder it can be to see your own limitations.”<sup>xxxiv</sup>

We often do not question our unconscious biases because we are unaware of them. But there is hope: our implicit biases can be discovered, examined, and even reshaped!

Our brains are incredibly complex, and the implicit associations we form can be gradually unlearned through a variety of debiasing techniques.<sup>xxxv</sup>

Excavating our unconscious bias is coming to terms with the hidden truth that shapes our life. But, unfortunately, reexamining and rethinking our implicit bias feels like separating our soul from our body because it has become so interwoven with our brain functions. And that is why most people avoid this deep psychological and spiritual work.

And there is a real tension that exists between denial and acknowledgment. That tension develops into boundaries that create space between us and where God is leading, between you and members of your congregation. Since it requires openness, honesty, and vulnerability, most people would prefer their relationship with others to remain impersonal and distant rather than deep and dynamic.

“The path of mutual accountability is capable of leading us out of our current cycle because its focus is not purely on winning the argument...In an atmosphere of collaborative communication, we work together to find a solution we can accept. We break the cycle because we learn we cannot have everything,” urged sociologist scholar George Yancey.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

But didn’t we agree that the liminal journey requires us to understand and navigate the spaces between us? This liminal experience means “That once previous certainties are removed and one enters a delicate, uncertain, malleable state, something might happen to one that alters the very core of one’s being.”<sup>xxxvii</sup>

Therefore, one challenge of congregational leadership is helping people recognize and continually challenge their biases. However, this is challenging work, as most people are not accustomed to rethinking what they unconsciously assume to be correct. From a theological sense, excavating our unconscious biases is an ongoing act of spiritual formation to lean into the image of God more faithfully, seen in Jesus Christ.

## **Recap**

Our brains have created a minefield of unseen beliefs. Everything that we see, hear, touch, and think is filtered through our unconscious bias.

But our brains can be rewired by first excavating these implicit biases and understanding how they were formed.

The next chapter will return to a relational understanding of the church, examining the effects of individualism on our capacity for community.

**Introspection**

Researchers from Project Implicit have developed the Implicit Association Test (IAT), which allows participants to better understand their specific unconscious bias towards any number of things, including skin-tone, religion, gender-science, age, and more.

Visit <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>, select one of the IATs, and take the test.

After completion, reflecting on the following questions:

1. **What surprised me?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. **Was there something confirmed that I suspected about my beliefs?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. **What challenged me?**
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. **What steps will I take in light of the test results?**

**Group Design Exercise: Bubbles, Bubbles, Bubbles**

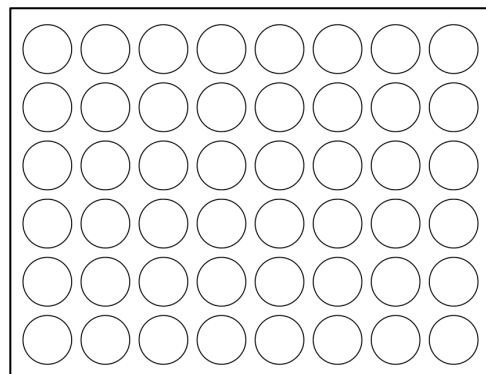
**Supplies:** whiteboard, whiteboard markers, small pieces of paper (cut 8.5"x11" paper into six pieces), pens, and basket.

**Prep:** On a whiteboard, draw a series of bubbles.

Break the large group into small groups of three to four people, providing groups with pieces of paper and pens.

**Step 1:** Invite participants to contemplate the types of unconscious bias they learned about by reading this chapter and taking the Implicit Association Test.

For example, I have learned that I unconsciously have an automatic dislike for bandwagon sports fanbases, and I realized that some people have unconsciously discriminated against people from the Baby Boomer generation.



**Step 2:** Invite the participants to write down at least two unconscious biases identified through their test results and two types of unconscious biases they are aware of people having. Ask them to write one response per small piece of paper, inviting them to add their responses to a collection basket near the whiteboard.

**Step 3:** Invite participants to share their responses with their small group while a scribe adds the written responses into the bubbles on the whiteboard.

**Step 4:** With the large group, review all the responses on the whiteboard without giving commentary.

**Step 5:** Invite the small groups to a discussion. Only provide one question at a time, giving each question enough time for healthy dialogue:

1. Why is shared learning about unconscious bias important for our church?
2. How have you seen some of these unconscious biases at work within our church?
3. You may not believe that some of these unconscious biases are at work within our church. If so, why do you think you do not see them at work while others do?
4. What am I learning about reducing my unconscious bias?
5. What can we, the collective church, do to reduce our unconscious bias?
6. What now? What do we (our church) do with all of this?

**Step 6:** Invite the small groups to appoint one spokesperson, giving each group five minutes to share their main takeaways from the Step 5 discussion.

**Step 7:** Discuss the following with the group:

- What can we take away from this activity?
- What action steps can we take resulting from this chapter and exercise?

## Assessment

Throughout the discovery, design, and delivery stages of the doctoral program, I have maintained a sense of clarity about who the project is designed for, which is clergy and congregational leaders. Therefore, throughout the stages of stakeholder workshops and feedback, I tried to utilize members of my intended audience to help me broaden my research, sharpen my focus, and produce content worthy of their use.

Throughout the exploration and design phase of clarifying my NPO and project, I have used a variety of ministers, denominational leaders, and congregational leaders, never once repeating an individual's participation in the various workshops and focus groups. However, for the final stage of the project, I returned to several key individuals, along with a few new individuals, for my project feedback plan.

The six peer reviewers were given six chapters of the book to read, reflect on, and test-drive the group design exercise. Then, asked to evaluate the book anonymously through an online survey, the reviewers were given 17 questions centered on the following project benchmarks:

- Quality: The content has a professional and high-quality design and layout.
- My intended audience comprehends book content as indicated by five readers that represent the intended audience who will score an average of 80% or higher on a follow-up survey after reading the six chapters and design exercises. The survey questions revolve around the book's relevance, coherence, impact, readability, applicability, and sustainability.
- 3-5 congregational leaders and ministers express interest in committing to reading the book with their leadership teams for one year. Recognizing that it takes time for a leadership resource to make its way around ministers and congregational leaders, I want to measure the book's relevance over time.

11 of the 17 questions were ratings based, using the following scale: 0 - very poor, 1 - poor, 2 - okay, 3 - good, 4 - very good.

Six of the 17 questions were direct feedback, giving reviewers a chance to expand on aspects of the book that were valuable to them, what was missing from the book, what questions they were left with after reading it, what they would change about the book, what they would not change about the book, and anything else they believed was prudent to share with me.

From the peer review survey, the benchmarks were rated on average as follows:

- Quality of design and layout: 5/5 or 100%
- Relevance: 4.63/5 or 92.72%
- Coherence: 4.25/5 or 85%
- Impact: 4.2/5 or 84%
- Readability: 4.33/5 or 86.66%
- Applicability: 4.36/5 or 87.27%
- Sustainability: 4.16/5 or 83.33%
- Interest in committing to reading the book with their leadership teams for one year: 5 out of 6 reviewers agreed to use this book

One peer reviewer indicated after their survey was submitted that they unfairly rated the book based on their role as a faith-based nonprofit leader rather than if they were a congregational leader. This brought the rating average down in applicability, sustainability, and relevance. Moreover, this particular peer reviewer indicated that he'd love to see this book adapted for a broader audience, including other types of organizational leaders, writing, "Generalizing the language of leadership so a leader of a religious nonprofit or a Sunday school class may feel like the book/exercises are doable would be helpful to expand the audience and allow for greater engagement." This specific feedback will help me consider how I might be able to adjust the book to address a broader Christian organizational audience.

The written portion of the survey was immeasurably helpful in affirming the content I have created thus far and challenging me to rethink certain aspects.

Most reviewers indicated that I had excelled in taking complex subject matter that most churches typically do not consider as part of their congregational dynamics and translating in a thoughtful way, especially through a theological lens. On the other hand, some indicated that there were times when the transition from layperson's terms to academic style was not as seamless as in other areas. I assume that this feedback factored into the 4.25 out of 5 in coherence. Overwhelmingly, however, reviewers indicated that the book is thoughtful, thought-provoking, and practical.

As one reviewer wrote:

This is a very insightful work that is clearly the fruit of much soul labor, compassion for God's church, and understandable frustration at what-is-but-does-not-have-to-be-this-way. I think you have done a tremendous job of articulating many of the frustrations that pastors and congregational leaders have been experiencing for a decade (but exponentially more so over the past two years). However, you've managed to thread the needle well that you aren't just voicing frustrations with no solutions; you are using hopeful imagination to dream of what COULD be.

One common critical piece of feedback I received was on the functionality of the book. Most people were left wondering how they should use it with their congregation and what they should do with the results of the group design exercises. As a result, in the Preface of the book, I have written a



"How to Use" guide for readers. As part of my Launch Plan, I will also address this matter, cultivating a more comprehensive user guide.

As I consider the potential commitment from congregational leaders to use this book with their church leadership or in a churchwide study, there is significant support from the peer reviewers. Additionally, as a denominational leader, I visit partnering churches on Sundays throughout the year, leading workshops and preaching in worship. Finally, as I have discussed the nature of the book and my doctoral research, many pastoral leaders have specifically asked that I teach workshops and preach sermons geared towards the content of *The Liminal Church*.

Overall, the book seems to be trending toward the level of success and quality I was hoping to achieve. And through the review process, I have a good handle on how I can continually improve the content and guidance to congregational leaders seeking to use this book within their context. As I have laid out in my Launch Plan, I am confident in the strategy of completing the book, pitching it to several publishers, and marketing it to congregations, especially within my denomination.

## Project Appendix

### BOOK ENDNOTES

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# Project Launch Plan

## Doctoral Project Description

My NPO is: Churches can thrive when they understand, navigate, and leverage the liminality existing between people, the community, and where God is leading.

The doctoral project I cultivated to address this opportunity is an interactive book entitled, *The Liminal Church: Why Navigating the Thresholds Between Us Leads to Thriving*. The book examines social and cognitive science through a theological lens to enhance the church's capacity for thriving. The book's goal is not to provide an anthological background of each topic, but instead be a starting place for healthy dialogue and exploration of how to navigate these challenges together as a local church.

The book currently consists of seven completed chapters, with a strategic plan to write ten more. There are four main facets of each chapter: (1) Primary learning content; (2) Chapter recap; (3) Personal introspection; (4) Group design exercise.

## Audience

Written primarily for congregational leaders and clergy, the book introduces the reader to varying social and relational dynamics within a church. Originally designed for my denominational tradition, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, the book is capable of connecting with different church types, utilized by church leadership teams or as a churchwide study

I am already invited to lead workshops and preach on the subject matter from *The Liminal Church* with member churches of our denomination. Eventually, through publishing, I will be able to expand the book's connection with ministers and congregational leaders.

## Development Plan

To continue the project beyond the scope of this program, I have developed the following milestones to see the book through completion, publishing, and consulting implementation:

Date	Key Deliverable
February 1, 2023	Submit project portfolio to project faculty
February-April 2023	Continue writing additional chapters of the book Receive peer review of new chapters
April 1	Make changes to the project based on the review process
Spring-Summer 2023	Beta test content with local churches through workshops and preaching engagements
May 2023	Develop a marketing strategy for the book
June 2023	Send the book proposal to publishing houses
June-August 2023	Invite participants into the pioneer cohort Invite participant church into pioneer group
September 2023	Submit finalized book to the publisher
Fall 2023	Continue congregational beta testing Commence pioneer cohort and group
Winter 2024	Publication of book

FIGURE 8: DEVELOPMENTAL PLAN

## Development Process

To continue to evaluate my project, gather feedback, and improve after launch, I will implement the following strategy:

- Beta Test Content with Local Churches
  - In my role as a denominational leader, I visit three to four partner churches per month, leading an interactive session during a church's spiritual formation hour and preaching in worship. I will continue beta testing *The Liminal Church* content and group design exercises with these partner churches. After a partner church visit, I will conduct two evaluations:
    - First, I will provide the following feedback survey to the church pastor and one congregational leader:
      - Rating Questions - 0 - very poor, 1 - poor, 2 - okay, 3 - good, 4 - very good:

- 1: Rate the relevance of the workshop with your church's context.
  - 2: Rate the clarity of the workshop's process.
  - 3: Rate the immediate impact of the workshop on your congregation.
  - 4: Rate the potential future impact of similar subject matter workshops for your congregation.
  - 5: Rate the likelihood of your church's leadership team interacting with a book based on some of the content from the workshop.
- Direct Feedback - Please provide direct feedback through the following questions:
  - What is your level of interest in you participating in a pioneer cohort of leaders centered on understanding, navigating, and leveraging relational dynamics within a congregation?
  - What is your level of interest in your church participating in a pioneer group centered on understanding, navigating, and leveraging relational dynamics within a congregation?
  - Check the box of the most common relational dynamics at work within your church:
    - Anxiety over change or the unknown
    - Tribalism
    - Low level of trust
    - Unconscious bias
    - Differing conceptual ideas of the church's vision
    - Lack of self-differentiation
    - Othering
    - Personality clashing
    - Politicization
    - Communication challenges
    - Theological divides
    - Generational gaps
    - Conflict management issues
    - Other:
- Second, I will evaluate the experience of leading the workshop and preaching on the liminality content with the following areas of reflection:
  - Clarity of instructions and direction
  - Level and types of participation
  - Level and types of congregational dialogue
  - Next steps clarity and level of interest
- Workshop Content



- In my role as a denominational leader, I have the ongoing opportunity to lead workshops at regional and national events. After leading workshops on *The Liminal Church*, I will conduct two evaluations:
  - Participant feedback surveys: (based on the same questions as the beta testing content with local churches)
  - Personal evaluation reflection: (based on the same areas of reflection as the beta testing content with local churches)
- Launch a pioneer cohort and group
  - I will invite 5-8 ministers, congregational leaders, and denominational leaders to participate in a pioneer cohort to study and participate in the group design exercises of *The Liminal Church*. In addition to collecting feedback data from the group through the process, I will also provide the same anonymous feedback survey used in the project delivery plan. A sample of the anonymous feedback survey is provided in the appendix.
  - I will invite one congregation to participate in a pioneer group to study and participate in the group design exercise of *The Liminal Church*. In addition to interviewing congregational leaders throughout the pioneer group's process of using the book, I will also provide the same anonymous feedback survey used in the project delivery plan.
- Complete the remaining chapters with peer review:
  - As I complete the remaining chapters of the book, I will provide these chapters to pastors, congregational leaders, and denominational leaders for peer review, giving the same anonymous feedback survey used in the project delivery plan.

Additionally, as a denominational leader, I visit partnering churches on Sundays throughout the year, leading workshops and preaching in worship. Finally, as I have discussed the nature of the book and my doctoral research, many pastoral leaders have specifically asked that I teach workshops and preach sermons geared towards the content of *The Liminal Church*.

## Project Launch Appendix

The following is a sample survey from the project delivery plan, which was used to receive peer-reviewed feedback. This survey will also be used for a pioneer cohort, pioneer group, and continued peer review.

## "The Liminal Church" Book Review

The following questions are set up on a rating scale:

0 – very poor, 1 – poor, 2 – okay, 3 – good, 4 – very good

Rate the quality of the book design and layout.

1 2 3 4 5

Very Poor Very Good

Rate the relevance of the book for your leadership.

1 2 3 4 5

Very Poor Very Good

Rate the potential relevance of the book for your congregational leadership.

1 2 3 4 5

Very Poor Very Good

Rate the coherence of the book.

1 2 3 4 5

Very Poor Very Good

Rate the potential coherence of the book for congregational leaders.

1 2 3 4 5

Very Poor Very Good

Rate the impact of the book on you and your congregational leaders.

FIGURE 9: PEER REVIEW SURVEY, PART 1

Rate the readability of the book.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Very Poor Very Good

Rate the applicability of the book to your congregational leadership.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Very Poor Very Good

Rate the applicability of the book to your context.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Very Poor Very Good

Rate the sustainability of the book for future usefulness in the next year.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Very Poor Very Good

Rate the sustainability of the book for future usefulness in the next five years.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Very Poor Very Good

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### Direct Feedback

What aspects of the book were valuable to you?

Type here...

What was missing from the book?

FIGURE 10: PEER REVIEW SURVEY, PART 2

Type here...

What questions are you left with after reading the book?

Type here...

What would change about the book?

Type here...

What would not change about the book?

Type here...

Anything else you'd like for me to know:

Type here...

Submit

Powered by Jotform

FIGURE 11: PEER REVIEW SURVEY, PART 3

# Appendix A

## Appendix A – Milestone 1 The NPO Charter

### Personal Research Manifesto

In light of my learnings on my unique tendency towards wrongness, I will approach research with an open ear to differing perspectives and an attuned focus on my NPO's specific context.

### NPO Statement

CBF churches can pursue sustainable visions and strategies to thrive in a changing world by understanding and leveraging the dynamics of relationships within their congregation.

### NPO Scope and Constraints

At the end of my doctoral research, my goal is to provide Cooperative Baptist churches with practical and strategic resources for thriving. I believe thriving comes from developing an authentic community within the congregation and spiritual formation, which can be a natural outpouring into the greater community around the church.

Since at their core churches are about relationships, I want to provide practical resources to help them understand the relational temperaments at work among congregants, the common causes of conflict between competing personalities, and tangible strategies for enhancing relational connections for a thriving church.

### NPO Context

Cooperative Baptist churches are diverse culturally and structurally, which creates a unique set of challenges in addressing the breadth and depth of dynamic congregational makeups. While CBF churches represent various church expressions, at their core are several models of doing and being the church.

Contextually, I want to drill down to identify the common organizational styles represented within our faith tradition. I will categorize the church types by researching their functionality, leadership structure, geographical and cultural contexts, and standard practices. The organizational style dynamics will give better insight into the relational connections that play into how a congregation relates to itself and makes decisions.

In turn, this research will inform the personalized ways that churches can utilize the resources produced for a contextual definition and goals for thriving.

### Root Causes

Organizations naturally institutionalize by formulating systems that fuel the many moving mechanisms that give them identity and meaning. Without meaning to, institutionalization often leads churches to the performance of the church rather than the abiding existence of being the church.

Over decades of living through institutional systems, many congregations have found their existence is irrelevant to their members and the community around them. These realities bring a whole host of emotions that often lead to a distrust in each other as a faith community and a general mistrust of the outside culture. Therefore, at the heart of the church's struggle is a lost sense of authentic community. And since most church members do not know each other beyond surface-level, they do not trust one another to make the necessary pivots to thrive in an ever-changing world.

### Discovery Workshop Stakeholder

The Discovery Workshop consisted of six senior pastors, an associate pastor, two state-level denominational leaders, and two church starters from the Cooperative Baptist tradition.

### One-On-One Interviews

The one-on-one interviews consisted of a professional consultant, an intentional interim pastor and coach, and a denominational leader.

### 3-5 Key Biblical Texts

Biblically, I will explore the church's discernment of Gentile inclusion, the pivot of its theological implications, and the subsequent transition of Paul's calling from the Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts 15-16.

Paul's letter to the Galatians gives a leadership glimpse into the Gentile inclusion period in the church's history and the dynamics of competing personalities within a congregation during a period of change. Specifically, Paul's call for inclusive unity in 3:26-29 speaks to the many relational challenges that congregations face.

James' epistle gives a unique glimpse into organizational leadership during a time of conflict and change, providing insight and wisdom into managing polarities. James 2 calls the church to look beyond the cultural labels and caste system, embracing one another as equals through humility and service.

However, Acts 2:42-47 provides the most transparent and purest look into how the church can exist as an authentic community. Here we find the church acting beyond the constructs of worship and spiritual formation to live life well together through sharing meals, celebrations, conflict, and change.

### Academic Resources

With both a main global office and state/regional offices, CBF's organizational structure provides ample research avenues for insight into the nearly 2,000 congregations. Additionally, CBF hosts a variety of networks for its clergy, which offers additional routes for research.

Additionally, I will focus on family systems, emotional intelligence, and behavioral personality types of organizational structures through Edwin Friedman, Peter L. Steinke, Thomas Erikson, Dan Goleman, Brandon Goleman, and Jim Clifton, and Gallup Research.

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## Milestone 1 Appendix

### DISCOVERY WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

On October 22, 2020, my Discovery Workshop was held via Zoom, from 12-3:00 pm. The following were in attendance:

1. Senior Pastor, Moderator of Denomi-Network, Colleague
2. Senior Pastor, Colleague
3. Senior Pastor, Colleague
4. Senior Pastor, Consultant, Colleague
5. Senior Pastor, Coach, Colleague
6. Senior Pastor, Colleague
7. State Leader of Denomi-Network, Colleague
8. State Leader of Denomi-Network, Colleague
9. Church Starter, Coach, Colleague
10. Church Starter, Professor, Colleague

The workshop followed the predetermined format of the DMIN 750 syllabus assignment. I sent an introductory video to the participants, laying out the workshop's structure, and provided a participant guide. Each participant received an UberEats gift card to purchase lunch before the workshop. They came prepared to discuss the NPO statement: *Cooperative Baptist congregations and leaders are often unaware or unempowered to engage strategies for success in a rapidly changing world.*

### DISCOVERY STATEMENT

The following Discovery Statement was formulated by the workshop participants after the four activities:

*Considering CBF churches, we've discovered that energized by the hope of the resurrection, they can pursue courageous vision(s) and sustainable strategies to thrive on mission in the world, which is caused by their feeling of declining relevance in the world. If solved, it would mean CBF churches feel reinvigorated and empowered.*

### CRITICAL INSIGHTS FROM DISCOVERY WORKSHOP

With such a variety of church models represented by the various clergy participating in the Workshop, it was fascinating to hear the interweaving of ideas, causations, and solutions.

At the root of both the potential solution and causation was a general sense of fear among CBF congregations. The concerns expressed were lack of relevance, control, foresight, vision, disillusioned ministry structures, and the institution's death. Simultaneously, the workshop participants almost uniformly expressed congregations' fear of the solutions through questions of cost, change, and uncertainty.

After Activity One, the participants revised the NPO: CBF churches need strategies for sustainability and confidence to thrive on mission in the world.

If solved, the group considered what the audience would say, think, feel, and do. They concluded that CBF churches would, overall, be excited about new possibilities, ask difficult questions about what next looks like, think critically about essential changes needing to be made, take risks by stepping into new approaches and feel reinvigorated.

The participants then evaluated the root cause of the NPO statement by asking five why questions, stating churches don't feel as relevant for changing the world as they once did, because we built institutions and became concerned with maintaining and preserving them, because we became more focused on "doing Church" than "being Church"; more internally focused, because we're fearful of losing control and dying, or worse, becoming irrelevant, because we have lost faith and hope in the resurrection.

Following the formulation of this discovery statement (Considering CBF churches, we've discovered that energized by the hope of the resurrection, they can pursue courageous vision(s) and sustainable strategies to thrive on mission in the world, which is caused by their feeling of declining relevance in the world. If solved, it would mean CBF churches feel reinvigorated and empowered.), I asked the participants to provide feedback on continued research, potential blindspots of researching the NPO, and potential research pitfalls to consider.

Some of the critical insight from these questions yielded the following thoughts:

- Define the terms "thriving" and "sustainability."
- Don't assume that all CBF churches fit into this NPO. Research to discover if there are outliers.
- Study beyond the CBF tradition to understand how other mainline denominations deal with the rapid decline of church participation in America.
- Don't overgeneralize, believing that a solution will work in all CBF churches.
- Don't be afraid to come up with measurable strategies and practical steps.

## ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW DISCOVERIES

I prepared each one-on-one interviewee with a one-page summary of the Discovery Workshop and three questions to consider: With what do you agree and why; With what do you disagree and why; What is missing?

The intentional interim pastor/professional coach agreed with the revised NPO statement after Activity One. However, he believed that the final NPO statement was too churchy, stating that these are the kinds of things that pastors like to discuss. Still, parishioners are more interested in resources and strategies. He indicated that my research should focus on defining thriving, generating practical resources to help congregations think strategically.

The church consultant/coach agreed that the primary cause of why churches are struggling today is the result of institutionalization, stating that churches need to rediscover what it means to be an organic community of relevance in the world. She believes that this is profoundly theological and practical, getting down to its core identity and purposefulness.

The denominational leader agreed with the workshop's synthesis, stating that now is the time to help churches find renewed energy by reexamining their past to clarify institutional memory, recognizing moments of innovation, celebrating faithfulness, and envisioning what could be.

## SYNTHESIS

The Discovery Workshop and one-on-one interviews provided a more in-depth perspective of CBF congregations' diverse struggles and questions. However, at the root of most church's tensions is a case of obsolete identity, ineffective approaches to ministry, and a lack of understanding of the outside community's needs.

Organizations naturally institutionalize by formulating systems that prime the many moving mechanisms that give them identity and meaning. Efficiency and replicability often lead many congregations down a repetitive decades' long path of tradition. In turn, custom blinds the organization from the continual need to innovate and adapt to the changes around and within the congregation and community's makeup.

Most struggling churches recognize where they have come from and why they find themselves where they are. However, there is a deep well of emotions, often preventing the organization from rediscovering what once made them successful and thriving.

Within the mixture of emotions, ideas of causation, and solutions are people, interwoven relationships that compose the faith community. And whether or not churches discover the right solution to lead to thriving might be futile if they do not see, hear, and understand each other.

Therefore, it is paramount for congregations to reforge a genuine sense of community by relearning each other, their varying personalities, passions, interests, hopes, dreams, and ideas. The church, at its core, is about relationships.

**NEXT STEPS**

As I look ahead to the next steps, I want to better understand relational or family systems at play within a congregation, examining the dynamics of emotional intelligence and behavioral temperaments and researching the components of what creates an authentic community within an organization.

**DISCOVERY WORKSHOP DOCUMENTATION**

The following pages are documentation from the Discovery Workshop, post workshop messenger to stakeholders, and the one-on-one interviews.

## Activity One: NPO Definition and Audience

**NPO:** Cooperative Baptist congregations and leaders are often unaware or unempowered to engage strategies for success in a rapidly changing world.

---

<b>NPO Definition Worksheet Questions</b>	<b>1</b>
1) What is the key issue you are trying to address and why is it important?	1
2) Who is it a NPO for?	2
3) What social/cultural factors shape this NPO?	3
4) What evidence do you have that this is worth the investment?	4
5) How might you think of this NPO in a different way? How might you reframe it?	5
<b>Key takeaways (patterns, differences, surprises, and outliers)</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Proposed NPO Revisions</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Restatement of the NPO</b>	<b>7</b>

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### NPO Definition Worksheet Questions

1) What is the key issue you are trying to address and why is it important?

- Division among people .
- Until we are able to find a spiritual path toward unity and understanding, we will continue to encounter issues that break people and churches apart.
- Getting them to grasp that mission and action speaks our identity for us these days.
- Being faithful to the example of Jesus in a politicized society
- 
- Strategies for church growth and evangelism in our CBF context
- Financial sustainability
- 
- 
- 
- 

#### Similar

Growth and lack of action

Financials

Faithful to the way of Jesus in a highly political time

Crisis of discipleship

2

**Patterns****Differences****Outliers**

Unfulfilled potential

**2) Who is impacted by this NPO and who should I focus on?**

- Aging churches on the decline
- CBF Regional Coordinators
- Pastors
- CBF ministers
- Denominational leaders
- Aging congregations
- Surrounding communities
- A community that needs a viable, helpful church
- Future generations (those who will inherit the church)
- Sunday brunch bunch
- Nones and dones
- People in the churches and the community where the needs are
- Congregational leaders and regional coordinators/CBF leadership
- CBF Ecosystem
- Church members, church staff, and the surrounding community

**Commonalities**

Denominational organizational leaders

Aging Churches

**Differences**

The church (clergy, denominational leaders, and members) and Unchurched (nones, dones, etc).

**Outliers****Who should be the core audience: CBF leadership****3) What social/cultural factors shape this NPO?**

Are these things negative per se? Or, not. Maybe it is a matter of 'framing'



- Lack of target market identification and the sometimes unspoken requirement of assimilation into white culture
- Rapidly changing culture raises issues of what solutions are viable and flexible enough to engage diversity(situations, geography, context, etc)
- Even leaders and “experts” don’t know what it will take to reach people. Loss of privilege/influence
- Younger generations less drawn toward institutions
- Traditional church mindsets/structures in rapidly changing world AND unwillingness of church/denom leaders to empower the change conversation
- Older congregations inhabited by older-leaning demographics. Not negative automatically.
- Rapidly changing community settings in which suddenly the same-old-stuff hasn’t been working for a while.
- Many church members are fine with the way it’s always been and want nothing more; they are less concerned with the church dying than they are with the church changing
- Overarching culture is divided
- Cultural understanding of “religion” as “spirituality”
- Wreckage of the cultural understanding of “Christian” and particularly “Baptist”
- We are far behind on technology.
- Fear of losing members (if some issues were to be addressed)
- Fear of preaching “wrong” theology

#### Similar

#### Differences

#### Outliers

### 4) What evidence do you have that this is worth the investment?

- The kin-dom of God is the hope of the world- a way to bring about peace, justice, joy and love. Whatever form it takes Jesus path for the kingdom seems to be through the church.
- The universal church will continue to serve a purpose in society. The question is how can CBF congregations play a role in that purpose for the long term?
- Honestly, personal joy and fulfillment in Christ. Offering others community and purpose.
- I have seen congregations discover new life; reinvent themselves and reintroduce themselves to their community. I believe it can be done.
- 
- Absolutely worth our time; there is value in an organization like CBF and CBF churches embodying core Baptist principles
- God’s Church will endure. We get to decide if we’re willing to adapt.
- “Surely there are some Baptists who may be trusted”
- Our communities, families, children, and churches are compelling evidence.
- Many churches are failing, so to explore why (and how to redirect) is important
- 

#### Useful

Not a threat. The Kingdom will endure  
It can be done. It is possible.

**Impactful**  
 Hopeful  
 Fun  
 Redirect success  
 Reshaping how the world sees the church and denominations

### 5) How might you think of this NPO in a different way? How might you reframe it?

- The discussion about congregations/leadership isn't either/or. It's a polarity.
- Is this for congregations or for CBF "generously defined"? I would shape it for congregations. That is where the most significant impact can be made.
- Work at clarifying whether this has a CBF-centric focus or whether the subject is actually more of a sociological one: CBF congregational personalities and tendencies. Which would then shine the spotlight on churches....rather than their "Denominetwork" hub.
- Clarify some markers of "success" so that we know what that's all about.
- CBF congregations are challenged to rediscover sustainability in a rapidly shifting culture while maintaining the basic tenets of the faith. Which requires CBF churches to clearly define those tenets.
- Cooperative Baptist congregations and their leaders are often longing to engage strategies for success in a rapidly changing world but are ill-equipped for how to facilitate that.
- Reframing as a positive opportunity to get on board with, rather than a negative/deficit
- Impact instead of success.
- I don't think "success" (as it stands) is a helpful term. I'm also intrigued by the term "rapidly"—yep, the world is changing, but it has been for decades, and we're still behind. (So are we talking current cultural talking points, or bigger changes that have been changing ... without us or are engagement?)

## Key takeaways (patterns, differences, surprises, and outliers)

- **Patterns:**
- **Differences:**
- **Surprises / Outliers:**

## Original NPO

Cooperative Baptist congregations and leaders are often unaware or unempowered to engage strategies for success in a rapidly changing world.

## Restatement of the NP

Considering \_\_\_\_\_ (audience / who for),  
we've discovered \_\_\_\_\_ (NPO).

**CBF churches need strategies for sustainability and confidence to thrive on mission in the world.**

### **Possible alternative:**

Take out "success"

Positive

Better definition of what is changing

Cooperative Baptist Congregations have the opportunity to move from existing and maintaining ( ) to thriving and engaging ( ).

**CBF churches need confidence to thrive on mission in the world.**

**CBF churches need strategies for sustainability and confidence to thrive on mission in the world.**



## Activity Three: Finding the Cause: How did we get here?

### The 5 Whys

**NPO Statement:** CBF churches need strategies for sustainability and confidence to thrive on mission in the world.

#### Steps

1. Five participants review the NPO and ask themselves WHY it's a need, problem, or opportunity. Write your first response on your Table below. Be sure to write the *first thing that comes to mind* each time you ask "Why?".
  - a. Person 1: [REDACTED]
  - b. Person 2: [REDACTED]
  - c. Person 3: [REDACTED]
  - d. Person 4: [REDACTED]
  - e. Person 5: [REDACTED]
- Ask yourselves WHY the answer on the 1st cell is true and write your next response in the next 'Why' cell in your table. Repeat for 'why' cells #3-5.
2. Review the "Why" progressions with the group and note commonalities and differences. The facilitator takes notes.
3. Work as a group to build consensus on which of the five "Whys" in the columns offer the most meaningful insight into the problem. The facilitator rewrites the "Whys" in the Consensus 5 Whys as the group agrees on them.

Person 1: [REDACTED]

Participant	1st Why	2nd Why	3rd Why	4th Why	5th Why

Person 2: [REDACTED]

Participant	1st Why	2nd Why	3rd Why	4th Why	5th Why

Person 3: [REDACTED]

Participant	1st Why	2nd Why	3rd Why	4th Why	5th Why

Person 4: [REDACTED]

Participant	1st Why	2nd Why	3rd Why	4th Why	5th Why

Person 5: [REDACTED]

Participant	1st Why	2nd Why	3rd Why	4th Why	5th Why

## Commonalities and Differences

### Commonalities

- Loss of relevance
- Self-worth
- Institutional control
- Fear
- 
- 

### Differences

- 
- 

### NPO Statement: (Revised from Activity One)

Energized by the hope of the resurrection, CBF churches can pursue courageous vision(s) and sustainable strategies to thrive on mission in the world.

## Consensus 5 Whys

Participant	1st Why	2nd Why	3rd Why	4th Why	5th Why
Group decision	Churches don't feel as relevant for changing the world as they once did	We built an institution and became concerned with maintaining and preserving them	We became more focused on "doing Church" than "being Church"; more internally focused	We are fearful of losing control and dying, or worse, becoming irrelevant?	We have lost faith and hope in the resurrection

## Activity Four: Putting it Together

### NPO Statement

- 1) Identify the key takeaways from each activity and record them on the flipchart or whiteboard.

### Activity One: NPO Definition and Audience

Considering aging churches on the decline, CBF regional coordinators, pastors, CBF ecosystem, congregational leaders, and members of the church (audience / who for),

we've discovered **Cooperative Baptist congregations and leaders are often unaware or unempowered to engage strategies for success in a rapidly changing world** (NPO).

**Possible alternative: CBF churches need strategies for sustainability and confidence to thrive on mission in the world (NPO).**

- Take out words: success, positive
- A better definition of what is changing and what does thriving look like
- Reframe as a positive opportunity to get on board with rather than a negative/deficit
- Impact instead of success
- **Is this for congregations or for CBF "generously defined"? I would shape it for congregations. That is where the most significant impact can be made.**
- The discussion about congregations/leadership isn't either/or. It's a polarity.

Who impacted

- **CBF ecosystem (ministers, coordinators) as a CONGREGATION**
- Congregational leaders
- Surrounding communities
- Future generations
- Aging Congregations

Possible causes:

- Leaders of aging congregations not knowing how to use the resources currently available to prepare for the future
- Fear of losing current members
- Rapidly changing community settings; "same-old-stuff doesn't work anymore"

- Technology
- Not knowing how to connect with younger generations
- Older congregations attract older-leaning demographics
- **Wreckage of the cultural understanding of “Christian” and particularly “Baptist”**
- Traditional church structures/mindsets and unwillingness to empower the change conversation

If addressed, it would mean (possible benchmarks of success):

- The enduring of God’s Church and spirituality - Confidence
- A pathway to peace, justice, joy, and love
- Putting an end to what seems like “the death” of traditional ministries and faith
- The universal church will continue to serve a purpose in society - Sustainability

## Activity 2: Understanding Those Impacted by the NPO - Empathy Map

### \_\_\_\_ (Audience) Says:

- 1) What themes were repeated in all the quadrants?
  - The thought that the congregation is already thriving
  - Who’s going to pay for this?
  - We are excited
- 2) What are the outliers?
  - “Let’s adapt” - the willingness of everyone to administer and adapt to change

### \_\_\_\_ (Audience) Thinks:

- 1) What themes were repeated in all the quadrants?
  - What will we have to give up?
  - How do we share what Jesus has done for us individually?
  - Age: “I’m too old for that”
- 2) What are the outliers?
  - Is this an attempt/trick to make us liberal?
  - Change isn’t scary, but natural.

### \_\_\_\_ (Audience) Feels:

- 1) What themes were repeated in all the quadrants?
  - Scared, Excited



- Empowered
  - Curious
  - Spirit-filled
- 2) What are the outliers?
- We're making a difference
  - Competitive
  - Long for christ-like welcome

\_\_\_\_ (Audience) Does:

- 1) What themes were repeated in all the quadrants?
- The audience will become engaged
  - Listen to the community in order to invoke changes that are specific to their community
  - Risk-taking
- 2) What are the outliers?
- A mission without fear
  - Fire the pastor
  - Start churches; form a committee
  - Have diverse racial and gender leadership
  - Know the names of refugees
  - **Shift away from paternalistic tolerance**

**Looking at all of the quadrants...**

- 1) What themes were repeated in all the quadrants?
- Money. Who is going to pay for this and how?
  - Change. There is a desire for change amongst the audience.
  - Some form of excitement because of the possibilities
- 2) What themes only exist in one quadrant?
- Is this an attempt/trick to make us liberal?
  - "Make sure the constitution said it was okay" - only theme that is tied to a outside element: government
- 3) What gaps exist in our understanding?
- What exactly need to be done
  - Who will be the leader in doing so

### Activity 3: Finding the Root Cause - 5 Whys

Participant	1st Why	2nd Why	3rd Why	4th Why	5th Why
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Group decision	Churches don't feel as relevant for changing the world as they once did	We built an institution and became concerned with maintaining and preserving them	We became more focused on "doing Church" than "being Church"; more internally focused	We are fearful of losing control and dying, or worse, becoming relevant?	We have lost faith and hope in the resurrection
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## Activity 4: Putting it Together

### 2) Discuss any points of friction/tension, clarification, or questions that arise as a group.

Friction:

- 

Clarification:

- 

Questions:

- Can it be stated as a "If, then..."?
- 

### 3) Revised NPO Statement

**Energized by the hope of the resurrection, CBF churches can pursue courageous vision(s) and sustainable strategies to thrive on mission in the world.**

Considering CBF churches (audience),  
we've discovered that energized by the hope of the resurrection, they can pursue courageous vision(s) and sustainable strategies to thrive on mission in the world (NPO),  
Which is caused by their feeling of declining relevance in the world (root cause). If  
solved, it would mean CBF churches feel reinvigorated and empowered (outcome).

### 4) Final reflections

As I continue researching this NPO, what should I be sure to examine?

- 
- 
- 
- You might try to see if there is a way to gauge the actual change/risk aversion in different congregations. Are our assumptions true/broad enough, or is there a layer of CBF churches out there who defy this description?

As I continue researching this NPO, what are potential blind spots that I best explore?

- What are "CBF churches?" Are they monolithic enough that there is a generalization that will hold up?
- 
- 

As I continue researching this NPO, what are potential pitfalls that I best avoid?

- 
-

All,

I'd like to extend my deepest word of gratitude for your willingness to participate in the Doctoral Workshop last Thursday. Your insight and wisdom shared were fruitful for my research.

We began with an NPO leaning toward a problem: Cooperative Baptist congregations and leaders are often unaware or unempowered to engage strategies for success in a rapidly changing world.

We ended with an NPO leaning toward an opportunity: Energized by the hope of the resurrection, CBF churches can pursue courageous vision(s) and sustainable strategies to thrive on mission in the world.

We wrapped up with you providing feedback for future research on the bottom of this [Google Doc](#). The invitation remains open if anything new has risen to the surface since our time together last week.

Again, thank you for your participation and friendship. Blessings on your day.

--

Grace and Peace,

Andy Hale

## Discovery Workshop

### One-On-One Interviews

#### Discovery Workshop Description

For my doctoral discovery workshop, I gathered ten diverse leaders on Zoom from across CBF, including senior pastors, state and regional leaders, and associate pastors.

The participants evaluated the following Need/Problem/Opportunity (NPO) statement:  
*Cooperative Baptist congregations and leaders are often unaware or unempowered to engage strategies for success in a rapidly changing world.*

They first considered the importance of this statement, the audience it addresses, the cultural factors that give it shape, and the worthiness of investing more research.

The group conferred that some of the most common issues for CBF churches are a lack of growth, inability to connect deeply with the greater community around them, and unfulfilled potential. The group agreed that the target audience for this NPO should be CBF churches.

The NPO statement was revised: *CBF churches need strategies for sustainability and confidence to thrive on mission in the world.*

If solved, the group considered what the audience would say, think, feel, and do. They concluded that CBF churches would, overall, be excited about new possibilities, ask difficult questions about what next looks like, think critically about essential changes needing to be made, take risks by stepping into new approaches and feel reinvigorated.

The participants then evaluated the root cause of the NPO statement by asking five why questions, stating *churches don't feel as relevant for changing the world as they once did, because we built an institution and became concerned with maintaining and preserving them, because we became more focused on "doing Church" than "being Church"; more internally focused, because we're fearful of losing control and dying, or worse, becoming irrelevant, because we have lost faith and hope in the resurrection.*

The NPO was revised: *Energized by the hope of the resurrection, CBF churches can pursue courageous vision(s) and sustainable strategies to thrive on mission in the world.*

#### Discovery Statement

Considering CBF churches (audience), we've discovered that energized by the hope of the resurrection, they can pursue courageous vision(s) and sustainable strategies to thrive on mission in the world (NPO), which is caused by their feeling of declining relevance in the world (root cause). If solved, it would mean CBF churches feel reinvigorated and empowered (outcome).

#### Critical Insight from Workshop

The participants provided insightful feedback on how I should next approach my research, including:

- Define "thriving" in a congregational context
- Why churches should engage this opportunity

- Avoid a lack of measurable strategies and practical steps
- Avoid not seeing the complex and diverse answers
- Consider the multi-contextual approach to this opportunity

## Questions to Consider for 1-on-1 Conversation

### Person 1

#### With what do you agree? Why?

Notes:

- Really like the second statement
  - Would add resources to the statement
- That I am calling churches to think strategically
  - Developing strategies for sustainability and confidence is paramount; most churches are thinking “We are going to meet next week.”
- The Five Whys, whole-heartedly

#### With what do you disagree? Why?

Notes:

- Final statement sounds too church and impractical
  - Churches don’t want to talk about theology. They want pastors to talk about it and think about it.
  - Churches want strategies and resources
- Doesn’t think that church leaders are energized by the hope of the resurrection. That sounds great when your budget expense are far head of your budget receipts, you are not thinking about the resurrection.
- I don’t think that CBF churches are unaware, maybe not unempowered. They are definitely under resourced.

#### What is missing?

Notes:

- Conclusions from your research need to be sent to the central office for CBF.
- What are we energized by?
- What does mean to thrive?
- Thoughts on Organizational, Relational, and Cognitive Response to Change:
  - Change comes slow
  - Education is 10 years behind culture. Churches are 10 years behind education.
  - Tradition carries the day
- COVID’S Impact on Change:
  - Pastoral leaders can’t do it by themselves and will need peer learning, along with organizational support. Coaching is also critical.
  - Congregations need to voice their fears

- Pastoral leaders need to continually give a vision of movement from institutional mindset

## Person 2

### With what do you agree? Why?

Notes:

- The failing of institutional focus is spot on. The church modeled what other institutions and cultures were doing. We are discovering now that wasn't the best thing for the church.
  - The institution worked in giving us someone to blame when things didn't go well. However, now that denominations are failing, churches and clergy have to looking in the mirror.
- I also think that there is a fear that people are actually paying attention to what the church is doing

### With what do you disagree? Why?

Notes:

- Not fond of the resurrection language as it is laid out, stating that we have to believe we are the resurrection
  - I think the church hasn't been faithful to being the resurrection. We've lost belief in ourselves. If we did believe, we wouldn't have a fear of losing control or being irrelevant.

### What is missing?

Notes:

- Helping churches understand how to move from institutional to organic community of relevance in the world. This is deeply theological and practical. Helping see that they are called to be like Jesus. This is getting down to core identity and purposefulness
- I think you will have to help people understand the broader understanding and definition of the church
- Look at Lilly's Thriving Congregation initiative:  
<https://lillyendowment.org/thrivingcongregations/>

## Person 3

### With what do you agree? Why?

Notes:

- Perceived needs of congregations
- Untapped potential: many congregations lack a poor self-image and lack of resources
- Institution preservation more of a worry than relevance
- Many, if not most, churches have not taken the time to visualize what church ought to look like now

- Most churches are looking for the next silver bullet, instead of looking spiritual inward and around each other for the leadership of the Spirit

### **With what do you disagree? Why?**

Notes:

- Most churches are not perceptive on the resurrection and spiritual discernment
- 

### **What is missing?**

Notes:

- Most churches don't know the questions to ask themselves after this pandemic
  - What does staffing look like
  - What does expectations of staffing look like
  - What are we going to take with us and what are we going to leave behind?
  - What's the church's identity (theologically, relationally, communally, socially)?
- It's time for churches to retrace their story from beginning to now, considering what their story will be moving forward
  - Clarifying institutional memory
  - Recognizing moments of innovation
  - Celebrating faithfulness
  - Envision what could be
-



## Appendix B

## Appendix B – Milestone 2 NPO Topic Expertise Essay

### Introduction

A thriving organization can point to several key factors as to why it is existing in a healthy capacity. My research specifically zeroes in on the relational aspects of organizational thriving. This paper explores key biblical insights into the connections among members within the life of the church, as well as explores the historical and contemporary voices navigating the dynamics of relationships within organizations.

### Section One: Biblical and Theological Foundation

#### **DOES INSTITUTIONALIZATION PREVENT THRIVING?**

What if one of the greatest obstacles for the church today was not the ongoing lack of adaptation to the rapidly changing world around it or even the amplified constraints of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, but the institution organization itself? The nature of the local congregation has so dramatically shifted from its original theological purpose in the lives of Jesus' followers that its current organizational existence might be preventing its opportunity for thriving. The ecclesial process of creating structure, policies, and procedures for ministries and programs can often overshadow the purpose of their existence in the first place, connecting people together.

What the church needs now more than ever is not a rebranding but a reevaluation of who it is and why it exists as a fellowship. Examining several passages from the New Testament of the church in various expressions and contexts might open congregational leaders' eyes to the critical need for authentic relationships within the church community.

#### **TEXTUAL DISCUSSIONS**

##### ***The First Signs of Koinōnia: Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37, & 5:1-11***

In its most infantile state, the early church, as portrayed in the *Book of Acts*, gives us a glimpse into the nature and vision of its purpose. In sum, *Acts* is a sociological, historical, and theological work explaining the roots of this new community.<sup>4</sup>

Shortly after the ascension of Jesus and the extraordinary events of Pentecost, Luke gives us a glimpse into the everyday lives of the Jerusalem church, which included apostolic teaching

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<sup>4</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 2-3.

(*didachē tōn apostolōn*), fellowship (*koinōnia*), breaking bread (*klasei tou artou*), and prayer (*proseuchais*).

Among the practices listed in Acts 2:42, the word *koinōnia* stands apart. Kearsley argued that *koinōnia* connects with real and tangible traits at the grassroots, distinct from universal or ideal concepts, a real community rooted in ongoing church life and witness.<sup>5</sup>

Readers see the mutual participation in speech, listening, thinking, and experiencing togetherness, described as having everything in common (2:44) with one heart and mind (4:32) and everything in common. One might marvel at their togetherness by sharing their resources (4:32) and selling their property and possessions to give to those in need (2:45, 4:34). The biblical picture is of a mutual sharing of self, with the group's welfare as the priority, reflecting the church's spiritual maturity.<sup>6</sup> As a result of its *koinōnia*, the church grew daily (2:47).

One could argue that Luke was merely writing in hyper-flattering language about the Jerusalem church to create an ideal example for all his readers. It would not be uncommon for ancient Greco writers to create a utopian image of the society or community they were writing.<sup>7</sup> However, as Walton argues, "The sharing it (Acts 2:42-47) depicts was very rare. The early Christians sold property whenever anyone had need; they valued people more than property without rejecting private property altogether."<sup>8</sup>

However, it does not take long for the community to face opposition from within. In Acts 5:1-11, preceded by the nearly identical report of the church's *koinōnia* from Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37, Luke introduced the characters of Ananias and Saphira. Caught up in the joy and power of the fellowship's generosity, Ananias and Saphira conspire to cheat God and the church. Bock remarked, "This is a lie to *koinōnia*, and thus it is an act against fellowship."<sup>9</sup> For the new community's members, the issue was the Gospel mission and how they will function together as contributors to the cause and community.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, with the Ananias and Saphira debacle buried, the church's fellowship continued to thrive as they experienced rapid growth, the development of new leaders, broadened their ethnic and theological diversity, and witnessed the miracle of seeing one of their archnemesis transform

<sup>5</sup> Roy Kearsley, *Church, Community and Power*. (Farnham: Ashgate Pub. Ltd., 2008), 13-14.

<sup>6</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 156.

<sup>7</sup> John H. Walton, *New Revised Standard Version Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 1888.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1888.

<sup>9</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 222.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

into an advocate for the Gospel. The flaming tongues of the Spirit at Pentecost continued to fan the flames of the young and invigorated church. While the Holy Spirit might be the protagonist of Acts, the story's true concern is the community.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Don't Let the Galatians Read This Letter: Philippians 1:3-11***

Outside of the Book of Acts, readers may turn to Paul's letter to the Philippians for a similar congregational thriving example. Unlike his letter to the Galatian church, in which the old Apostle firmly reprimands their lack of faith and commitment, Paul bestowed gushing prose of affirmation, collaboration, and love on the church in Philippi.

Paul's opening lines set the mood for this letter, as he talks about his joy (*chara*), rejoicing (*chairein*), and rejoicing with (*synchairein*) the Philippians. These words appear sixteen times throughout the composition. Still noted, "Beyond sheer statistics, the overall tenor of the letter is that of joy."<sup>12</sup> Paul amplified his love for the Philippians by expressing his loving affection (*splanchnon*) (1:8), a word used by the Gospel writers to describe Jesus' compassion for those in need that came from his bowels or the pit of his existence.

Why did Paul feel so fondly for this church, whereas the Galatian church seems like the bane of his existence? The answer to this question is found in 1:3-11, in which Paul discusses their partnership (*koinōnia*) in the Gospel.

As Still argued, "Paul shares with the Philippians a foundational reason for his thankful, joyful prayer to God on their behalf—the assembly's protracted partnership in the Gospel. From the church's inception to Paul's present communication, the Philippians had been deeply interested in and actively involved with the apostle in gospel work and witness."<sup>13</sup>

Some might believe that Paul praises their *koinōnia* for their generous financial contribution to Gospel work (4:10-19). However, Paul's view of their partnership seems to go beyond monetary constraints as he praises their spiritual growth (1:6), shared suffering and work (1:7), and spiritual discernment (1:9-11).

The peculiar aspect of their synergy comes in the face of opposition created from their disharmony, referred to in chapter 2. The fellowship in Philippi was not a church without conflict or turmoil.

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<sup>11</sup> William H. Willimon, *Acts. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 42.

<sup>12</sup> Todd D. Still, *Philippians & Philemon*. The Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2011), 29-30.

<sup>13</sup> Still, *Philippians & Philemon*, 30.

Despite their suffering and opposition, Paul expressed immeasurable joy that they might overcome such things through togetherness.<sup>14</sup>

As N.T. Wright noted, “The Philippians are ‘partners in the gospel,’ ‘partners in grace;’ they are in the gospel business, the grace business, along with Paul, and their gifts prove it.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, Paul looked upon their fellowship (koinōnia) with gratitude and joy.

### **Radically Inclusive Community: James 2:1-13**

While Paul’s letter to the Philippians shows readers the results of the power of a shared fellowship within a church, James’ letter gives them a glimpse into the inner workings of how to forge it through hard work, difficult conversations, and development.

Unlike many of his New Testament counterparts, James does not give future readers much insight into the specific church or churches he originally wrote. However, the letter’s recipients were exhorted as fellow sojourners out of his sense of communal responsibility and commitment, calling them to journey together.<sup>16</sup>

James’ readers’ unique challenges are highlighted in 2:1-13 as he admonishes their economic and social discrimination. In short, the rich and well connected were treated more favorably than the poor and lowly, with socialites receiving a place of prominence within the church. James called out their “acts of discrimination” or hurtful partiality based solely on outward appearance and social position.<sup>17</sup>

James reminded them that the Lord Jesus said that the poor and lowly were the greatest in the Kingdom of God (2:5), prompting them to recall that it was the rich who were exploiting them in court (2:6-7). It seems as though the rich were able to use legal proceedings to oppress the poor.

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<sup>14</sup> Michael D. Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 329.

<sup>15</sup> Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*. (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 84-84.

<sup>16</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, Joel B. Green, and Marianne Meye Thompson, *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology*. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2001), 496-497.

<sup>17</sup> Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 389.

<sup>18</sup> Pheme Perkins, *First and Second Peter, James, and Jude*. Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1995), 110.

However, his teaching's bedrock is found in verses 8-13, in which James calls them to a different standard, the Royal Law of Love. As Jesus called them to love their neighbor, James warns that faith in Christ is incompatible with discriminatory attitudes and practices, which gone unchecked, will plague the Christian communities.<sup>19</sup> James amplified this teaching on love by stating in 2:14-17 that faith, if not accompanied by actions that reflect loving neighbor, is dead.

As Coogan argues, "The writer is concerned that these early Christian groups should not adopt, or fall back into, the values or the behavior of the surrounding population."<sup>20</sup> Paired together with the writers call to a pure and faultless religion that looks after widows and orphans (1:27), to accompany words of grace with action (2:14-19), and to act justly with those entrusted to their care (5:1-6), James was setting the church apart from all other communities within their context.

While differences will always exist within a local congregation, whether the rich and poor in James' letter or Gentiles and Jews in Galatians, Jesus' followers are to preserve peace and love in their communal life.<sup>21</sup> James gives readers a glimpse into the radically inclusive nature of the community.

### **SYNTHESIS OF THEMES, VALUES, AND COMMITMENTS**

The concept of the church as a community is different from the institutional concept of *ekklesia*, a more common term used for the church throughout the New Testament. *Ekklesia* is a technical term to describe the distinct local churches and the greater sense of connection as a group of communities bound together by Jesus.<sup>22</sup> Of course, the church was an assembly of people who worshiped, prayed, studied, partook in the Eucharist, and ministered together.

Out of the rich history of Greek philosophy, we derive the term *koinōnia*, which was associated with equality through the idea of friendships that shared all things, including goods, mind-set, and love.<sup>23</sup> That is why in the purest expression, the church's fellowship is about living life well together, breaking bread in each other's home, supporting each other's businesses, enjoying shared interests, and responding to the needs around us.

For the church, it is not just a shared belief in Jesus that forms a community, but the incarnational expressions of life ordained by the Spirit of God for the excellent work of redeeming God's world.

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<sup>19</sup> Edgar V. McKnight and Christopher Lee Church, *Hebrews-James*. Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary. (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2004), 364.

<sup>20</sup> Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 386-387.

<sup>21</sup> Achtemeier, *Introducing the New Testament*, 498.

<sup>22</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 227.

<sup>23</sup> James Thompson, *The Church According to Paul: Rediscovering the Community Conformed to Christ*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 193.

Through the Spirit, the mundane acts of breaking bread and conducting business transform into purposeful actions of fellowship among followers of Jesus.

As Leon put it, "Since the Holy Spirit is the eschatological Spirit— which means liberation and communion— the being of the church must take into account the Spirit's work as perfecting the church as a free community constituted by relations."<sup>24</sup> The Spirit's work bonded the church community through everyday living and generosity in Acts 2:42-47 and 4:32-37, stretched their capacity to love one another in James 2:1-13, and bolstered them for thriving in Philippians 1:3-11.

Throughout the New Testament and proceeding history, we see many church expressions across multiple continents, people groups, and theological convictions. No matter the form, the church is still composed of people, connected around a unifying act of existence. Even as we witness the growth and organizational changes within the many expressions of the church in the *Bible*, as the church struggles over power, exclusion and inclusion, money, persecution, and theology, the New Testament writers continually brought people back to the centrality of the Christian community (koinōnia).

While the concept of equality within a community is extraordinary and beautiful, it is quite challenging in practicality. Hence, we have so many correspondences from the New Testament writers addressing various conflicts that arose as community began to form. The challenge that faced the church's early expressions, whether from the Book of Acts to the Galatians and Philippians, was the merging of many life journeys, ethnicities, contextual experiences, genders, and socio-economic statuses together. As one Kearsley put it, "Biblical accounts of early church and power theory equally still draw attention to the fact that power relations and exclusions are real factors in the life of the church."<sup>25</sup>

Modeled by the variety of biblical letters to the churches of the first and second centuries of Christianity, one key to the thriving of the church community might be the adventure of navigating difficult conversations. Though often avoided by many churches, the airing of our grievances, perceived differences, struggles with change, and theological convictions, create the capacity for transparency and growth. As one author argues, "A first step in cultivating the true social expression of this shared life is candid recognition of possible inequalities and communications."<sup>26</sup>

The hope of congregational thriving might be a simple, yet profound, reminder of who we are together, not in the institutional sense, but a deeply held theologically-relational sense. Despite all the necessary complexities of the congregational organization, with all of our organized programs, traditions, policies, and bylaws, we are still called together to know one another, share life, and

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<sup>24</sup> I. Leon Harris, *The Holy Spirit as Communion*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 103.

<sup>25</sup> Kearsley, *Church, Community and Power*, 93-94.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 94

respond to our needs. The cosmic capacity of the church still comes down to *koinōnia*, authentic relationships bound in community.

## Section Two: Topic History and Key Voices

### A FAIRLY NEW FIELD OF STUDY

The history of looking at the congregational organization as an emotional or relational system is a fairly new concept. Much of the groundwork has been laid by two primary experts, Dr. Murray Bowen and Dr. Edwin Friedman. Both men contributed significantly to organizational emotional theory.

#### ***The Father of Family Systems, Dr. Murray Bowen***

Psychiatrist Dr. Murray Bowen (1913-1990) developed the theory of family systems, which looked at how being human in relationship with others affects every person within that system. The theory examines human behavior and functioning on multiple levels, including individuals in the context of the relationship systems, the members in relationship to each other, and the systems overall.<sup>27</sup>

Bowen begins with looking at the family as an emotional unit and then uses systems thinking to examine the unit's complex interactions. As one considers his or her own family, there is an intense connection to many different interwoven levels of the human emotional system.

In his groundbreaking work, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, Bowen examined the endless points of relational connection among immediate members of a family, as well as extended family, environment, context, and influences.<sup>28</sup> He studied the interconnected nature of the family unit and how needs, expectations, anxiety, stress, and change affect each member of the family.

Family dynamics in psychiatry was not a new concept in 1966 when Bowen presented these ideas. However, what made Bowen's work profound was his ability to expand the concept of family systems theory to its connection with society. Like the interrelated nature of a family unit, such as the relationship between child and parent or parent to parent, Bowen believed that society is an interconnected system. He determined, "The members of society are fused into each other and are more emotionally dependent on each other, with less operating autonomy in the individual."<sup>29</sup>

By examining one's complex family system as an emotional unit, individuals might have a better understanding of how they related to others in different types of systems, such as work, social

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<sup>27</sup> Ona Cohn Bregman and Charles M. White, editors. *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life: Expanding the Horizons for Bowen Family Systems Theory*. (New York: Brunner-Routledge, 2011), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. (New York: Scribner Book Companies, 1985).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 440.



groups, and religious connections, which is directly correlated back to how the individual relates within their family system. The subtle and powerful ways that people are influenced by their own families, by society, and by the past generations demands the development of systems understanding to help one recognize the subtle and powerful ways we are affected by others.<sup>30</sup>

By looking at the complex depth of human psychology and culture and its connection to other human beings, Bowen believed that the emotional system affects most human activity and is the principal driving force in the development of clinical problems.<sup>31</sup> He, therefore, studied the emotional operations within the family, work, and society as a way to better understand how to resolve the issues humans face in connection to one another.

Bowen broke down his theory into eight concepts: (1) Triangles, (2) Differentiation of Self, (3) Nuclear Family Emotional System, (4) Family Projection Process, (5) Multigenerational Transmission Process, (6) Emotional Cutoff, (7) Sibling Position, (8) Societal Emotional Process.<sup>32</sup>

By examining each of these concepts, we can understand how humans respond to needs, expectations, anxiety, stress, and change within an organizational emotional unity. As scholars of Bowen's Theory, Ona Cohn Bregman and Charles M. White expressed:

Bowen theory broadens the observer's perspective from a focus on the behavior and functioning of individual people to a focus on the behavior and functioning of human relationship systems as a whole and of their members, in the context of mutual influencing from and mutual responding to relationship forces from within and outside of those systems in an ongoing, dynamic fashion.<sup>33</sup>

### **Edwin H. Friedman and Family Systems Theory within the Church**

If Murray Bowen was the Father of Family Systems Theory, then Edwin H. Friedman (1932-1996) was its Great Rabbi. Friedman, an ordained rabbi and family therapist, applied the family systems theory to the church and synagogue as an emotional unit.

Of course, congregations are composed of many families and often multiple generations of families are represented. These realities and the many interconnected relationships within a congregation or synagogue make this emotional unit incredibly complex.

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<sup>30</sup> Bowen, 320.

<sup>31</sup> "Learn about Bowen Theory." The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family. <https://www.thebowncenter.org/core-concepts-diagrams> (Accessed March 1, 2021)

<sup>32</sup> "Learn about Bowen Theory." The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family. <https://www.thebowncenter.org/core-concepts-diagrams>. (Accessed February 28, 2021)

<sup>33</sup> Ona Cohn Bregman and Charles M. White, editors. *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, 3.

In his book, *Generation to Generation*, Friedman argues that you can apply family systems theory to religious organizations. There are six basic family systems concepts have particular relevance in the religious setting: (1) homeostasis; (2) process and content; (3) the nonanxious presence; (4) over-functioning; (5) triangles; (6) and symptom-bearer.<sup>34</sup>

Friedman focused on the congregational or synagogue leader's role in understanding and managing the complex emotional unit. In a sense, the leader's role is to continually measure the emotional pulse of the congregation to needs, expectations, anxiety, stress, and change. He determined, "Homeostasis can be very useful in detecting underlying forces and in evaluating whether or not a given change is really systemic, pushing leaders to ask questions such as 'Why now' or 'What has gone out of balance.'"<sup>35</sup>

Friedman argues that the church leadership's work is around self-differentiation, helping people understand who they are emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually while also understanding where they end and others begin. He stated, "To the extent we function and grow within the context of our souls (a lifetime project) and abet the emergence of our selves (by a willingness to face life's challenges and oneself), our spirituality and our tradition will spring naturally from our being."<sup>36</sup>

To do this, leaders must be well-equipped personally, with a strong sense of self-differentiation. Friedman states, "If a leader will take primary responsibility for his or her position as "head" and work to define his or her own goals and self while staying in touch with the rest of the organism, there is a more than reasonable chance that the body will follow."<sup>37</sup> In other words, emotionally, healthy organizations must have attuned leaders. A leader cannot expect to manage the complex emotional system of a congregation or synagogue without the ability to govern himself or herself.

Bregman and White commented on Friedman's theory, "Clergy frequently believe that leadership has more to do with what they do, or what they know, than with who they are. There is a tendency to over-function for others, which often leads to frustration, a loss of energy, and in some cases, a desire to leave the ministry."<sup>38</sup>

### ***Bowen and Friedman Point to a New Generation of System Thinkers***

The groundbreaking work of Bowen and Friedman established a psychiatric and anthropologic way of thinking about people and how they fit into a system, whether the family, work, religious

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<sup>34</sup> Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 202.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 229.

<sup>38</sup> Ona Cohn Bregman and Charles M. White, editors. *Bringing Systems Thinking to Life*, 205.

organization, or society at large. Their research will inspire a new generation of systems thinkers to build off of their work, specifically looking at what defines a system, emotional intelligence, and how leaders of organizations might approach leading a complex array of people.

## KEY VOICES

### ***Peter Block and Defining Community***

The twenty-first century has seen a shift to globalism due to open markets, availability of travel, and social media platforms. And yet, people are living in increased isolation. “The fragmentation of community, in which we are separated into silos, is driving our dividedness that makes it difficult to create a more positive or alternative future,” argued Peter Block in his work, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*.<sup>39</sup>

Block’s expertise is in the area of community building. Along with authoring several books on the topic, he runs an organization for civic engagement, designed learning for community leaders, and a created a collective that gathers representatives from across a community’s sectors for conversations.

Block originally planned his book *Community* for city managers seeking to build a strong coalition within their communities. However, what he found through his research was a desire to define community more generously. According to Block, community is a sense of belonging and a sense of ownership.

Block argues that the absence of belonging is a primary cause of the age of isolation within our lives, institutions, and communities. Therefore, the key to creating or transforming community is to see the power of small but essential elements of being with others.<sup>40</sup>

For leadership to successfully foster a community of belonging, Block states, they must create a context that nurtures an alternative future of well-being. This is done by building on the collection of shared gifts, commitment, and accountability, creating space for meaningful conversations for people to experience a different point of view from carefully listening and paying attention to others.

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<sup>39</sup> Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*. (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2009), 2.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

Block urged, "In communal transformation, leadership is about intention, convening, valuing relatedness, and presenting choices. It is not a personality characteristic or a matter of style, and therefore it requires nothing more than what all of us already have."<sup>41</sup>

### ***The Relational Pastor with Andrew Root***

In shifting from a philosophical discussion about relationships with Peter Block to a theological conversation about how leaders approach the dynamics of relationships within a congregational organization, Andrew Root is a leading voice.

Root's work around the relational approach to ministry leadership began focusing on youth ministry out of his research of theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He produced two books from this focus, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker* and *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry*.

However, Root's work so resonated with the broader ministerial leadership audience that he became the leading thinker of a relational approach through *The Relational Pastor*. Root's research centers on the power of empathy within a church community, writing, "Empathy is the experience of feeling the very relationships that make a person. Empathy is a feeling that touches the relationships that make us, a magnet that draws our person to another's."<sup>42</sup>

Root talks about relational ministry in the theological sense as incarnational. He claimed, "To follow the incarnate One is to be person one to another, trusting that when we indwell each other, when we are human beings one to another, we are sharing in the life of God."<sup>43</sup> In approaching the church community as an incarnational expression, the members are participants in an open space of vulnerability, brokenness, restoration, suffering, healing, celebration, and growth.

Root examines the church as a theological construct. He argues that the church is not just a building with a specific location. Rather the church is an incarnational expression of the relationship found with the nature of God. Root explains that as a shared space of humanity's persons, the church is the indwelling of God's presence in relationship with one another, both divine and human.<sup>44</sup>

The work of the church leaders, therefore, is to curate this space. Root elaborated, "The pastor must do the work of keeping the relational flow going by being in touch with people's emotions, confronting and attending to emotional cutoffs, over-functioning, and triangulation." Root adds that

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<sup>41</sup> Block, *Community*, 85.

<sup>42</sup> Andrew Root, *The Relational Pastor: Sharing in Christ by Sharing Ourselves*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013) 91.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 159-160.

it is not the pastor's job to solve these problems or completely heal them in individuals but confront relational blockages as an open and sharing environment.<sup>45</sup>

### ***The Emotionally Intelligent Congregation***

For church leaders to facilitate a space for relationships to flourish, they must have a strong understanding of their emotions and equip the congregation to do the same. There is a term for this, which is emotional intelligence.

While Peter Salovey and John Mayer developed the original Emotional Intelligence concept, Daniel Goleman has become the leading voice for Emotional Intelligence's implication for leadership and organizations. Goleman has written numerous books on the topic, beginning with his 1995 work, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*.<sup>46</sup>

Generally, Emotional Intelligence (EQ or EI) is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage our own emotions and recognize, understand, and influence others' emotions.

The development of emotional intelligence is vital within an organization when it comes to addressing challenges. Goleman stated, "When emotionally upset, people cannot remember, attend, learn, or make decisions clearly."<sup>47</sup>

Working off of Salovey and Mayer's research, Goleman argues that there are five components of EQ, including: (1) self-awareness or knowing one's emotions; (2) self-regulation or managing one's emotions; (3) motivation or marshaling emotions in the service of a goal; (4) empathy or recognizing the emotions of others; (5) social skills or handling relationships.<sup>48</sup>

Goleman believes that the emphasis and value of intelligence (IQ) has gone too far in measuring human life. He argues, "For better or worse, intelligence can come to nothing when emotions hold sway."<sup>49</sup> His subsequent research has examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and effective performance, especially in leaders.

He argues that cognitive skills such as big-picture thinking and long-term visions are fundamental. "However, when calculating the ratio of technical skills and IQ to emotional intelligence as ingredients of excellent performance," argued Goleman, "EQ proved to be twice as important as

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<sup>45</sup> Root, *Relational Pastor*, 211.

<sup>46</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. (London: Bloomsbury, 1996).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-118.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

the others for jobs at all levels.”<sup>50</sup> According to Goleman and his contemporaries, research has found that emotional intelligence is twice as important as cognitive abilities or technical skills for leaders within an organization.<sup>51</sup>

Goleman argues that the emotional climate of an organization drives the results. His research found that roughly 50 to 70 percent of an organization’s members perceive their organization’s climate are traced back to one person’s actions: the leader. “More than anyone else, the boss creates the conditions that directly determine people’s ability to work well,” states Goleman, “Therefore, the leader’s emotional states and actions do affect how the people they lead will feel and therefore perform.”<sup>52</sup>

The work of helping people better understand their emotions is for the benefit of the organization’s health and the individual’s health. “Helping people better manage their upsetting feelings—anger, anxiety, depression, pessimism, and loneliness—is a form of disease prevention,”<sup>53</sup> states Goleman. In a sense, the leader’s role is to help people broaden their vocabulary and understanding of their emotions.

Goleman’s work has influenced countless explorations of EQ, creating practical resources for organizations to train and equip their members for a greater capacity to understand themselves and others.

*Emotional Intelligence 2.0* is one of the most practical resources on EQ.<sup>54</sup> Developed by Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves, the interactive resources’ focus is to create a high capacity within individuals to identify their emotions as they happen accurately. This emphasis came off the heels of their research that found only 36 percent of people can express the wide range of emotions they experience.<sup>55</sup> The book provides a framework for understanding EQ and an assessment to help the reader better understand their capacity for self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management.

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<sup>50</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Leadership: The Power of Emotional Intelligence; Selected Writings*. (Northampton: More Than Sound, 2011), 38.

<sup>51</sup> Daniel Goleman, “Emotional intelligence” key to leadership.” *Health Progress* 80, no. 2 (1999): 9, <https://georgefox.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/trade-journals/emotional-intelligence-key-leadership/docview/274438810/se-2?accountid=11085> (accessed March 13, 2021)

<sup>52</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Leadership: The Power of Emotional Intelligence*, 94.

<sup>53</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional intelligence*, 422.

<sup>54</sup> Travis Bradberry, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*. (San Diego, CA: TalentSmart, 2009).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

### ***John Kotter and The Relational Side of Leading Change***

John Kotter is one of the foremost thinkers on leadership for the last two decades. As the Professor of Leadership, Emeritus, at the Harvard Business School, Kotter first published *Leading Change* in 1996.<sup>56</sup> The book has only grown in popularity over the last two and half decades, reaching The International Bestseller list.

In the book, Kotter lays out an eight-stage process for leading change. For the sake of my research, I zeroed in on stage two of the process and its implications to the relational connectedness within an organization as leaders seek to change. In stage two, Kotter suggests that the leaders must develop a guiding coalition. He argued, "No one individual has ever developed the right vision, communicate it to a larger audience, eliminate all key obstacles, generate short-term wins, lead or manage dozens of change projects, nor anchor new approaches deep in the organization's culture."<sup>57</sup>

Kotter centers the work of a leader in developing a guided coalition around creating a culture of trust within the organization. He maintained, "When trust is present, you will usually be able to create teamwork. When it is missing, you won't."<sup>58</sup>

This statement unto itself seems obvious, and yet how many organizations, specifically churches, lack trust. Many organizations silo people into their various fields of expertise or interest without clear, transparent, and collaborative communication across the organization. In organizations that lack trust, when difficult circumstances arise and tension builds, communication falters, personality polarities emerge, and avoidable new obstacles stand in the path of change.

The work of leadership is to bring people together with great intentionality, not just for work projects or organizational initiatives but also for developing relationships, mutual respect, trust, and a common goal. "The typical goal that binds individuals together on a guiding change coalition is a commitment to excellence, a real desire to make their organization perform to the very highest levels possible," Kotter argues, adding, "Trust helps enormously in creating a shared objective."<sup>59</sup>

Kotter's original work in *Leading Change* has created an intricate network of research and resources around the eight-stage process of change. In some of his subsequent work, such as "Core Drivers for Cultivating Thriving Teams," he argues that how team members relate to each other is equally

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<sup>56</sup> John P. Kotter, *Leading Change*. (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>58</sup> Kotter, *Leading Change*, 63.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 67.

as important as how they get work done together.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, the focus of team relationships centers on three key core ideas: (1) trust, building an understanding of self and appreciation of others; (2) cohere, developing authentic, caring relationships; (3) belong, balancing respect for individuals and group identities.<sup>61</sup>

For organizational leaders, developing healthy relationships may be more challenging in some groups than others. Some groups might have a higher emotional intelligence (EQ), while others are more inclined to technical skills (IQ). Kotter's research has found that IQ learning groups often tend to resist the opportunities to develop healthy relationships. He advised, "Leaning into your less preferred style feels a bit like writing with your non-dominant hand or riding a backward bicycle. But if you want to accelerate your team's path to thriving together, you have to excel at engaging people rationally and emotionally."<sup>62</sup>

### ***The Lilly Endowment***

In June of 2020, the Lilly Endowment issued grants to ninety-two organizations focusing on congregational thriving. According to Lilly, the initiative aims to help congregations strengthen their ministries and thrive on helping deepen people's relationship with God, enhance their connections with each other, and contribute to their communities' flourishing.

In my faith tradition, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF) is one of the grants' recipients. As part of the grant proposal, CBF identified five characteristics of a thriving congregation: Compelling Clarity, Holy Tenacity, Faithful Agility, Rooted Relationships, and Dynamic Collaboration.<sup>63</sup>

CBF's practical research on thriving congregations will take several years to produce findings. However, several other faith traditions with similarities to CBF have researched this area, with several identifying relational connections within a church as an essential element for thriving.

The Vibrant Faith Project's is a Lilly endowed organization. Its research identified twenty-three common characteristics of thriving congregations from across fifteen diverse studies of various faith traditions and expressions. At least three of the traits involved the relational connectedness of a church, including engaging in conversations and relationship building, diverse people uniting

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<sup>60</sup>"Thriving Teams: How to Develop New Ways of Working." Kotter, Inc. (September 2020): <https://www.kotterinc.com/thriving-teams-how-to-develop-new-ways-of-working/> (accessed March 14, 2021).

<sup>61</sup> Kotter, "Thriving Teams: How to Develop New Ways of Working."

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> *A Proposal to Establish Thriving Congregations Initiative*. (Decatur, GA: Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, 2018).



around a shared vision, and the cultivation of belonging and acceptance.<sup>64</sup> As part of their Thriving Congregations initiative, Vibrant Faith focuses on coaching congregational leaders, facilitating workshops, and offering compelling curriculum for churches.

The Presbyterian Church USA released a study in 2019, focusing on “7 Marks of Congregational Vitality.”<sup>65</sup> Of the core ideas produced from the study, two of the seven marks concentrate on the concept of relationships.

The sixth mark of congregational vitality is caring relationships, emphasizing cultivating an environment of genuine opportunity to share stories, fostering connections among various demographics while building and rebuilding conflicted and strained relationships.<sup>66</sup>

The seventh mark of ecclesial health emphasizes communal life centered on a shared clarity of vision, mission, and core values, with all stakeholders committed to fiscal responsibilities, active participation, and giving voice to envisioning, dreaming, and decision-making.<sup>67</sup>

The PC USA’s Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative provides a two-year covenant relationship with participating congregations through guided curriculum, toolkit, conferences, and coaching. In the first year of the churchwide journey, the initiative emphasizes building authentic relationships of faith, while the second year focuses on joining faithfully together in living out a Christ-centered change.<sup>68</sup>

### ***Piecing Together The Relational Dynamics of Change***

The building blocks for helping congregational leaders understand the relational dynamics of change are there. Block helps leaders consider the conceptual understanding of what forms people together in community, while Root builds the theological framework of the local church's interwoven dynamics. Goleman gives a practical structure for helping people understand themselves and how they relate to others, while Kotter helps leaders understand how to bring people together around a common cause.

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<sup>64</sup> “Thriving Congregations Characteristics.” n.d. Vibrant Faith Projects: <https://www.vibrantfaithprojects.org/thriving-congregations-characteristics.html> (Accessed March 15, 2021)

<sup>65</sup> *Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative*. (Louisville, KY: Theology, Formation and Evangelism Office Presbyterian Mission Agency Presbyterian Church, 2019).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>67</sup> *Vital Congregations Revitalization Initiative*, 12.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

## Section 3: Synthesis and Conclusion

### AREAS OF AGREEMENT/CONSENSUS

The church is an intricate system, composed of individuals with varying degrees of emotional complexities, relationally joined together around a common goal. That idea unto itself might scare away many leaders from guiding such a group through change, let alone complex transformation such as what is next after the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, this research has shown that for all the complexities of humanity, there is a rhyme and reason behind our actions. Yes, we are emotionally driven beings, but our emotions can be understood, coached, and directed toward individual and collective thriving.

Looking at Acts 2-5, one can see how dynamic congregational thriving can be when individuals and the collective church community hone into emotional intelligence, more specifically the idea of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivating emotions in service of a goal, empathy for others, and handling relationships.<sup>69</sup> While at the same time, one can see the catastrophic outcome of emotional ignorance in Ananias and Sapphira's betrayal of the fellowship.

If the controversy of Acts 5 played out today, there might have been a broader language of the deep theological and psychological issues at work. Andrew Root would have indeed argued that this conflict is precisely where the church community's incarnational nature should intersect conflict, emotional cutoffs, and over-functioning of both Peter and the infamous couple.<sup>70</sup>

Paul's letter to the Philippians provides a practical example of Kotter's belief that to develop a guiding coalition, a genuine sense of trust and a common goal must exist.<sup>71</sup> This church is also a textbook example of a complex emotional unit with plenty of conflicts and the ability to positively manage their emotions for the organization's success.<sup>72</sup>

James' letter might be the best example of the conjoining research of all the historical and critical voices presented within my investigation. Here is a complex organization composed of dynamic individuals from an array of family systems.<sup>73</sup> James' first readers' variety of family systems were the rich and poor, included and marginalized, working-class and peasants. In turn, somehow, James

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<sup>69</sup> Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 117-118.

<sup>70</sup> Root, *The Relational Pastor*, 211.

<sup>71</sup> Kotter, *Leading Change*, 67.

<sup>72</sup> Daniel Goleman, *Emotional intelligence*, 422.

<sup>73</sup> Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*.

was supposed to create a sense of authentic community of belonging and shared ownership.<sup>74</sup> And, as Friedman concluded, "The efficacy of the pastoral approach resides in our position in the emotional processes of our community and how we function within that position."<sup>75</sup>

As seen in both the evidence from the New Testament letters to the many modern-day examples, the church organization needs a better and more functional understanding of their emotional connection to others. As Goleman pointed out in the characteristics of people who are not self-aware, "They are bullies; They are highly controlling; They prefer to be passive-aggressive; They have a whole lot of made-up reasons that do not involve being accountable; They suffer from delusions of grandeur."<sup>76</sup>

### **ONGOING TENSION, DISAGREEMENT, AND PRESSURE POINTS**

Through my research, the tension I discovered was not necessarily a philosophical, theological, or theoretical understanding of why the church exists as a diverse group of people partnering around a common goal. Instead, many churches' unique challenge is the ability to help people manage the deep well of emotional identity, both individually and collectively, in relationships with others.

While the church can be one of the healthiest institutions in people's lives, it can quickly descend into a place of unhealthy toxicity, as seen in the story of Ananias and Sapphira from the Book of Acts and in James' letter. I have had my fair share of challenging business meetings and the emotional scars to prove it.

### **GAPS, MISSTEPS, SCHOLARSHIP PROBLEMS, AND LIMITATIONS**

The biggest gaps I discovered were not necessarily around the research data itself but the lack of resources in the church vernacular. In turn, I have several lingering questions, which are pointing toward further exploration. Are most people aware of and willing to work through their emotional identity as it relates to the church? Does the church have the systems to help individuals and the collective congregation navigate the myriad of challenges that comes with being in relationship with one another around a common goal? How might denominations and partner organizations equip clergy to lead congregations through an emotional intelligence education?

While the well of research and evidence for the correlation between a healthier organization and a stronger sense of Emotional Intelligence is deep, as seen by the work of Friedman, Block, Kotter, among others, the direct applicability of these concepts to the congregational setting is wanting. This is a tremendous gap for clergy, who are often leading congregations that face a mounting number of issues coming out of this pandemic, including and not limited to declining membership

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<sup>74</sup> Block, *Community*, 10.

<sup>75</sup> Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 8.

<sup>76</sup> Brandon Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence*, 23-25.

and financial resources, limited staff, and the congregational worry of relevance to the greater community around the church.

## Conclusion

As congregations return to in-person gatherings at this stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, now might be the opportune time for clergy to lead church members through emotional and relational development as it correlates to spiritual formation. As Bock argued, "The portrait of the early church in Acts shows that community and the welfare of the group were a priority. This attitude reflected spiritual maturity that allowed the church to grow."<sup>77</sup>

Many experts have argued that most people will have to relearn social skills after spending over a year in isolation and drastically different social circumstances. As a clinical psychologist, Ilyse Dobrow DiMarco conveyed, "As a return to somewhat normal life is on the horizon, my patients' anxieties have morphed once again, with many of them fretting about how they will reenter public life after having avoided it for a year. While they've been outwardly rejoicing about the world reopening, they've been privately panicking."<sup>78</sup>

There are myriad of tools are available for congregational leaders to facilitate the relational connections that help churches thrive. As Kearsley pleaded, "The stakes here are high, and the handling of power streams in church appears imperative because life together in small and great ways is a kind of power-sharing in people's destinies. The commitment to each others' destinies is high and therefore involves high risks wherever power relations are found."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Bock, *Acts*, 156.

<sup>78</sup> Ilyse Dobrow DiMarco. n.d. "Dreading Post-Pandemic Crowds and Social Situations? Exposure Therapy Can Help." *Washington Post*.  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/after-covid-social-anxiety-crowd/2021/04/06/901c552e-93d1-11eb-a74e-1f4cf89fd948\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/wellness/after-covid-social-anxiety-crowd/2021/04/06/901c552e-93d1-11eb-a74e-1f4cf89fd948_story.html). (Accessed April 8, 2021).

<sup>79</sup> Kearsley, *Church, Community and Power*, 220.

# Appendix C

## Appendix C–Milestone 3 Design Workshop Report

### NPO Statement

Churches can thrive when they understand, navigate, and leverage the liminality existing between people, the community, and where God is leading.

### NPO Scope and Constraints

There is a diversity of beliefs, identities, cognitions, communication styles, and personalities within a congregation. Such dynamics create emotional, communicative, and social gaps, resulting in strained relationships, competing interests, and mistrust. Often this tension builds unhealthy barriers from where a congregation is and where they would like to be. One way to think about this is liminality, which comes from the Latin word *limen*, which means “space between” or “threshold.”

By equipping congregational leaders with practical resources to understand and explore these liminal spaces, congregations have the potential to thrive.

### NPO Context

Churches come in all shapes, sizes, and structures. When you also consider congregational polity and denominational traditions, churches have endless contextual differences.

However, at their core, churches are made up of people in relationship with one another. Therefore, who we are individually and how we relate are the most fundamental aspects of being human, let alone members of a local church.

No matter the church makeup, polity, or denominational tradition, churches can create space to understand and enhance the relationships among members building a capacity for thriving. By focusing on the fundamental elements for improving all relationships (communication styles, personality types, core beliefs, identity, and clarifying shared values), the NPO can address a myriad of contextual church expressions.

For larger churches, approaching the NPO begins within small group leadership teams. For smaller churches, approaching the NPO can start with congregational-wide learning, conversations, and exploration.

### Root Causes

The nature of the local congregation has so dramatically shifted from its original theological purpose in the lives of Jesus’ followers that its current organizational existence might be preventing its opportunity for thriving. The ecclesial process of creating structure, policies, and procedures for ministries and programs can often overshadow the purpose of their existence in the first place, connecting people.

Since at their core congregations are relational, and since relationships are complex, a church's capacity for thriving often is predicated on the overall health of how people relate to one another. Even within a small group of people, there are dozens of possible ways of seeing and perceiving the world, communicating and processing information, and emotional responses to what is happening within and around individuals. And a lack of familiarity with these significant differences often drives misunderstanding, mistrust, and miscommunication within the church, which leads to anxiety, frustration, resistance to change, immobility, and more.

## Definition of 'Done'

By equipping congregations with practical resources to understand and navigate liminality, churches will experience enhanced relationships, leading to a greater level of trust and respect, deeper formation, enrichment of shared values, and clarity of vision to step forward into an undetermined future.

## Three Big Ideas

Next semester, I will explore the viability of three practical prototypes to equip congregations to understand and navigate liminal spaces: (1) An interactive book study, (2) An interactive podcast series, (3) A churchwide interactive discernment process.

## 3 Concept Pitches

### **BIG IDEA # 1: INTERACTIVE BOOK**

- **Big Idea:** An interactive book will provide the fundamental understanding of liminal space in a church, along with an interactive small group discussion guide and practical design concept activities.
- **Audience:** The interactive book will be designed for congregational leaders and clergy for leadership development.
- **Benefits:** The target audience's benefit will be foundational learning of liminality within a congregational and a helpful guide to put these learnings into practice.
- **Approach:** Based on learnings from the book, leaders will be equipped to facilitate small group conversations and design concept activities geared towards developing a deeper contextual understanding of liminality and practical opportunities to enhance relationships within the church.
- **Risk:** Book studies are often limited by the weakest link in the group, not thoughtfully reading the material in preparation for small group conversations and design concept workshops.
- **Assumption/Hypothesis:** Equipped with knowledge and practical activities to develop a congregation's understanding of liminality, clergy and congregational leaders will lead their congregations into healthy relationships.
- **Benchmarks of success:**

- Leaders have a sense of confidence in their knowledge about and ability to navigate liminal spaces within their church and community.
- The small group conversations and design concept workshops are practical, strategic, and applicable to various contextual expressions of the church.
- The church sees improved relationships with a greater sense of mutual respect, enhanced communication, and improved togetherness.
- Other Approaches: The concept of liminality has been written about from a theological and organizational perspective. There are ample personality and temperament assessments available to help people understand the diversity of people types within an organization.

## **BIG IDEA # 2: INTERACTIVE PODCAST SERIES**

- Big Idea: The podcast series will build a foundational understanding of liminal space in a church, with interactive small group discussion guides and practical design concept activities.
- Audience: The podcast series will be designed for congregational leaders and clergy for leadership development.
- Benefits: The target audience's benefit will be foundational learning of liminality within a congregational and a helpful guide to put these learnings into practice.
- Approach: Based on interviews with experts in organizational psychology, leaders will be equipped to lead small group conversations and design concept activities geared towards developing a deeper contextual understanding of liminality and practical opportunities to enhance relationships within the church.
- Risk: While tapping into the learning style of auditory learners, one of the risks behind a podcast series is not providing the appropriate learning platform for visual and reading/writing learners.
- Assumption/Hypothesis: Equipped with knowledge and practical activities to develop a congregation's understanding of liminality, clergy and congregational leaders will lead their congregations into healthy relationships.
- Benchmarks of success:
  - Leaders have a sense of confidence in their knowledge about and ability to navigate liminal spaces within their church and community.
  - The small group conversations and design concept workshops are practical, strategic, and applicable to various contextual expressions of the church.
  - The church sees improved relationships with a greater sense of mutual respect, enhanced communication, and improved togetherness.
- Other Approaches: The concept of liminality has been written about from a theological and organizational perspective. There are ample personality and temperament assessments available to help people understand the diversity of people types within an organization.



### **BIG IDEA # 3: INTERACTIVE DISCERNMENT PROCESS**

- **Big Idea:** The discernment process is built around an interactive multi-month process, centered on three components: plenary sessions, small group conversation, and creative activities.
- **Audience:** The interactive discernment process is designed for an entire congregation to journey through together.
- **Benefits:** The target audience's benefit will be foundational learning of liminality within a congregational and a helpful guide to put these learnings into practice.
- **Approach:** The plenary sessions will provide congregations the general framework around the common liminal spaces within a church, while the small group conversations and interactive activities will give space to put concepts into practice.
- **Risks:** Who will lead these sessions, providing the essential insight into liminal spaces within a church, me, or a trained church leader? If I lead the plenary sessions, how will I do this over several months? Additionally, are most churches willing to commit to this type of process amidst other ministry and program commitments?
- **Assumption/Hypothesis:** Equipped with knowledge and practical activities to develop a congregation's understanding of liminality, clergy and congregational leaders will lead their congregations into healthy relationships.
- **Benchmarks of success:**
  - Leaders have a sense of confidence in their knowledge about and ability to navigate liminal spaces within their church and community.
  - The small group conversations and design concept workshops are practical, strategic, and applicable to various contextual expressions of the church.
  - The church sees improved relationships with a greater sense of mutual respect, enhanced communication, and improved togetherness.
- **Other Approaches:** The concept of liminality has been written about from a theological and organizational perspective. There are ample personality and temperament assessments available to help people understand the diversity of people types within an organization.

### **Design Workshop Stakeholder**

The Design Workshop consisted of eight participants: three senior pastors, one denominational leader, two advocacy specialists, and one seminary student.

### **One-On-One Interviews**

The three one-on-one interviews consisted of a retired senior pastor/congregational consultant, an executive director of church community engagement and leadership at a university, and a seminary director for a pastoral thriving initiative.

## Annotated Bibliography

**CARSON, TIMOTHY L, ROSY FAIRHURST, NIGEL ROOMS, AND LISA R WITHROW. *CROSSING THRESHOLDS: A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF LIMINALITY*. CAMBRIDGE: THE LUTTERWORTH PRESS, 2021.**

The collaborative writing team examines the theological construct of liminality. After building the framework for the concept within the context of the biblical narrative, they explore the tension that exists with the church and a rapidly changing world around it. Designed to build a new lens for the congregation to see itself and the world, the book attempts to equip clergy for liminal leadership. Contributors come from different practices, including academia, ordained clergy, parachurch leadership, and denominational offices.

*Crossing Thresholds* will provide a broader understanding and vocabulary to my research and diversify my contextual understanding of application by garnering a multidenominational approach.

**GRAY, DAVE. *LIMINAL THINKING: CREATE THE CHANGE YOU WANT BY CHANGING THE WAY YOU THINK*. BROOKLYN: TWO WAVES BOOKS, 2016.**

Gray examines why some people and organizations change while others struggle to adapt. By looking at the tension between the past, present, and future, the author helps highlight the core beliefs, tying them to identity, that either mobilize or immobilize adaptation.

As an organizational consultant, Grey wrote *Liminal Thinking* for individual practitioners and organizational leaders, providing readers with six practices that minimize reality distortion, improve understanding, and open new possibilities for positive change within their lives and organizations. Grey has written several books on design, change, and innovation.

*Liminal Thinking* will provide practical research on people's core beliefs, which often create tension within an organization.

**GRANT, ADAM M. *THINK AGAIN: THE POWER OF KNOWING WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW*. NEW YORK, NEW YORK: VIKING, 2021.**

As an organizational psychologist teaching at Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, Grant is at the cutting edge of research and application around human dynamics. In *Think Again*, the author explores the common cognitive processes, assumptions, and barriers that often lead individuals and organizations to assume their rightness in the face of compelling alternatives.

The first part of the book invites readers to hold a mirror to see their blinding wrongness. The second part provides practical methods of rethinking how an individual thinks. Finally, the third part examines these things on an organizational and institutional level.

*Think Again* will provide my research with scientific, psychological, and physiological depth behind why people think and act the way they do within an organization while also providing some practical tools for re-examining how we can think and act differently as we relate to others within the church.

**SIMMONS, AMY, AND RICK SIMMONS. *UNLEASHED: HARNESSING THE POWER OF LIMINAL SPACES*. CHARLESTON: FORBESBOOKS, 2021.**

Trained in organizational behavior, Simmons and Simmons examine the concept of liminal spaces and why uncertainty positively reshapes an organization. Coming from the concept of change management, the authors look at why some organizations resist the vulnerability of uncertainty while others thrive because of it.

Providing practical examples from the business sector, readers walk through the practical steps to prepare an organization to embrace to step into liminal spaces together by enhancing trust, increasing self-awareness, and clarifying identity.

Though written from a business and organization leadership perspective, this book can provide helpful insight into the dynamics that help an anxious organization navigate liminal spaces together.

**BARRET, JUSTIN L., AND PAMELA EBSTYNE KING. *THRIVING WITH STONE AGE MINDS*. DOWNERS GROVE: IVP ACADEMIC, 2021.**

Ebstyne, a professor of Applied Sciences in the School of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, and Barret, the founder and president of Blueprint 1543 and adjunct professor of psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary, examine evolutionary psychology, Christian faith, and the quest for human flourishing.

Since thriving has become such a widely used term, the authors first define what it means for individuals and relationships. Then, looking at human nature through a scientific and theological lens, the scholars also examine human capacity for adaptation in a rapidly changing world and how it affects individuals and organizations.

"Thriving with Stone Age Minds" provides a fascinating perspective into my research on human social dynamics from both a theological and scientific perspective.

**DUISBERG, JESSICA. "IMPLICIT, INTERSUBJECTIVE PRACTICES: ATTACHMENT THEORY AS A RESOURCE FOR ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP." *JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP* 20, NO. 1 (SPRING 2021): 48-82.**

Human social connections have always been remarkably challenging. However, the pandemic and political division has increasingly made communication and understanding even more strained. Duisberg examines what it takes to be an adaptive leader in challenging times and guides people to better connection practices.

The academic article examines what is behind the emotional distress of resistance to change as it relates to attachment theory while providing the reader with practical insight into cognitive and behavioral approaches to leading people into an uncertain future.

The article provides helpful insight into how people work and why they respond to change, conflict, and the future differently.

## Appendices

### Doctor of Leadership Design Exploration Plan Workshop October 13, 2021

#### To DO

- Finalize Participants
- Sketch Out Games
  - The Blindside, research more on know and don't know
- Online Platforms
  - Show & Tell
    - Create Doc
    - Upload to Google Docs
  - The Blind Side
    - Create Mural
  - 4 C's
    - Create Doc
    - Upload Google Doc
  - Affinity Map
    - Create Mural
  - 20/20 Vision
    - Create Doc
    - Upload Doc
- Proof Read: Participant Guide, Each Activity Doc or Mural (Show & Tell, The Blind Side, 4 C's, Affinity Map, 20/20 Vision)
- Participant Intro Video
- Participant Email

#### Participants

1. [REDACTED]
2. [REDACTED]
3. [REDACTED]
4. [REDACTED]
5. [REDACTED]
6. [REDACTED]
7. [REDACTED]
8. [REDACTED]

#### Overview

1. Introduction
2. Show and Tell: to prime the participants for creative conversations, each will be asked to come prepared to share a story of how they've experienced congregational thriving through navigating liminal spaces between people.
3. The Blind Side: participants will consider what they know and do not know about the topic.
4. 4 C's: participants will consider the components, characteristics, challenges, and character of the topic.
5. Affinity Map: participants will contemplate what it will take for churches to be equipped to navigate liminal spaces between people.

6. 20/20 Vision: participants will explore potential projects to solve the NPO.

#### NPO

This year, I am researching the concept of liminal space and thinking within a church. Liminal comes from the Latin word *limen*, which means "space between" or "threshold."

I believe that within the church are liminal spaces and ways of thinking between our members, which often prevents them from the space between where they are and where God is leading.

By garnering a deeper understanding of each other, namely our way of thinking, emotional responses, communication styles, beliefs, and identities, churches can bridge a more robust connection that leads to thriving.

*Churches can thrive when they follow God's leading by navigating liminal spaces between people.*

#### Prepping Participants

\*See Participant Guide

**RECORD****\*DON'T FORGET TO RECORD****Introductions**

Gratitude for Participation.

Ask each person to share who they are and their vocational role.

**\*DON'T FORGET TO RECORD****Disclaimer:**

*Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you may still refuse to answer any question in the written survey or during the oral interview that you do not wish to answer. You may also withdraw from the study at any time.*

*There is no known risk associated with this interview. However, it is possible that you might feel distress in the course of our conversation during the oral interview. If this happens, please inform me promptly.*

*Your name will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will use pseudonyms – made up names – for all participants/churches, unless you specify in writing that you wish to be identified by name.*

*There is the possibility that I will publish my thesis with this study included or refer to it in a published writing in the future. In this event, I will continue to use pseudonyms (as described above) and I may alter some identifying details in order to further protect your anonymity.*

**Overview:**

This year, I am researching the concept of liminal space and thinking within a church. Liminal comes from the Latin word *limen*, which means “space between” or “threshold.”

I believe that within the church are liminal spaces and ways of thinking between our members, which often prevents them from getting from the space between where they are and where God is leading.

By garnering a deeper understanding of each other, namely our way of thinking, emotional responses, communication styles, beliefs, and identities, churches can bridge a more robust connection that leads to thriving.

*Churches can thrive when they follow God's leading by navigating liminal spaces between people.*

Pray

**Part I: Show & Tell****Activity Platform:** [Google Docs "Show & Tell"](#)

**Before Workshop:** Ask each person to come prepared to share a story about how they have experienced congregational thriving through healthy relationships.

**Instructions for the Workshop:**

Each person will have 1 minute to share their story.

After each story, the other participants will type and share the key words, phrases, or themes they heard from the story. 1 minutes per story.

**Processing the Activity:**

After each story are shared, ask the participants to name the similarities, outliers, and celebrations.

**Part II: The Blind Side****Activity Platform:** [Mural "The Blind Side"](#)**Before Activity:** Provide link to Mural page.**Instructions for the Activity:**

We are going to take some time to consider what we do know and do not know about liminal spaces and thinking within a church. There are certain things about liminal spaces and thinking that we have knowledge and knowledge we don't have but could use.

Liminal comes from the Latin word *limen*, which means “space between” or “threshold.”

I believe that within the church are liminal spaces and ways of thinking between our members, which often prevents them from getting from the space between where they are and where God is leading.

By garnering a deeper understanding of each other, namely our way of thinking, emotional responses, communication styles, beliefs, and identities, churches can bridge a more robust connection that leads to thriving.

*Churches can thrive when they follow God's leading by navigating liminal spaces between people.*

We are going to address this in four parts: “Know/Know”, “Know/Don't Know”, “Don't Know/Know”, and “Don't Know/Don't Know”.

**Part I: “Know/Know”:** what do you know you know about liminal space and thinking within a church.

**Part 2: "Know/Don't Know":** What are the things we know but have questions about?

**Part 3: "Don't Know/Know":** This information could be skills people have that are currently not used to solve problems or untapped resources that have team doesn't know it doesn't know? How can you find out what you don't know you don't know?

**Part 4: "Don't Know/Don't Know":** There are things we don't know, so what can we do to proactively address the distinct challenges of each category.

#### Processing the Activity:

So we are going to continue to build off of what we know about liminal spaces and thinking within a church.

#### Record

#### Part III: 4 C's

**Activity Platform:** [Google Docs "4 C's"](#)

**Before Activity:** Provide link to document.

#### Instructions for the Activity:

As we continue to clarify the idea of liminal spaces and thinking within a congregation and how navigating them can lead to thriving, we are going to look four **C's** around this: Components, Characteristics, Challenges, and Character.

Let me explain each of these four C's:

- Components are parts of the topic. For example, a component of a social commerce strategy might be responsive tweets. Components of a distribution channel might be 18-wheelers.
- Characteristics are features of the topic. For example, speed of response is a characteristic of a social commerce strategy. A characteristic of an 18 **wheeler** might be an inefficient use of fuel.
- Challenges are obstacles associated with the topic.
- Characters are people associated with the topic.

We are going to take a few minutes on each of these C's by contributing our thoughts the pertaining section in the shared Google Doc.

**Components:** are parts of the topic

- Have each person type their ideas
- Give everyone 1 minute to read through the responses

- Ask:
  - What stands out to you?
  - What surprises you?
  - What categories are forming out of these components?
  - What's missing?

#### Characteristics:

- Have each person type their ideas
- Give everyone 1 minute to read through the responses

- Ask:
  - What stands out to you?
  - What surprises you?
  - What categories are forming out of these characteristics?
  - What's missing?

#### Challenges:

- Have each person type their ideas
- Give everyone 1 minute to read through the responses

- Ask:
  - What stands out to you?
  - What surprises you?
  - What categories are forming out of these challenges?
  - What's missing?

#### Characters:

- Have each person type their ideas
- Give everyone 1 minute to read through the responses

- Ask:
  - What stands out to you?
  - What surprises you?
  - What categories are forming out of these characters?
  - What's missing?

#### Part IV: Affinity Map

**Activity Platform:** [Mural "Affinity Map"](#)

**Before Activity:** Provide link to Mural page.

#### Instructions for the Activity:

The purpose of this activity is for us to contemplate what it will take for churches to be equipped to navigate liminal spaces and thinking between people and where God is leading.

In just a moment, I am going ask you a question and I want you to write down as many ideas as they come to mind. Using the sticky notes on the side of the mural, type one idea per sticky note.

*So, consider this question, what initiatives will help churches understand and navigate the liminal spaces and thinking between people and where God is leading?*

**Part 1:** Type Ideas

**Part 2:** Take 2 minutes to read the sticky notes.

**Part 3:** If you feel led, pull similar sticky notes close to each other on the Mural. These clusters can be things that have an affinity with other ideas.

**Processing the Activity:**

**Part 4:** Let's name these clusters as categories.

**Part 5:** Write down the categories as they will become the items for the final activity.

### Part V: 20/20 Vision

**Activity Platform:** [Google Doc "20/20 Vision"](#)

**Before Activity:** Provide link to the Google Doc.

#### Instructions for the Activity:

In this final activity, we are going to take the categories of initiatives created in the Affinity Map activity and drill down to explore their potential practical benefits.

We are going to spend time prioritizing these potential initiatives based on perceived benefits.

#### Step 1:

Under each category of initiatives, we are going to contribute our perceived benefits.

\*Move through each category of resources

#### Step 2:

Now that we have taken the time to work through each of these, are there initiatives missing that we should consider?

If any are named, explore the benefits.

I'm not asking you to pick your favorite initiatives because you like the person that gave the idea or if it was because of your idea, but I'm going to pair some of these initiatives up against each other and I'd like to hear your feedback as to why you'd pick one in the pair over the other.

In a side-by-side comparison, you are going to rate one initiative high priority and one initiative low priority. Find the line with your name, writing either high or low in the two sections.



Ask for each person to briefly share why they labeled one a high priority.

#### Step 3:

Now we are going to compare the high priority initiatives to each other and the low priorities to each other. In a side-by-side comparison, you are going to rate one initiative high priority and one initiative low priority. Find the line with your name, writing either high or low in the two sections.

Ask for each person to briefly share why they labeled one a high priority.

#### Step 4:

Finally, we are going to finalize a priority list of each of these initiatives. Give your input as to what initiative should be the highest priority and why.

#### Final Input

As I continue my research and explore potential resources, what should I be sure to examine?

Are there any potential blind spots we have not identified?

If you have any follow up thoughts, please be sure to email me.

#### Sending

I can't even begin to tell you how grateful I am for you and your insight. It is incredibly humbling that you all are willing to invest 2.5 hours of your very busy lives to help me. Thank you.





**Doctor of Leadership Workshop**  
**Participant Guide**  
 October 13, 1:30-4:00 pm EST/12:30-3:00 pm Central

**A Word of Gratitude**

In this season of disruption and constant adaptation, I am incredibly humbled by your willingness to share your valuable time with me. Your insight into my research will immeasurably give greater breadth and depth to providing innovative resources for congregations. Thank you for your leadership and willingness to share your strengths.

**What to Know Before October 13**

The research workshop will be a 2.5 hour or less interactive space with several other leaders as we explore the concept of liminal spaces and thinking within a church. Liminal comes from the Latin word *limen*, which means "space between" or "threshold."

Within the church are liminal spaces and ways of thinking between our members, which often prevents them from the space between where they are and where God is leading.

By garnering a deeper understanding of each other, namely our way of thinking, emotional responses, communication styles, beliefs, and identities, churches can bridge a more robust connection that leads to thriving.

*Churches can thrive when they follow God's leading by navigating liminal spaces between people.*

To help prime the creative pump around this concept, please come prepared to share a one-minute story about how you have experienced congregational thriving through healthy relationships.

You will need to have the Zoom app downloaded to your computer and access to a web browser to utilize the interactive workshop activities.

**Key Links**

Here are the essential links you'll need for the workshop. Feel free to have the activity links open and ready for the start of the session.

Zoom: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/3146988114>

Activity One: [Google Docs "Show & Tell"](#)

Activity Two: [Mural "The Blind Side"](#)

Activity Three: [Google Docs "4 C's"](#)

Activity Four: [Mural "Affinity Map"](#)

Activity Five: [Google Doc "20/20 Vision"](#)

**Doctor of Leadership Workshop**  
**Show & Tell**

*Each person will share a 1-minute story about experiencing thriving in a church as a result of healthy relational connections.*

*After each story, type the key phrases, words, or themes under the corresponding storyteller's section.*

Key phrases, words, or themes:

- past church trauma
- The importance of planning gatherings
- Encouraging imagination
- Blessed others ideas
- Opportunity to intentionally deepen relationships during the camping trip
- from 1 person to 24 families, less than 12 hours, relationships, camping!
- engagement
- relationship, trust, "come together"
- Less than 12 hours- no work on Amy's part
- Desire for community
- Sometimes a shared interest can create stronger relationships

Key phrases, words, or themes:

- Creation of Small House Groups
- family relationship
- changed model led to lightened load
- sharing spaces and sharing stories
- delegation to within church
- empower leadership by modeling and blessing them to lead
- Peer culture and sharing
- Sharing spaces- conversational- missional projects outside of the church
- Missions outside of the church
- small groups, mission, family
- In small groups, individuals can flourish. Small group identity helps individuals express who they are when they can often be lost in a large group setting.
- small groups, tremendous growth from 30 to 400, leaders leading, freeing for Ruben

Key phrases, words, or themes:

- the need to take a risk to experience God and and with
- Striving in new and different spaces and places
- heavy church hurt, look for the motives, hold myself back, experiential learning (Cuba trip with Ruben), outside of walls
- past trauma yields cautiousness

- people not participating doesn't always mean they don't like you it might mean they have been hurt before and need time to trust
- thriving outside the walls of church
- outside of walls, family
- Church hurt and conflict prevents thriving. It can also cause us to put up emotional barriers, preventing us from wanting to relationally connect with others.
- Relational thriving in a church happens outside of the walls
- Being the church that discover "one of one" how to deal with separation and discrimination.

Key phrases, words, or themes:

- Thinking about what church is supposed to be verse what is going on in the church
- church start but reached max
- identified the need for deeper relationship with God and one another
- response to need
- operate by vision and not the problem
- diverse congregation that needed depth
- time in worship to tell stories of their own community
- stories blessed by the church and led to renewed vision for church
- storytelling model that looks for theological themes in the problems
- different backgrounds, church start, plateau, lots of needs, storytelling (what, how, respond), modeled storytelling with a plan, intentional time to share stories in worship for've also made the poll so you've also made the poll so you
- the importance of small voices and storytelling in the church: unify, vision together, trust.
- plateau vs. moving forward; diversity; story-telling, questions
- Sharing who we are, through story, helps us discover each other on a deeper level
- Storytelling to elevate the theological vision

Key phrases, words, or themes:

- Power of hospitality - good use of intentional learning while blessing open space for fellowship
- Spaces between us can be age, experience in church, church traditions
- Super Club and sharing a meal
- naming ministry is important for spiritual formation
- practicing faith is something everyone can talk about
- wanted connection between old and young but also new to church vs well journeyed members
- The importance of sharing a meal together.
- created education material
- Spiritual formation
- Wine will break down all barriers...just ask Jesus.
- Practical homework based program based on Spiritual Formation disciplines.

- food, small-group, practice, linger
- The use of Lectio Divina

Key phrases, words, or themes:

- never waste a good pandemic
- What do we need to leave behind and not bring back following the pandemic
- Having to juggle structure and culture in how to make decisions (importance of addressing both the church culture and structure)
- the importance of impact demographics
- tradition clashing with new ideas
- impacted engagement by going virtual
- "touching in" can look very diverse
- sometimes the space between us is the type of ministry or mode of worship or even the physical vs virtual spaces we gather
- thrived off a disease, older generation vs. younger generation, building vs. online
- natural return to original relationship instead of a building mentality?
- tradition/generation differences
- old-heads vs new-heads
- old vs new, circumstance forces issue and old gives way to new
- growth via social media and more interaction
- Tension can bring growth
- Thrived from something that should be a negative-- growth through nontraditional connection and creating a space for relationships to thrive based on what was already there (asset based)

Key phrases, words, or themes:

- Each person as an active advocate (missional focus?).
- legacy: how do we spend money well?
- wealth rich congregation
- Movement from age-based growth to deeper connection to vision and relationships
- liminal space between ages
- legacy, growth, advocacy.
- movement towards advocacy
- Theological perspective offered courage to change and unforeseen/aspirational results
- Resources defined church in positive manner
- active congregation
- Practical matters didn't make the decision for the church

Key phrases, words, or themes:

- not thriving, but surviving, avoided a crisis because of strong leaders
- Sometimes surviving is thriving

- Power hungry people
- Trust relationships
- listen and learn before respond
- Experience build trust and trust can lead to thriving
- Some wanted to "blow the house up" but relationships maintained a community
- longevity teaches patience
- trust
- disruption

### Similarities

- Small groups can make an impact on the larger community
- renewed vision came from "problem solving" and trying something new outside walls of church
- mission
- The importance of personal stories (storytelling).
- New models to be together outside of the "Sunday meeting" (spiritual formation, peers, etc.).
- teaching and sharing
- relationships across divides
- Investment of time
- Intentionality alongside free space for God to "show up"
- Relationships as opposed to programs
- Hospitality
- non-"programmed" time for building relationships

### Outliers

- Striving is as good as thriving
- what is thriving will be different in each case
- experiencing outside of the walls
- Utilizing what was already there, especially in a time of crisis
- Outside the walls of the church
- Virtual experiences can create deeper connections



## Doctor of Leadership Workshop

### 4 C's

*Type your responses in the corresponding sections.*

#### Components

*Components are parts of liminal spaces and thinking.*

- Risk
- Willingness to have one's mind changed
- Biases - many unaware of
- Need for good questions not answers
- openness; willingness to cross the gap
- Identities
- Traditions
- Anxiety
- resistance to change
- Relationships
- Connection between people
- excitement and newness
- silence, listening, and waiting
- Communication
- how do people really feel about this?
- Beliefs
- Listening
- Understanding
- The unknown
- Culture
- vibe
- look/smell/feel of it
- Fear

#### Component Categories:

- Emotional Responses
- Risk & Faith
- Trust
- Self-Awareness
- How to deal with ambiguity
- Opportunity
- Perseverance
- Intentionality
- Skills to navigate
- Prioritizing personal relationships
- Vulnerability

- Celebration/Reward/Payout
- Courage
- Compelling Vision

#### Characteristics

*Characteristics are features (attributes, distinctive) of liminal spaces and thinking.*

- everyone starts in a different place
- There's an understanding that work must be done
- Perception is not often reality
- forces dependence on others, no clear path
- Have to listen deeply to other's realities
- Have to answer the WHY questions - why change, why think differently, Why go there
- "no-man's land" - it's not this or that
- inter-trans personal work
- messy
- time and resource/energy consuming
- Risk-taking
- the look
- Patience
- Understanding
- use of time, human resources and talents
- time-consuming
- order of business
- The vibe of the church; it's essence
- There has to be a sense of comfort and safety with the physical space in order to engage the relational, spiritual, and emotional spaces

#### Characteristic Categories:

- Need for a paced out approach - too fast and people shut down
- Open but not Vacant
- A sense of Faithfulness
- Pace is slower than normal
- Open-ended
- longing for the church to address the liminal space (a necessary work).
- Lingering and Aspiration
- Hard work and motivation to do this hard work is hard (triple use of hard is intentional, lol)
- Not a program but a process - lean into trusting a spiritual process that is not linear



## Challenges

*Challenges are obstacles associated with liminal spaces and thinking.*

- How to invite people into this journey where there is risk, the unknown and difficult work
- People know what they know and aren't sure there is a need to change from what they know
- People don't know what they don't know so little pressure to proactively seek to change, grow
- Humility is needed but not always seen as a strength or desired quality
- A willingness to be unchangeable.
- TIME - Will people have the energy to give the time
- The Barriers of Language
- Creating a sense of Trust and safety
- everyone starts in a different place
- People
- ability to develop Collective Effervescence (Durkheim) or feeling of authentic worship
- dialectical challenge of navigating culture and conflict (cognitive dissonance)
- Liturgical or ritual challenge (myth and ceremony)-- ie how much do we change or hold to for sake of bonding through shared tradition
- memory and reconciliation-- how do we form new communities while representing diversity and lived experience (how do white churches have black members and act as a different organization... are they still just a 'white' church in style and tradition)
- Creating accessible spaces- handicap availability, age appropriate space, safe congregations, etc- as churches change or grow new procedures may become vital
- Culture and history
- Most people see and hear the world one way, expecting everyone else to see and hear it in the same way
- Rightness
- some people view church as a place to "not have to deal with hard things"
- Depth of the organization's just cause/purpose/practical values
- agency of each person
- renting space, what can you actually do to make it yours?
- emotional capacity of each person, are they willing to give what is needed?
- the physical space must be comfortable before opening spiritually/emotionally
- authenticity of leadership
- meeting people "where they are"
- judgement and generalizing people
- clear understanding of needs and expectations from the "space" leader
- clear understanding of what the "space" is offering
- the space required to change is often not given the time necessary, so change doesn't happen as needed

- like building a house, always slower and more expensive than you thought
- churches are often reactionary and not responsive (planning for the change to come)
- I keep thinking of the Muppets song "Halfway Down the Stairs." It isn't here, it isn't there. Liminal is in some ways "no where" as it is between things. For many, this is very uncomfortable and a place to be avoided.
  - [\(55:67\) Halfway Down the Stairs - YouTube](#)
- we don't embrace the uncomfortable well as the western church
- church giving and numbers vs saving souls

### Challenges Categories:

- When you know what you need to do but are limited in what you can do
- People: We are all so different and respond differently
- Group identity
- Will the organization change identity or retain identity
- The battle between the desire for comfort and God's calling for transformation

## Characters

*Characters are people associated with liminal spaces and thinking.*

- spiritual directors
- retreat leaders
- leader
- followers
- complainers
- questioners
- "No" people and "Yes" people
- Deacons
- Those receiving help or assistance (community of need)
- partner organizations
- The "doers"
- clergy
- lay leaders
- physical space and limits if any
- money and limits if any
- worship participants
- guests
- members, but don't lend themselves to the work
- God
- The conceptual organization: Core Values/Mission/Vision

- Holy Spirit
- Visitors
- Politicians
- the spiritually mature
- considered as "left the building" by others
- Influencers
- Budget
- Buildings
- People can often be the barriers that need to be overcome
- Guides and coaches

#### Characters Categories:

- Visionaries
- The Institution
- Members
- The Talkers
- The Walkers
- the people within organization
- people outside of organization
- Remnant People: the yeast that affects the loaf
- Communicators
- Influencers



## Doctor of Leadership Workshop 20/20 Vision

*Type your responses in the corresponding sections.*

### Initiative: Discernment Process

*Add the perceived benefits of this initiative.*

- clarity on what actually matters, and what does not
- Answers not just the "what" but the "why"
- Clarity of the call
- Yoking up with mature leadership (Mentor)
- spiritual foundation of what you are doing
- community building
- Envisioning
- feeling of togetherness
- organic
- Not "One-size-fits-all"
- Everyone has a say
- Seek ye first the Kingdom of God
- Communitary
- Goal oriented
- deeper relationships
- "Evergreen process"

### Initiative: Creating Safe Spaces for Play and Conversation

*Add the perceived benefits of this initiative.*

- Play=Fun
- Tension release
- Doesn't feel churchy
- Highly relational
- Fun
- Work and creation result (or derive) from rest/play
- Less pressure to get it right
- Experience develops mutual respect and trust
- need a break from thinking from time to time
- good ideas come out of play and creativity
- all ages can be involved
- lowers defenses so that real conversation and communication can happen
- have a clear definition of "safe space"
- if described right, it lets people know everyone is welcome
- identify fun/stories are not always fun
- deepen relationships across divides through play

- Cultural approach, more inclusion.

### Initiative: Retreat (group interaction, play, conversation, spiritual formation)

*Add the perceived benefits of this initiative.*

- retreats things happen quickly on retreat, lots packed in small amt of time
- longer time to complete more activities and develop relationships
- Improvement to the Teaching/Learning process
- away from church and people can relax
- multiple leads during the retreat or even a neutral person
- getting away gives different vibe when together, people more at ease
- Removing the familiarity of known spaces to introduce an unknown space
- Unfamiliar routine creates opportunities for vulnerability, listening, and learning
- must relate to real people, not "straw men"
- Echo/friendly.
- Multidimensional approach.
- Open to the work of the Spirit (be rest, be apart, etc.)



### Initiative: Intentional Small Group Conversation/Curriculum



*Add the perceived benefits of this initiative.*

- able to happen in town
- small group must be diverse for success
- can be virtual
- can go over longest amount of time
- can be adapted as it's being implemented
- Personal+intimate, allows for reciprocity and transformation at the personal level
- depends on who's in the group
- financially easier to do that retreats
- ability to hear/experience another person's context
- Learning to trust and explore newness
- Practical path
- Shared experience for spiritual formation
- Allows time for each person to voice their thoughts, fears, hopes, and dreams
- Relational
- Appreciative
- might get participants who would not go on a retreat to join in
- Open mic/voice/ type = (democratic?)
- Open new space beside the church building.

### Round One: High or Low Priority





Rate <u>ong</u> initiative high priority and <u>ong</u> initiative low priority			
Initiative: <i>Discernment Process</i>	High or Low Priority	Initiative: <i>Creating Safe Space for Play &amp; Connection</i>	High or Low Priority
	low		high
	High		Low
	High		Low
	High		Low
	Low		High
	High		Low
	High		Low
Notes: text			

Rate <i>ong</i> initiative high priority and <i>ong</i> initiative low priority			
Initiative: <i>Retreat</i>	High or Low Priority	Initiative: <i>Small Group</i>	High or Low Priority
	low		high
	Low		High
	low		high
	Low		High
	high		low
	High		Low
	High		Low
Notes: text			

Rate <i>ong</i> initiative high priority and <i>ong</i> initiative low priority			
Initiative: <i>Retreat</i>	High or Low Priority	Initiative: <i>Creating Safe Space for Play &amp; Connection</i>	High or Low Priority
	low		high
	Low		High
	low		high
	Low		High



		high			low
		High			Low
		High			Low
Notes: text					

Rate <u>ong</u> initiative high priority and <u>ong</u> initiative low priority			
Initiative: <i>Discernment Process</i>	High or Low Priority	Initiative: <i>Small Group Initiative</i>	High or Low Priority
	high		low
	High		Low
	low		high
	High		Low
	low		high
	High		Low
	Low		High
Notes: text			





Round Two: High or Low Priority

Rate <u>one</u> initiative high priority and <u>one</u> initiative low priority			
Initiative: <i>Discernment Process</i>	High or Low Priority	Initiative: <i>Small Group</i>	High or Low Priority
<div></div>	high	<div></div>	low
	High		Low
	High		Low
	low		high
	High		Low
	Low		High
Notes: text			

Rate <u>one</u> initiative high priority and <u>one</u> initiative low priority			
Initiative: <i>Retreat</i>	High or Low Priority	Initiative: <i>Creating Safe Space for Play &amp; Connection</i>	High or Low Priority
<div></div>	low	<div></div>	high
	Low		High
	Low		High
	high		low
	High		Low
	High		Low
Notes: text			

Finalizing Priority

Round Three:

- 1. Retreat
- 2. Small Group
- 3. Discernment
- 4. Relational Connections

Round Three:

- 1. Retreat
- 2. Small Group
- 3. Discernment
- 4. Relational Connections

Round Three:

- 1. Relational Connections
- 2. Discernment
- 3. Small group
- 4. Retreat

Round Three:

- 1. Discernment
- 2. Relational Connections
- 3. Small Group
- 4. Retreat

Round Three:

1. *Discernment*
2. *Small Group*
3. *Relational Connections*
4. *Retreat*

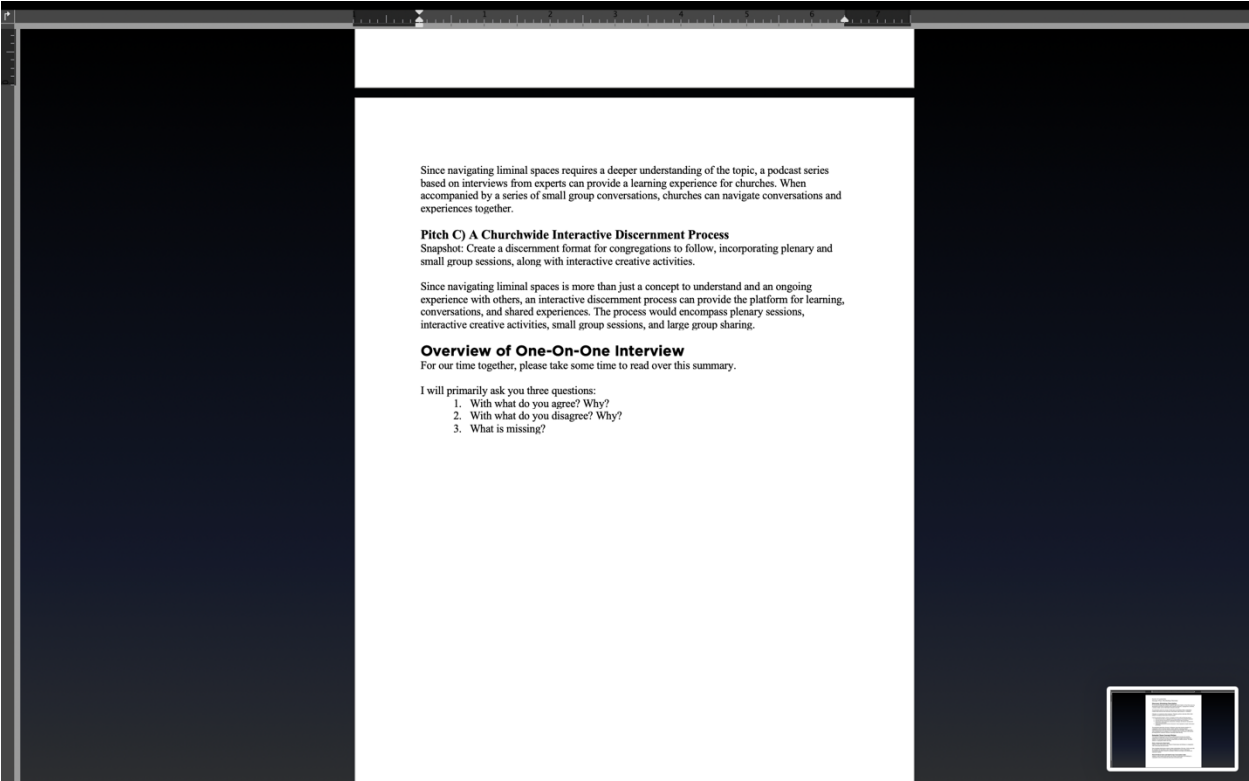
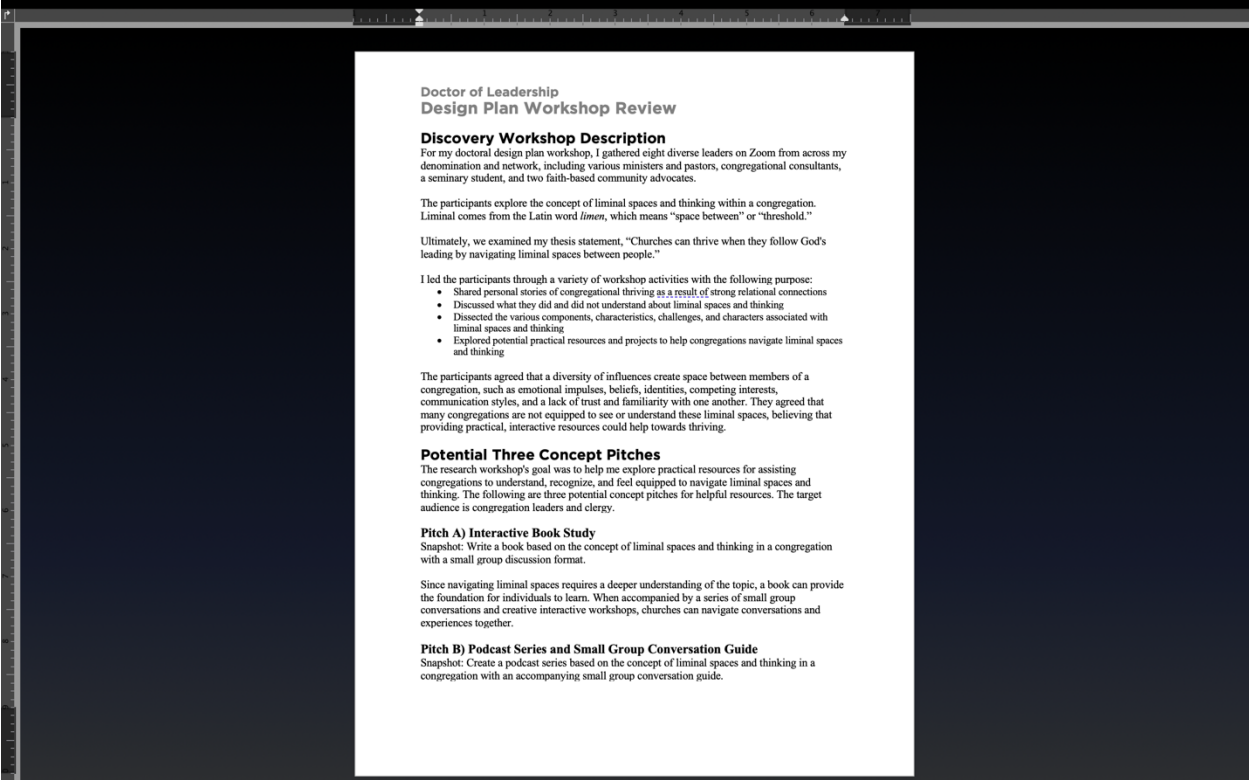
**Round Three:**

1. *Small Group*
2. *Discernment*
3. *Relational Connections*
4. *Retreat*

**Round Three:**

1. *Discernment*
2. *Retreat*
3. *Relational Connections*
4. *Small Group*





## Doctor of Leadership Design Workshop 1x1 Interviews

### With what do you agree? Why?

The last thing we need is more scholarship without the people doing the work. I like the idea of congregations doing small group conversations and interactive activity. Involve the whole congregation, not just a clergy and a small group of leadership.

The easiest to step into is the discernment process because they just have to show up. The hardest would be the book because they have to do homework.

Each of these require an increase of preparation but could be more engagement.

The Podcast could be the best option for prep work ease and showing up.

I like that they are actually asking people to engage this, not just passively hear about it.

This is a resource people need because people don't know how to step in between these spaces.

Option C could be a meaningful long-term

### With what do you disagree? Why?

The book study could be hard for people who don't have time to do the homework.

### What is missing?

Notes:

I think the biggest challenge you are going to have is making this practical for churches. The concept is deeply academic and theological versus practical.

How do you invite people into participation? What's the desired outcome?

Be sure to create opportunities for the liminal spaces between the church and the community around it.

For option C) who is going to facilitate the plenary sessions? Are ministers equipped for this? Or do the plenary sessions need to be video series, zoom call with facilitator, or something else?

### With what do you agree? Why?

Notes:

You are scaling what I have already done but with a different topic or language.

How do you scale this that's replicable?

Who needs to learn this first?

There are building blocks here to something more later. So what to build the foundation off of?

Let your other work help build to something bigger as you academically focus on one of these things.

### With what do you disagree? Why?

Notes:

### What is missing?

Notes:

Community listening activities. What is the threshold between the church and the congregation? Survey the community. Walk the neighborhood. Connect with other leaders in the community.

Missional and incarnational standpoint.

### With what do you agree? Why?

Notes:

I like the terms but you are really going to have to clarify the terms.

Is there another word besides space: barrier, gaps, friction, anchor

All leadership is done in liminal spaces: move from what has been to what will be; we are always on the threshold of what is to come.

Lean into the anxious moments of the threshold.

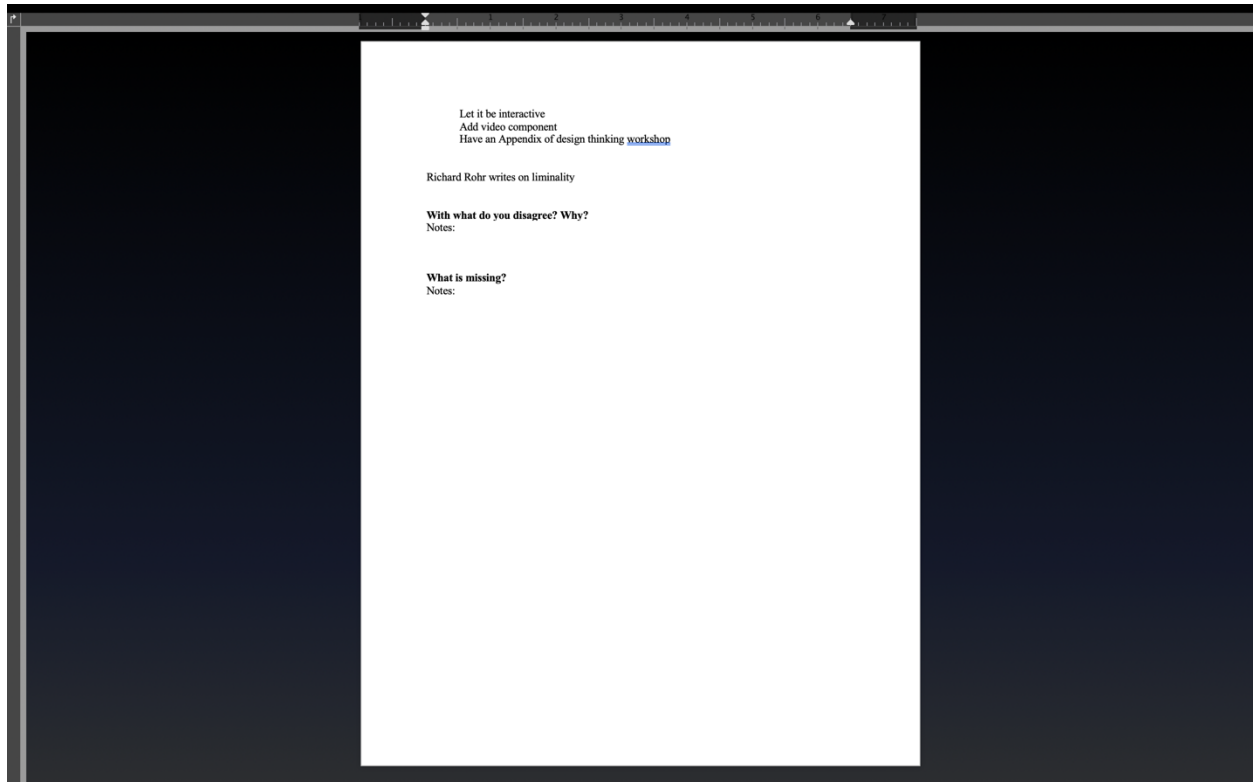
How do we live in the space in between?

What's a descriptor word or two about navigating.

Navigating how?

I need something that tells me about what you are trying to navigate.

Really like the book



# Appendix D

# Appendix D—Milestone 4 Design Research Report

## Prototype Summary and Findings

### PROTOTYPE DESCRIPTIONS

The first prototype, an interactive book study, consists of a table of contents, an introduction, and the first chapter.

The second prototype, an interactive podcast series, consists of two 30-minute episodes of interviews with experts in liminality and relational obstacles, ending with practical takeaways and introspective reflections for the leadership listeners.

### NPO

Churches can thrive when they understand, navigate, and leverage the liminality existing between people, the community, and where God is leading.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

I examined two questions: 1) What is the best delivery method and why; 2) What is effective content?

For my background research, I set out to gain a deeper insight into the concept of liminality from a theological, biblical, and organizational understanding.

### ASSESSMENT OF BENCHMARKS

To assess the efficacy of the prototypes, I utilized participant surveys, one-on-one interviews, and focus group feedback.

### FOCUS GROUP DESCRIPTION

The focus group consisted of nine different types of organization leaders with a diversity of contexts, experiences, roles, and demographics: one marketing coordinator, two senior pastors, an associate minister for advocacy, a congregational consultant, two state-level denominational leaders, and an associational minister for community and missions.

### LEARNINGS

Utilizing PollEverywhere.com, the focus group participants were allowed to provide constructive and creative feedback anonymously. I set up a diverse group of questions, allowing me to garner insight into prototypes level effectiveness and usefulness for individual leaders and prospective leaders of each focus group member's organization.

Overall, the focus group indicated that both prototypes offered insightful and balanced approaches to the challenges of relational dynamics within an organization.

The book provided an excellent overview of liminality and how it applies to the church, with the table of contents giving an interesting projection of what would be covered, indicating that the title and theme of the book were strong. The book was rated as “good” for prospective usefulness for leaders and “very good” for overall approach.

Most of the constructive feedback focused on the end of the chapters in the “introspection sections,” indicating the question could use some work related to connection to the chapter, organizational leaders, and congregational leaders.

The podcast provided an alternative view of organization leadership than most ministers are used to hearing from church resources. The podcast was rated as “very good” for prospective usefulness for leaders and “very good” for overall approach.

Most of the constructive feedback focused on providing show notes with reflection questions and resources, some editing nitpicking, shortening the interviews, and providing more content as the host versus just interviewing the guests.

When selecting the prototype for their leadership context, four selected the book, and five chose the podcast. When selecting the prototype for their particular learning style, four selected the podcast, and five chose the book. When selecting the prototype they believed their organization would consume, seven selected the book, and two chose the podcast. Finally, when predicting which prototype would stand the test of time as a helpful resource, five selected the book, and four chose the podcast.

Outside of the interactive survey, the stakeholders voiced a desire to have both prototypes produced with a website to accompany them. However, when informed that I had to select one prototype for my doctoral project, the group indicated that it makes sense to create the book first, allowing its content to inform website design and podcast substance.

## Background Research Essay on the Emerging Solutions

### **THE CHURCH OF THE INBETWEENNESS**

The church, much like many other sectors, has been uniquely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, with the long-term effects not known for years, if not decades. However, for many churches, this twenty-four-plus month experience is a microcosm of much deeper issues that probably would have never been brought to light if such a moment had not demanded abrupt changes to their way of existing.

The world is rapidly changing. Nevertheless, many churches have struggled to adapt. The idea of adaptation, novelty and innovation immediately floods many churches with feelings of apprehension, anxiety, fear, and a twinge of obstinacy. That is a tough spot: grieving what once was, struggling to understand what is, and floundering in apprehension about what comes next.



The church is in this in-between space of where we have been, where we are, and where we are going. One word that can define these experiences is liminal. Finding its roots in the Latin *limen*, liminal means “threshold” or “space between.” It was originally associated with the stone placed at the threshold of a door, crossing from one space into the other. Often described as an inbetweeness, liminality is that space between where you are and where you are going, the present and the future, the old and the new, or the familiar and unknown.

As one scholar noted, “Liminality may be regarded as a cultural apparatus because it illuminates the symbolic realm in human life in which possibility and the ambiguous— the simultaneous presence of the familiar and unfamiliar, the existing and new—not only prevail but are heightened.”<sup>80</sup> This is an ever-present tension for many pastors and congregational leaders about what was, what is, and what will be. Typically, this tension hovers around questions about where God is leading us, how we relate to each other, and how we connect deeply with the community around us.

### THE FATHER OF LIMINALITY

Out of his work, *The Rites of Passage*, anthropologist, and folklorist Arnold van Gennep, coined the term liminality. Van Gennep was exploring the concept of the cultural and human experience of passing from one stage of life into the next through rituals.

As the father of liminality, van Gennep laid out the concept of liminality in three parts or stages: *Pre-liminal* – the known and assumed structure of life; *Liminal* – the ambiguous transitional period; *Post-liminal* – the new adjusted and transformed state of being.<sup>81</sup>

As an individual moves through these liminal spaces, they are letting go of held ways of thinking and acting, preparing to inherit new mindsets and approaches as they navigate this great crossroads of rites of passage. He argued, “Life itself means to separate and be reunited, change form and condition, die, and be reborn. It is to act and cease, wait and rest, and then begin acting again, but in a different way.”<sup>82</sup>

In processing van Gennep’s work, scholars noted that liminality should have been, but was not, among the founding terms of modern anthropology.<sup>83</sup> Instead, the realm of human existence is passing from one experience to another, one stage of life to the next. “In liminality, there is no

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<sup>80</sup> Howard-Grenville et al, “Liminality as Cultural Process for Cultural Change,” *Organization Science* 22, no. 2 (May 2011): 522-539, <https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.1100.0554>.

<sup>81</sup> Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 121.

<sup>82</sup> Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 189.

<sup>83</sup> Ágnes Horváth et al, *Breaking Boundaries* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), 11.

certainty concerning the outcome but rather a world of contingency where events and ideas—and indeed, ‘reality’ itself—can be carried in different directions.”<sup>84</sup>

### **EXPANDING THE CONCEPT OF LIMINALITY FROM AN ORGANIZATION STANDPOINT**

From an organizational standpoint, several thinkers and practitioners have expanded the concept of liminality. For Dave Gray, an organizational consultant and the founder of Xplane, a visual thinking company, liminality is a new way of seeing oneself, organization, and world. He calls this “Liminal Thinking,” seeing the thresholds, doors of opportunity around you at all times, noting, “Most of them are invisible to you because you are focusing on other things. But they are there, they are real, and they offer incredible potential for growth and change. It is a kind of psychological ability that enables you to create change where others cannot.”<sup>85</sup>

To recognize and embrace this new way of thinking and seeing, Gray argues that we must understand the belief systems within ourselves and our organizations that often unconscious barriers. “All beliefs are approximations because the whole of reality is unknowable. Beliefs have some truth to them, but all of us are fallible, and so are your beliefs.”<sup>86</sup> However, to think liminally, we need to think beyond our conscious and unconscious belief systems, embracing the unknown and uncertain.

In their work *Unleashed*, Amy and Rick Simmons explore liminality as a concept of space, inflection points that occur in nature at different periods in any particular life cycle of an organization.<sup>87</sup> Recognizing that many people do not embrace discomfort and disruption, the authors argue that organizations often miss out on such moments that bring about creativity and innovation. “When you recognize that there’s power in that in-between—that discontinuity creates an openness to transformation—you can do something about it. You have the opportunity to build a new reality rather than just struggling to return to normal,” noted Simmons.<sup>88</sup>

Instead of waiting for disruption to occur, whether volatility in the market or a global pandemic, the authors argue that leaders should curate liminal spaces, arguing, “Incubating these periods on your

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>85</sup> Dave Gray, *Liminal Thinking* (Brooklyn: Two Waves Books, 2016), XXII.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>87</sup> Amy Simmons and Rick Simmons, *Unleashed: Harnessing the Power of Liminal Spaces* (Charleston: ForbesBooks, 2021), 2.

<sup>88</sup> Simmons and Simmons, *Unleashed*, 12.

own, creating tremors that would not bring down the house but shake things up enough to become open to new considerations?<sup>89</sup>

When you overlap the concept of organization liminality with work around adaptive leadership by Ronald Heifetz, the intersectionality is fascinating. Heifetz wrote about the necessity of leaders to mobilize people to tackle tough challenges and thrive when faced with complex interactive process comprising of multiple dimensions and activities. "The improvisational ability to lead adaptively relies on responding to the present situation rather than importing the past into the present and laying it on the current situation like an imperfect template," he noted.<sup>90</sup>

Business management scholar Nic Beech also sees liminality as an excellent opportunity for healthy change. "Liminality can be understood in the anthropological sense to be a temporary transition through which identity is reconstructed, and/or it can be thought of as a more longitudinal experience of ambiguity and in-between-ness within a changeful context," he argued.<sup>91</sup>

### **A THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF LIMINALITY**

From a theological understanding, Friar Richard Rohr has written extensively about liminality. In thinking about van Gennep's theory on rites and rituals, Rohr believes that the world is starving for these necessary stations in life. He argued, "Without guidance and reframing, we don't understand the necessary ebb and flow of life, the ascents and descents, and the need to embrace our tears and triumphs. Without standing on the threshold for much longer than we're comfortable, we won't be able to see beyond ourselves to the broader and more inclusive world that lies before us."<sup>92</sup>

From a theological perspective, the liminal journey is a spiritual process of letting go of what is known and familiar to discover what new thing God is doing. Moving through these spaces creates profound experiences of anxiety, worry, fear, formation, discovery, creativity, and hope. However, the liminal journey is one of faith, knowing that God's Spirit is at work within and around us, guiding us into the unknown.

As people of faith, we might consider the story of the Hebrews, fresh off their liberation from servitude in Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, the promise of the land flowing with milk and honey, only to wander in the wilderness for forty years. What happened along the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land? What happened in the period of the Wandering?

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>90</sup> Ronald A Heifetz, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 199.

<sup>91</sup> Nic Beech, "Liminality and the Practices of Identity Reconstruction," *Human Relations* 64, no. 2 (2010): 285-302. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726710371235>.

<sup>92</sup> Richard Rohr, "Introduction: Liminal Space," *Oneing*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2020), 17-18, 20.

"God's Spirit does indeed blow where she will and our current time of deep shifting and change, which leaves the modern period of Christendom behind it, requires a fresh approach to being Christian and being church," explained the editors behind a practical theology of liminality.<sup>93</sup>

At the same time, the liminal journey is not one of solitude but companionship through the church. Liminality is not only the threshold of where we have been and where we are going, but it also encapsulates gaps that naturally exist within a relational organization, such as the church. From a theological perspective, "The nature of faith is relational. We choose our communities (or are chosen by them) because we are shaped by them and we shape them."<sup>94</sup>

The church is composed of people. And last time I checked, people are a complex of differing beliefs, identities, personalities, communication styles, cognitions, and much more. Such dynamics create emotional, communicative, and social gaps, resulting in strained relationships, competing interests, and mistrust. Therefore, it is no wonder why many churches cannot get from where they are to where God is leading.

Do you remember that inspiring passage from Paul's letter to the Galatians in which he proclaimed that in Christ there is no Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, enslaved person nor free? With this statement, Paul declares that there is openness, dissolving of barriers, the tearing down of indifferences, and a call for unity with the Kingdom of God.

As Gray argued, "Whatever groups you belong to or most strongly associate with, the dynamics will be similar. Collectively, we create a kind of *bubble of belief* that reinforces and protects our existing beliefs by denying that alternative beliefs are within the realm of possibility. It's kind of collective delusion or dream that we co-create in order to maintain a group map that we use to navigate the world."<sup>95</sup>

However, you can only wonder what the circumstances were like in Galatia that compelled him to charge them with inclusivity and unity. Where did their relationship to one another fit on the scale of toxic to healthy? Imagine the tension in some of their conversations. Church leaders thought their church's businesses meetings were nerving and a journey through a minefield.

## LEADING THROUGH LIMINAL SPACES

Churches and individuals cannot be forced onto the liminal journey. Instead, each congregation must decide whether or not they will step into the space between what is now and next. As scholar Sheryl Fullerton argued, "When we find ourselves in liminal space, does it matter whether we are pushed or whether we jump? Either way, we are not where or what we were before, nor do we know

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<sup>93</sup> Timothy L Carson, Rosy Fairhurst, Nigel Rooms, and Lisa R. Withrow, *Crossing Thresholds* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2021), 103.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>95</sup> Gray, 43.

how or where we will land in our new reality."<sup>96</sup> In turn, each church member must decide whether or not they open or close the relational threshold between self and others.

Moreover, like every relationship, when faced with stress, disagreement, anxiety, and uncertainty, church members respond uniquely and diversely based on their personality, conflict management style, communication habits, and unconscious beliefs about other people, situations, and how things should be managed.

Edwin Friedman, the acclaimed family systems therapist, believed that the congregational leader's role is to understand and manage the church as a complex emotional unit, measuring the pulse of the organization's needs, expectations, anxiety, stress, and change.<sup>97</sup> Heifetz argued, "What people resist is not change per se, but loss."<sup>98</sup>

Anxiety, both within individuals and an organization, is genuine and complex. Our anxiety tells us a lot, not just about how we feel about a set of circumstances but our abilities to manage them. The role of the leader, according to Heifetz, is "knowing how the environment is pulling your strings and playing you is critical to making responsive rather than reactive moves."<sup>99</sup>

Human beings have a fascinating relationship with change. While many are resistant to it, our brains are hardwired to embrace and resist it. Organizational leadership scholar John Kotter argues that we have a two-channel system for responding to uncertainty, the survival and thrive channels. "The Survive Channel is activated by threats and leads to feelings of fear, anxiety, and stress. By contrast, the Thrive Channel is activated by opportunities and is associated with feelings of excitement, passion, joy, and enthusiasm."<sup>100</sup>

So, churches have the capacity to either retreat or stride forward when entering a liminal space based on their ability to recognize the myriad of ways their members respond to their apprehension about discontinuity, disruption, and uncertainty. Moreover, the liminal journey can unveil creative and innovative potential for the future by revealing and reaffirming unforeseen giftedness, assets, passions, resources, and ideas that the church once thought impossible.

The role of the congregational leader is critical throughout the liminal journey. "Liminal guides accompany person and groups through the shaded passages of life, sharing in their experiences

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<sup>96</sup> Sheryl Fullerton, "What Else Is There?," *Oneing*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2020), 77-80.

<sup>97</sup> Edwin Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), 65.

<sup>98</sup> Heifetz, 22.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>100</sup> John P. Kotter et al, "Is Your Organization Surviving Change – or Thriving in It?," *Harvard Business Review*, (August 13, 2021).

and building bridges between that experience and a larger transcendent referent, between the human story and the larger stories from scripture and tradition.”<sup>101</sup>

Since the journey through liminality is not made in solitude, the liminal leader must be prepared to help bridge the often-challenging relational gaps between church members. “Our biological bodies are hardwired for close relationships, and the capacity to love and be loved is intrinsically human. . . .Our urge to connect with other people is a superpower that keeps us close to others.”<sup>102</sup>

Therefore, equipping clergy and congregation leaders to explore and understand the liminality, not only in the relationships between church members but also in the complex relationships the leader within the congregation. Pulling together the various approaches to relational dynamics for a congregational setting and making it accessible for leaders is the main focus of my doctoral project. I believe building a greater sense of confidence in a congregational leader’s ability to understand and navigate these matters will lead to thriving.

More than ever, congregational leaders need to be equipped, empowered, grounded, and inspired. As one scholar urged, “Leaders in the twenty-first century must navigate through doubt, uncertainty, and ambiguity to accomplish organizational goals effectively. Liminal leaders are capable of using dissonance and dislocation as opportunities for transformational growth and of operating on changing ground,” as scholar Leslie Shaw-VanBuskirk noted.<sup>103</sup>

## MVP (MOST VIABLE PROTOTYPE)

Based on the survey data and conversations within the focus group, it is prudent for me to proceed forward with the book prototype as my primary focus. Additionally, a book would provide a much-needed resource for leaders based on the abundance of research around the topic of liminality related to the congregational organization’s relational dynamics.

I feel confident in my ability to begin writing the remaining chapters of the book, editing, and soliciting feedback within the timeframe of the third year of the program. Since I worked diligently to project the rest of the subtopics of the book through the table of contents, along with feedback from the focus group on potential new subtopics to consider, I can begin writing at the end of this semester over the summer. I have extensively researched each of the remaining subtopics and feel comfortable with the direction of my next steps to fulfill this most viable prototype.

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<sup>101</sup> Carson, *Crossing Thresholds*, 82.

<sup>102</sup> Robert M. Rosales, “Energizing Social Interactions at Work: An Exploration of Relationships That Generate Employee and Organizational Thriving,” *Open Journal of Social Sciences* 04, no. 09 (2016): 29-33.

<sup>103</sup> Leslie Shaw-VanBuskirk et al, “Liminal Leadership: Leading Betwixt and Between,” *European Journal of Training and Development* 43, no. 7/8 (September 2, 2019): 643-660.

I have set a goal to write one chapter per week over the summer, allowing for editing and feedback into the next school year.

## APPENDICES

Due to the volume of the book prototype and the inability to import an audio file into this document, both prototypes can be found here:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1atGILH2Zx7YEc9Pg6oi0HiclhsDTGnbG?usp=sharing>.



Prototype 1: Book

What aspects of the book were valuable to you?

admittedly I did not have the chance to read... sorry!  
I think the topic and its application are valuable.  
Well organized. Good resources at the end.  
Description and overarching discussion of liminality.  
It was clear, to the point, and didn't fall too far into the "spiritual" or "academic." It was a good rhythm of both. It does a good job asking questions without making the reader feel like they've failed.  
The overall processing of responding to anxiety in times of change. It was good for me to process how my own response was affecting the potential response of my congregation.  
I found value in the definition of liminal for the church specifically, and the theological lens with which we could explore biblical liminal spaces to act boldly and faithfully.  
The parallels between anti-vaxxers and congregational change resisters was a wild and helpful illustration. Likewise, the gap between competing emotions was very insightful.  
The intro was a good overview and proper introduction to the concept of liminality. I also liked the index that shared some really creative titles for each chapter. It was also helpful to realize how this affects my church context post-covid.  
**What are important features missing from the book?**  
Information was well organized. It had quite a bit of information. I would have enjoyed hearing the author's voice a bit stronger.  
More specific questions for the ratings and self evaluation portions.  
I would have appreciated a more thorough examination, in specificity, of the problem(s) that can be solved through a liminal approach. Start with the problem to be solved. I think some charts/graphics could help too.  
The self-differentiation aspects of the book were great as was the explanation of the liminal spaces in which the church finds itself today. I'm sure it will come later, but more on next steps might be helpful.  
In the absence of the rest of the material, this is hard to say. The fact that I found myself wanting more at the end of the first chapter is a good sign!  
It's difficult to say without seeing the remaining chapters, but a connectivity from survey piece to chapter text itself would be better--unless I just missed that connective tissue. I also would want to see some extra questions to explore with a group rather than individually for each chapter/section.  
You may want to process how removing our masks and physically being with people again might change the ways that we form community. We've spent the last two years afraid of each other, and I wonder about the psychological effects that will have on the future of our faith communities.  
I really didn't feel that anything was particularly missing.

How would you rank the potential usefulness of the book for your leadership?

- Good
- Very Good
- Okay
- Very Good
- Good
- Good
- Good

What questions are you left with after reading the book?

What are "common" next steps (knowing one size does not fit all). How might this language translate to lay leadership, etc.  
I wanted to know more about how to enter into liminal space together with others. Not just personal application but organizational application.  
I was curious what the next chapter would be! I was curious how the book might apply to individuals vs groups.  
I don't know that I was any further down the road in understanding where my church or where I was as a leader in being ready for making the most of liminality. Maybe that would have become clearer later.  
Are there defined elements of "the liminal journey"? Will there be illustrations of congregational best practices or other organizations that are doing well in this new world we are navigating? Likewise, are there case studies of congregations that do some parts of this well & others not as well?  
My greatest question is how you may hold the list from page viii of your introduction in view throughout the process--as approaching complex issues like unconscious bias becomes a difficult conversation alone, rather than a simple lens through which you can approach change.

What would you change about the book?

Nothing on the parts available to us. Based on the table of contents, the next chapters will answer the remaining ones I had  
in text citations and/or footnotes.  
More specific questions, better questions for the introspection portions.  
This is surely a personal preference, but the space for writing reflections a the end of the chapter is not something I tend to engage with.  
Similar to my response of what's missing, I think I want takeaway questions for a group to ponder in discussion.  
I really wouldn't change anything. I thought you did an excellent job covering the complexities of the liminal space we're all wading through.

How would you rank the overall approach of the book?

- Very Good
- Okay
- Good
- Good
- Good
- Very Good
- Good

What would keep about the book?

I believe all of it is helpful and should be kept. I wouldn't take away from it.  
I think the title, topic and content is strong. The book of the cover you provided is also appealing.  
I like the idea of it being a workbook that a church leader or group of lay leaders could use together with the introspection questions. I just don't know that these questions really get at the true answers.  
Ubert scale and notes at the end. Font is very appealing. Space between paragraphs is good. Overall idea is needed in church today.  
Again, this is a personal disposition, but while I do not care for the written reflection space, do like - and engage with - the questions to consider and rank myself and congregation at the end of the chapters. I also really like the quotes for reflection at the beginning of each section.  
I appreciate the inclusion of personal references, pop culture, and theology alongside the concepts presented--makes it feel more approachable and personal--less anxiety-driven in the face of change.

What were your overall leadership takeaways from the book?

Leveraging liminal spaces in the church can be a huge strength for a leader. Not doing so misses opportunity.  
I don't know that there was anything in this first two chapters but I'm sure there would have been something later.  
A strong affirmation of embracing change and welcoming disruption as a way of moving forward positively.  
Leadership - and I might qualify that with several adjectives like adaptive, pastoral, entrepreneurial - is at a pivotal point in congregational life right now. The moment calls for wisdom and added measures of grace for and with one another.  
The major takeaway was the journey of liminality with God, but while also holding the space for individuals in true complexity of emotions, mental health, etc.

- quest670
- quest473
- quest366
- quest725
- quest1011
- quest670
- quest340
- quest801
- quest366
- quest725
- quest473
- quest1011
- quest340
- quest637
- quest473
- quest1011
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- quest366
- quest725
- quest801
- quest340
- quest670
- quest637
- quest1011
- quest473
- quest366
- quest725
- quest801
- quest340
- quest670
- quest637

Prototype 2: Podcast

What aspects of the podcast were valuable to you?

I loved the conversational style and the way the hosts (Andy and I) made it feel like we were having a conversation. I thought it was good to have leaders in the study of liminality who have explored this concept in numerous settings speak about their experiences and insights. I loved the insight that congregations and congregational leaders can glean from people outside the "stained glass bubble" that we can be prone to inhabiting. I appreciate the podcast format, that it can be consumed while my eyes and hands are doing something else. Hearing directly from "experts" is also good. I found great value in the episode about Trelis because of their explanation of liminal space and how they approach organizations to be catalysts of greatness. Hearing the conversational and respectful tone around liminal space was amazing. Since I had never heard that term before March 2020 it was helpful. I always love examples that are relatable to the church. I appreciate the hosts' (Andy and I) being open and vulnerable about their own experiences with liminality. It was done in an informative, yet easy to understand and follow, presentation. The topics covered are not always the easiest to face, but they are important, so this was informative in a helpful way. I appreciated David Gray's take on getting out of the walls of our church to diversify our understanding of how to navigate liminal space.

What are important features missing from the podcast?

Show notes, references, or recommended future reading.  
I don't remember anything that wasn't there that I wished had been.  
I would have appreciated visual cues, such as slides or graphics, to help with understanding. With key points, questions, etc. Maybe an overview of where this podcast fits into the overall narrative.  
What if you gave intro questions like you give ending questions?  
I'm sure if they had been full episodes you would have asked about church specifically but I find that many church leaders, even pastors and especially lay leaders, have trouble making that jump with other examples.  
Exploring real-time church leadership situations—providing some context to the expertise.  
None.

How would you rank the potential usefulness of the podcast for your leadership?

- Very Good
- Good
- Okay
- Good
- Very Good
- Very Good
- Very Good

What questions are you left with after listening to the podcast?

None.  
Are there congregations or congregational leaders that might be identified where we can consider how these insights are being applied in a real-life church setting?  
Again, I'm thinking through the best way to communicate this to my staff and leadership team as we live into a post-Covid space.

Again, I was not sure how I would use this with my leadership at church. They did not draw connections and I feel they needed that. But again, I know these were shortened, how can we help our people who may be "ready to move on" or return to a before time really get the concept?

I wanted a less episodic approach, an understanding of how one podcast fits together with another into a bigger picture.

Rather than a question, I found myself wanting to read I wish I could have given deeper into their expertise, left with questions only of how I can approach this work from my current context and perspective.

More of the host (Andy) adding insight when talking with the guests. The host seems to be an expert as much as the guest. It is an interview style format. At times it seems like having more of a dialogue would strengthen the conversation.

What would you change about the podcast?

I thought it was well done and covered a lot of ground. At this time, I wouldn't change anything.  
After the interview and during the reflection time, the music in the background was a distraction, especially since it was on a loop and there was a small gap between when it stopped and restarted. (Perhaps this is mocking, but it was a distraction while listening)  
For me, listening to the same person speak for 30ish minutes was a bit tedious. Maybe a few more specific questions with shorter responses. Less open ended reflecting and more specific illustration/examples of concept.  
I would add visuals somehow. And maybe give an overview of the whole "season."  
The gentlemen who spoke, I know he was a leader in the idea of liminal space for organization change but he had trouble focusing his message as a speaker. My church leaders would not have stuck with it.  
It might be interesting to have your "expert" and then a leader who could use the information in their setting and get "feet on the ground" questions answered in that space.  
More host dialogue and inserting self in conversation during interview.  
More host dialogue and inserting self in conversation during interview.  
It would be helpful to hear from pastors that are navigating this in real time.

How would you rank the overall approach of the podcast?

- Very Good
- Good
- Very Good
- Very Good
- Good
- Good
- Very Good

What would I keep about the podcast?

Again, I wouldn't change anything. I'd keep it as is.  
Keep everything.  
I thought the intro and the summary thoughts by you at the end were good. It helped to frame the conversation and bring it more into focus. I thought this drove the main points home where the thoughts of the podcast guest were a bit scattered to me at times.  
The content and the format are very accessible. The length is very manageable. I appreciate the interchanges between guest and host. There seems to be authentic interest on both sides and that invites a listener further into the conversation.  
Good intro, Great summary by host at the end.  
Keep people who are experts in this field who can give ministers a different approach while it remains approachable.  
I loved what the couple said about moving organizations towards greatness. I love the language there.  
Take a risk (episode 11). Open eyes to liminal spaces (episode 2).

What were your overall leadership takeaways from the podcast?

That moving forward will require a shift in understanding and ways of doing things. If we want to thrive—a step just on the part of our congregations, but ours as well.  
I loved what the couple said about moving organizations towards greatness. I love the language there.  
Take a risk (episode 11). Open eyes to liminal spaces (episode 2).  
I think the podcast provided a lot of valuable insights and opportunities for change.  
That this has been going on for a long time as usual the church is WAY behind business. That we have to help people think in new ways.  
This one is harder for me to articulate. I'm very aware that the moment we are living in now calls for adaptive leadership and innovation, but I'm not sure I have a specific takeaway I can share.  
I felt that I sat in a liminal space and that we are looking at a need to harness greatness and be catalysts for change as individuals in organizations.

guest25  
guest801  
guest366  
guest940  
guest473  
guest670  
guest801  
guest1637

guest366  
guest940  
guest801  
guest670  
guest25  
guest670  
guest1011  
guest473  
guest366  
guest940  
guest801  
guest670  
guest725  
guest670  
guest473  
guest1011  
guest637

guest1011  
guest940  
guest801  
guest725  
guest670  
guest473  
guest670  
guest366  
guest637

guest1011  
guest940  
guest801  
guest670  
guest725  
guest473  
guest670  
guest366  
guest637

guest1011  
guest725  
guest366  
guest801  
guest670  
guest940  
guest670

Prototype Selection

For your leadership context, which prototype would you select?

Book	quest011
Podcast	quest725
Podcast	quest670
Podcast	quest473
Book	quest801
Podcast	quest940
Book	quest366
Podcast	quest637
Podcast	quest670

For your learning style, which prototype would select?

Book	quest011
Book	quest801
Book	quest940
Podcast	quest725
Podcast	quest473
Podcast	quest366
Podcast	quest670
Podcast	quest637
Book	quest670

Which prototype do you think leaders in your organization would consume?

Book	quest011
Book	quest366
Book	quest801
Podcast	quest725
Podcast	quest637
Book	quest940
Book	quest670
Book	quest473
Podcast	quest670

Predict the future: Which prototype will stand the test of time as a helpful resource?

Book	quest011
Book	quest366
Podcast	quest801
Podcast	quest940
Book	quest637
Podcast	quest670
Podcast	quest725
Book	quest670
Book	quest473

Rank the color palettes of the prototypes:

Yellow & Blue, Blue & Green, Slate Black & Yellow, Red & Black, Purple & Peach, Other	quest366
Blue & Green, Slate Black & Yellow, Purple & Peach, Red & Black, Other	quest011
Slate Black & Yellow, Blue & Green, Yellow & Blue, Red & Black, Other, Purple & Peach	quest801
Slate Black & Yellow, Purple & Peach, Blue & Green, Other, Red & Black, Yellow & Blue	quest670
State Black & Yellow, Blue & Green, Yellow & Blue, Red & Black, Purple & Peach, Other	quest725
State Black & Yellow, Blue & Green, Red & Black, Other, Purple & Peach, Yellow & Blue	quest637

What other color palette should be considered?

White and blue	quest366
I have none add.	quest011
Red and white.	quest670
Orange and Black--Go Camels Ha!	quest801
I have no idea.	quest725
Blue and Orange	quest940
Not sure about this one. Color popularity changes each season	quest473
I'd have to play with palettes! The slate gray with many other highlight colors would work great--or any of your other colors that you have in pairings. It's a good base color.	quest670

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