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# The Restoration-Focused Church

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE RESTORATION-FOCUSED CHURCH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

DAVID RALPH

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

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## ABSTRACT

Statistical research indicates an increase in brokenness among North Americans over the past fifty years. Despite this increase, people seeking help for mental health issues, relational dysfunction, addictive behaviors, and other forms of brokenness are not often turning to the church for restoration, recovery, and healing. Many of those struggling with brokenness more often turn to therapeutic practitioners and other healing sources absent of any genuine spiritual parameters. Others turn to mutual support recovery groups where behavior modification and cognitive therapies lead to abstinence but not restoration. They stop giving into their addictions and compulsive behaviors, but they do not deal with the underlying reasons for them. Others seek spiritual solutions, including Christian discipleship, eastern meditation and yoga that are often void of any recovery or therapeutic practices or methods.

Church leaders need to take a semiotic approach to this, understanding what the cultural signs are pointing to. What is this increase in brokenness pointing to and what opportunities does it create for the church? This is not as a threat to current ways of doing ministry. It is an opportunity to look at new paradigms, possibly helping the church regain credibility and provide restorative solution for increasing brokenness. This new model of church, a Restoration-Focused Church, might create a safe and trusted place of healing, even for an increasingly broken culture. This dissertation will focus on that new paradigm. Section 1 will discuss the evidence of increasing brokenness and examine why people are not turning to the church for healing. Section 2 will review the available options for addressing this problem. Section 3 will describe a new ministry paradigm, the Restoration-Focused Church, which is Kingdom-focused and mission-minded. Section 4 describes a non-fiction book written in a fable format for church leaders, describing how

the church can better understand cultural realities and courageously make a major shift in mission. Section 5 includes a book proposal and section 6 provides a postscript. The table of contents and key chapters from the book are included in Appendix A.

## SECTION 1: THE PROBLEM

### **Introduction**

While greeting after another Sunday morning service, with inspiring music, thought-provoking media, and a relevant and practical message, I wonder if it is enough.

A young woman sitting in the church café is struggling with severe depression, diagnosed after years of self-harm that eventually lead to divorce. Across the atrium, another young woman's slight frame is a reminder of the battle she has with an eating disorder since adolescence. Just beyond her are two men who once were addicted to pornography, one leading to infidelity, jail time, job loss and a subsequent divorce. Two women, both victims of abuse at the hands of people who claimed they loved them, are talking and laughing nearby. Although they have found healing, they still struggle with the lingering consequences of the abuse. I am interrupted by a forty-something woman who was sexually abused for seven years and who is still trying to deal with the pain and the shame she suffers as a result of the trauma. Many have found some healing and recovery, but I wonder, "Are we doing enough?"

On my way home, driving past a world-class therapeutic mental health and recovery institution, I wonder why a far greater percentage of hurting people choose this kind of facility for healing over finding healing in their faith community. Is one of these treatment options better than the other?

The sad reality is, no matter where they went for treatment, the increase in brokenness in our culture is at epidemic proportions and relapse seems commonplace. Research indicates a significant increase in brokenness in our North American culture. The word brokenness as used in this dissertation refers to addictive behaviors, emotional

and mental health issues, and compulsive behaviors that are personally and relationally destructive.

### **The Trends**

It is one thing to use anecdotal evidence to substantiate the claim of increased brokenness, but statistical trends detail the true extent of the problem.

From 2002 until 2012, alcohol abuse rates declined. In 2002, 7.7% of Americans struggled with alcoholism, while in 2012, that number declined to 6.8%. However, it still represents 17.7 million Americans and over 2 million Canadians.<sup>1</sup>

Illicit drug use is increasing. The number of drug users has increased from 8.3% of the population in 2002 to 9.3% of the population in 2012. That percentage has grown to 10.1% of the population and there are an estimated 24.6 million drug users in 2015.<sup>2</sup> This increase is primarily due to the growing use of marijuana, especially among young adults. Marijuana has the second-highest dependency of illicit drugs, after alcohol abuse.<sup>3</sup> Although there is insufficient evidence regarding the long-term use of cannabis, with the ongoing decriminalization and legalization of marijuana, addiction to marijuana could rapidly increase.

With media portraying what the “right” body image or look is, with social pressures many young adults are facing, with the unraveling of the family, with the desire to fit in and belong, and the by-products of other forms of brokenness, many young

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<sup>1</sup> “National Survey on Drug Use and Health,” The National Institute on Drug Abuse, accessed October 3, 2014, <http://www.drugabuse.gov/national-survey-drug-use-health>.

<sup>2</sup> “National Center for Health Statistics,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed July 28, 2017, <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/drug-use-illegal.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> “National Survey on Drug Use and Health,” The National Institute on Drug Abuse, accessed October 3, 2014, <http://www.drugabuse.gov/national-survey-drug-use-health>.

women, are turning to various forms of physical harm, eating disorders, and even suicide. “It is one of our society’s fastest growing and most disturbing epidemics. There has been an alarming rise in the number of people who feel compelled to handle life’s frustrations by wounding their bodies. Self injury is being called the new ‘anorexia.’”<sup>4</sup> One in five females and one in seven males self-injure, many initiating this behavior in adolescence. Self-injury can include cutting, burning, interfering with wound healing, hair pulling, and inserting objects under their skin.<sup>5</sup> With males, self-harm can also include fighting, tattoos, binge drinking and other forms of reckless and risky behaviour. A study analyzing hospital visits of those who have self-harmed over a ten-year period reported, “The increase in self harm rates per 1000 US population was seen in all major demographic groups. Comparing 1993-1996 to 2005-2008, rates nearly doubled for males and females.”<sup>6</sup> All indications point to a continuing increase to these statistics of self-harm.

For many of the same stressful reasons, a growing group of young women and men have developed dangerous and destructive eating disorders. These disorders are not a fad or a phase or a lifestyle choice, but serious life-threatening conditions. “In the United States, 20 million women and 10 million men suffer from a clinically diagnosed

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<sup>4</sup> Karen Conterio and Wendy Lader, *Bodily Harm: A Breakthrough Healing Program for Self-Injurers* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Natasha Tracy, “Self-Injury Community,” The Healing Place, accessed October 9, 2014, <http://www.healthyplace.com/abuse/self-injury/self-injury-articles>.

<sup>6</sup> Sarah Ting, Ashley Sullivan, Edwin Boudreau, Ivan Miller, and Carlo Camargo, “Trends in US Emergency Visits for Attempted Suicide and Self-Inflicted Injury,” *General Hospital Psychiatry* (2012): 557.

eating disorder at some point in their life, including anorexia, bulimia, binge eating or an eating disorder not specified.”<sup>7</sup>

Suicide is another growth issue. According to the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, 43,000 suicides were reported in the United States in 2015, making it the tenth leading cause of death in America. From 2000 to 2015, suicide rates increased from 10.4/100,000 to 12.93/100,000.<sup>8</sup> These are the statistics for successful suicides. Attempted suicides are approximately 20 times more frequent.<sup>9</sup> Self harm, eating disorders, and attempted suicides all point to an increase in brokenness, especially among young adults.

Mental illnesses are also increasing. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the United States, affecting more than 40 million individuals, or 18% of the population.<sup>10</sup> Diagnosis of anxiety disorders almost doubled between 1987 and 1999 and the use of medication to treat these conditions is up between 17% and 26%, depending on the prescribed medication.<sup>11</sup> “Depression and anxiety diagnoses are growing at an alarming rate. One in ten Americans are affected by it and the number of

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<sup>7</sup> “Getting the Facts on Eating Disorders,” National Eating Disorder Association, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://nationaleatingdisorders.org/get-facts-eating-disorders>.

<sup>8</sup> “Suicide: Facts and Figures,” American Association for Suicide Prevention, June 2016, accessed August 7, 2017, <http://afsp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/2016-National-Facts-Figures.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Ting, Ashley Sullivan, Edwin Boudreau, Ivan Miller, and Carlo Camargo, “Trends in US Emergency Visits for Attempted Suicide and Self-Inflicted Injury,” *General Hospital Psychiatry* (2012): 557.

<sup>10</sup> “Facts and Statistics,” Anxiety and Depression Association of America, accessed December 1, 2014, <http://www.adaa.org/about-adaa-pressroom-statistics>.

<sup>11</sup> M. Olfson, S.C. Marcus, G.I. Wan, and E.C. Geisler, “National Trends in Outpatient Treatment of Anxiety Disorders,” *Journal of Clinical Psychology* 65, no. 9 (September 2004): 1166-1173.

patients diagnosed is increasing by 20% per year.”<sup>12</sup> Adding Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, originating from childhood abuse and other emotional trauma, to other mental illnesses, the significant increase in mental and emotional brokenness in our culture is obvious.

While there have been significant benefits derived from the Internet, misuse of this technology has resulted in an increase in brokenness. It could be concluded that the fastest growing areas of addiction and brokenness are the result of access to the world wide web. The use of the Internet alone can become addictive. According to Kimberley Young in *Internet Addiction*, “One in eight Americans suffer from at least one indicator of problematic Internet use. In countries like China and South Korea, media reports suggest that Internet addiction has reached epidemic proportions.”<sup>13</sup>

One of the misuses of the Internet is cyber bullying. It is estimated that 50% of teens have been bullied and 25% repeatedly bullied, leaving many of them feeling anxious, broken, struggling with self esteem issues and even some considering self harm and suicide.<sup>14</sup>

The most troubling Internet related addiction is pornography. In 1996, there were an estimated 5,000 pornographic sites; today that figure has risen to over 24 million, generating more than 2.8 billion dollars in revenue.<sup>15</sup> More and more people, especially

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<sup>12</sup> “Unhappiness by the Numbers: 2012 Depression Statistics,” Health Line, accessed November 4, 2014, <http://www.healthline.com/depression/statistics-infographic>.

<sup>13</sup> Kimberley S. Young and Cristiano Iabuco de Abreu, *Internet Addiction: A Handbook and Guide to Evaluation and Treatment* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2011), 4.

<sup>14</sup> “Cyber Bullying Statistics,” Bullying Statistics, accessed December 3, 2014. <http://www.bullystatistics.org/content/cyber-bullying-statistics>.

<sup>15</sup> “The Stats on Internet Pornography,” Daily Infographic, accessed July 29, 2017, <http://www.dailyinfographic.com/the-stats-on-internet-pornography-infographic>.

younger people, have access to sexually explicit material that never was available just a few years ago. Statistics reveal that 70% of men aged 18-24 visit porn sites in a typical month and the average age a person is first exposed to pornography is 11.<sup>16</sup> “In adolescents, porn hinders healthy sexual development. Those exposed to high levels of porn have lower levels of sexual self-esteem. In adolescents, there is a relationship between frequent porn use and feelings of loneliness, including major depression. In adults it distorts sexual attitudes and social realities. In families, porn leads to marital dissatisfaction, infidelity, separation and divorce; it increases the rate of infidelity by 300%.<sup>17</sup> Pornography addictions are also progressive. There is a continued longing for harder core pornography to satisfy the addiction, leading to seeking out illegal forms like child pornography.

The above research indicates that we are experiencing a growing problem with addictions and brokenness in our Western culture. As a result of these addictions, other forms of brokenness have developed, primarily in the area of relationships. Many marriages and families have been shattered by an individual’s brokenness, leaving wounds that need to be healed within everyone impacted.

With this increase in brokenness in our culture, there is continual pressure on local and federal governments to fund social agencies that provide therapeutic solutions. However, with the current economic challenges, this funding is being reduced, leaving many without viable solutions for treatment.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> “Internet Pornography by the Numbers; A Significant Threat to Society, Webroot, accessed August 6, 2017, <https://www.webroot.com/ca/en/home/resources/tips/digital-family-life/internet-pornography-by-the-numbers>.

How can the church help the community achieve healing and restoration and what can the church bring to the table and who can they partner with in order to facilitate the healing and restoration they desire?

### **A Credibility Issue**

The reality is that many, if not most people in our culture in need of recovery, restoration or wholeness are not turning to the church. This has been especially true over the past 100 years. Fewer and fewer people, including regular church attendees, are turning to the church for any kind of solutions to life issues and struggles. There are a variety of reasons for this, including a lack of availability and programs, a lack of trained experts, but it also stems from the way the church has lived out its missional mandate in the contemporary culture.

In 2008, The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted the “U.S Religious Landscape Survey,” and the findings revealed 16.1% of Americans reported as not being affiliated with any religious group,<sup>18</sup> doubling the number who made that claim in a similar survey in 1980.<sup>19</sup> The Pew Forum did a follow-up survey in 2014 with a similar sample size and those claiming no religious affiliation jumped to 22.8% of the population.<sup>20</sup> The follow-up survey found that there were 56 million religiously

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<sup>18</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” February 2008, accessed March 3, 2016, [pewforum.org](http://pewforum.org), 5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” May 12, 2015, accessed March 3, 2016, [pewresearch.org](http://pewresearch.org), 3.

unaffiliated adults in the U.S., and this group was more numerous than either Catholics or mainline Protestants.<sup>21</sup>

This increase in the “non-affiliated” is not just an American issue. The Angus Reid Institute prepared a similar survey on “Religion and Faith in Canada” and reported that 26% of Canadians claim they are not affiliated with any religious group and 44% acknowledge ambivalence towards any religious affiliation.<sup>22</sup> Nearly four and a half million Canadians claim no religious affiliation, making it the second largest “religious” group next to the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>23</sup>

The most troubling research statistic is the number of unaffiliated Millennials. Surveys reveal that 36% of young Millennials (between 18-24) are religiously unaffiliated, as are 34% of older Millennials (ages 25-33).<sup>24</sup> In Canada, 28% of millennials don’t embrace any religious affiliation.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, many of those unaffiliated used to be churchgoers. According to David Kinnaman, “59% of young people with a Christian background admit they have dropped out of attending church, after going regularly.”<sup>26</sup>

As a place that can offer healing and restoration from brokenness, the church has often created barriers and damaged its credibility in ways that actually inhibit its desired

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>22</sup> Angus Reid Institute, “Religion and Faith in Canada Today,” March 25, 2015, accessed March 3, 2016, [angusreid.org/wp/content/uploads/2016/01/2015.03.25\\_Faith.pdf](http://angusreid.org/wp/content/uploads/2016/01/2015.03.25_Faith.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” May 12, 2015, accessed March 3, 2016, [pewresearch.org](http://pewresearch.org), 11.

<sup>25</sup> Angus Reid Institute, “Religion and Faith in Canada Today,” March 25, 2015, accessed March 3, 2016, [angusreid.org/wp/content/uploads/2016/01/2015.03.25\\_Faith.pdf](http://angusreid.org/wp/content/uploads/2016/01/2015.03.25_Faith.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 23.

impact. Dave Kinnaman, President of The Barna Group (an organization known for doing extensive research on church- and faith-related subjects), partnering with Gabe Lyons, carefully researched and interviewed thousands of “outsiders” to determine the factors behind this increase in the number of people not affiliated with the church, presented in the book *Unchristian*.

In *Unchristian*, the authors list six reasons why people, especially Millennials, are not affiliated with any church. Those reasons are 1) Christians are hypocritical,<sup>27</sup> 2) Christians are insincere and only concerned with converting others,<sup>28</sup> 3) Christians are anti-homosexual,<sup>29</sup> 4) Christians are boring, unintelligent, old fashioned, and out of touch with reality,<sup>30</sup> 5) Christians are primarily motivated by a political agenda and promote right-wing politics,<sup>31</sup> and 6) Christians are prideful and quick to find fault in others.<sup>32</sup>

Thom and Joani Schultz, in their book *Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore*, corroborates Kinnaman’s and Lyon’s research, concluding the four main reasons for a decline in church attendance are 1) churchgoers’ judgmental attitudes, 2) churchgoers’ hypocrisy, 3) shallow, lecture-style teaching and 4) Christianity is not relevant to their lives.<sup>33</sup> In *Lost and Found*, Ed Stetzer writes, “The younger un-churched

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<sup>27</sup> Dave Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 41.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>33</sup> Thom Schultz and Joani Schultz, *Why Nobody Wants to Go to Church Anymore* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2013), 23-26.

believe the church is too critical about lifestyle issues, full of hypocrites, and not necessary for spiritual development.<sup>34</sup>

Labels like hypocritical, insincere, only care about conversions, anti-homosexual, out of touch with reality, quick to find fault, judgmental, and critical of lifestyle issues create significant barriers to an increasingly broken culture turning to a community of faith for help. Has the church become such an unsafe place that even many Christ-followers turn to solutions outside their community of faith?

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<sup>34</sup> Ed Stetzer, Richie Stanley, and Jason Hayes, *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches That Reach Them* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2009), 65.

## SECTION 2: OTHER SOLUTIONS

### Introduction

Before we can examine any solutions, it is paramount that we have a clear understanding of the causes of addiction and brokenness. Addiction is often reduced to a dependency on a substance to reduce pain or increase pleasure. But the definition is much broader. Addiction is “a combined experience of mental, physical and emotional dependence on a substance or behavior even when it is known by the addicted person that they face considerable harm by doing so.”<sup>35</sup>

Addictions can be classified under two broad categories—substance and behavioral.<sup>36</sup> Substance addiction is a dependency on or the abuse of chemicals such as alcohol or drugs (prescription or non-prescription). Behavioral addictions include gambling, pornography, the Internet and computer games, sexual addiction, obsessional love addiction, food (including eating disorders), shopping, and self-harm. But what causes someone to be so focused on a substance or behavior that they cannot stop, especially when they know the substance is harmful and the behavior is wrecking their lives and their relationships?

Traditionally, the causes of addiction are linked to one of three models. The *moral model* is the oldest view, seeing addictions caused by poor moral choices by sinful, hedonistic living. This implied they were done willfully because of moral weakness.<sup>37</sup> This has been the traditional view of the church. The *disease model*, popularized by Dr.

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<sup>35</sup> Brian Shaw, Paul Ritvo, and Jane Irvine, *Addiction and Recovery for Dummies* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2011), 36.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Linda Simmons, *The Everything Health Guide to Addiction and Recovery: Control Your Behavior and Build a Better Life* (Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2008), 29.

Benjamin Rush, claims addiction, especially substance addiction, is a disease caused by a chemically hijacked brain and should be treated as such. The Institute of Medicine defines addiction as a brain disease characterized by compulsive use of a substance. The National Institute of Drug Abuse defines addiction as a chronic, relapsing, brain disease expressed in the form of compulsive behavior.<sup>38</sup> This removes any personal responsibility for recovery. Under this model, chemical addictions are the result of excessive amounts of dopamine introduced by a substance that disrupted the dopamine pleasure circuit, affecting the frontal cortex of the brain and creating an insatiable desire for more.<sup>39</sup> The *psychosocial* theory of addiction asserts that someone seeks out a substance or a behavior for numbing the emotional pain of a past trauma, a stressful family environment, or a current stressful situation. “In families where physical, verbal, emotional and sexual abuse may be present, it is not uncommon for a person to begin using addictive substances or behaviors to escape the emotional pain.”<sup>40</sup>

Mental health issues are a contributing factor to addictive choices and research indicates there is a strong correlation between mental health issues and reliance on addictive substances and behaviors. Studies in genetics are giving researchers reason to believe that there might be a genetic predisposition toward addictive patterns, which could explain why children of addicts are four times more likely to be addicts themselves than those from non-addict families.<sup>41</sup> The causes of addictive behaviors are complicated

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<sup>38</sup> Kent Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue: Beyond the Model of Disease and Choice* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 17.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

and there are often concurring factors such as mental illness, trauma and difficult circumstances that contribute to someone's addiction.

In addition to these theories about the cause of addiction, there are other cultural factors that could be responsible for this increase in brokenness in our culture. Factors such as the pace of life in North America, the growing dysfunction in many families, the breakdown and redefinition of marriage, affluence and entitlement can all have a part to play in the increase of addiction and issues of mental health.

Just as the causes of addiction are varied and debated, so are the theories and treatments regarding the right path to restoration and recovery. Although there are various treatments and recovery methods, there are common factors found in the treatments that work. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration released a consensus statement outlining the fundamental components of recovery that are as follows:

- Hope – An internalized sense that hope and healing are possible.
- Medication – The goal for most is to take the least amount required, but medication is required for some forms of mental health.
- Empowerment – There is power available and a person is able to take control of their addiction.
- Support – A support system including family and friends is important, and support groups are a key component.
- Education and Knowledge – Knowing as much as possible about your brokenness and addiction.

- Spirituality – A partnership with one’s higher power provides hope, solace, and peace.
- Meaningful Activity – Activities and roles that provide meaning, worth, and identity.
- Self Help – Recognizing the need for professional treatment but also the ability to be proactive in one’s treatment.<sup>42</sup>

The current recovery community (the AA’s etc.), believes the above causes for addiction are accurate and require the above-noted components in treatment. If these are the causes and cures, what are the key options for treatment and where can the church play a role in this?

### **Traditional Discipleship**

The *moral* theory of addiction has influenced the church when it comes to direct treatment of addictions and brokenness, believing a person is responsible for the moral choices they make. Addiction is labeled a sin and therefore spiritual discipleship is the primary method for dealing with these sinful choices and the power of sin to take hold of a person’s life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in *The Cost of Discipleship*, writes, “Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”<sup>43</sup> But what did Bonhoeffer mean by the word discipleship? Like so many biblical words used today, there are various nuances used by different parts of the Christian community.

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<sup>42</sup> Renne Kopache, “Recovery: Definition and Components,” accessed November 27, 2016, <http://www.mhrecovery.com/definition.htm>.

<sup>43</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1937), 64.

The first nuance is *classic discipleship*. The key components of classic discipleship include practicing spiritual disciplines, one-on-one mentoring, a strong focus on scripture study and memorization, and training in sharing your faith. It was made popular by para-church ministries such as Campus Crusade, the Navigators, and Inter Varsity.<sup>44</sup>

The second nuance of the word is “spiritual formation.” Bill Hull defines spiritual formation as “the process through which individuals who have received new life take on the characteristics of Jesus Christ by a combination of effort and grace.”<sup>45</sup> This term was made popular by those in the Christian community who didn’t want to use the word discipleship because of its ambiguity and the perceived baggage attached to it. But it embraces virtually identical components as classic discipleship.

The final nuance of the word discipleship is *contemplative spirituality*. Contemplative spirituality focuses on the classic practices of the ancient church such as solitude, silence, unceasing prayer, finding your way to the presence of God, listening for and meditating on the wisdom of God, adapting historical practices (disciplines) of the church that are applicable today (including the daily offices and Sabbath keeping), and being part of a sacred community.<sup>46</sup>

The term *traditional discipleship* includes the key components of all three nuances, claiming there are more similarities than differences among these approaches to spiritual formation.

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<sup>44</sup> Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2006), 18.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 46-47.

Traditional discipleship finds its theological roots in two primary passages. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus says, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” Additionally, in 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul says, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” The way these key verses play out varies, but there are many core components found in all forms of traditional discipleship.

The first component is the focus on and the practice of spiritual disciplines. Core to the spiritual disciplines is the study and memorization of scripture. This can include basic doctrine and theology. It is the idea that the “truth shall set you free.”<sup>47</sup> In the book *Organic Discipleship*, which describes three key components of discipleship, the authors present a strong case for the importance of scripture study and memorization. Their arguments detail how scripture is spiritual nourishment, helps with mental transformation, provides victory over sin, is the source of insight and wisdom, and helps people understand themselves.<sup>48</sup> They conclude by stating, “In our experience, too many disciplers put too little emphasis on Bible study with their disciples. Such disciples usually don’t do as well as others who have regular Bible study as a mainstay of their time with disciplers.”<sup>49</sup> In *Transformational Discipleship*, when listing their key principles of discipleship, they start with “Bible Engagement and Obeying God.” They

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<sup>47</sup> Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, *How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals about Personal Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 16.

<sup>48</sup> Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery, *Organic Discipleship: Mentoring Others into Spiritual Maturity and Leadership* (Columbus, OH: New Paradigm Publishing, 2012), 91-95.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

conclude, “the truth of God is undefiled and unchangeable, and God has chosen to use His truth to bring transformation to His people. By His truth we were saved and by His truth we are made holy and walk in freedom.”<sup>50</sup>

In addition to the study and memorization of scripture, traditional discipleship includes the practice of other spiritual disciplines. Richard Foster writes, “The classic disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm. They urge us to be the answer to a hollow world.”<sup>51</sup> The most common disciplines are meditation, prayer, fasting, simplicity, solitude, service, confession, worship, and generosity. They could be summarized as having a daily quiet time (including prayer, scripture study, and memorization), building the inner life (including fasting, simplicity, and solitude) and public worship (including worship, confession, service, and generosity).

The second characteristic of traditional discipleship is multiplication or reproduction. Core books on discipleship like *Organic Discipleship*, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making*, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, and *The Master’s Plan for Discipleship* all emphasize in the initial chapters of their books that an important purpose for discipleship is for multiplication and reproduction of disciples. In the initial chapter of *Organic Discipleship*, as part of the definition of discipleship, they begin with multiplication. They conclude this section saying, “Disciple making multiplication growth is biblical and powerful.”<sup>52</sup> Multiplication and reproduction is not implied to be a

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<sup>50</sup> Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), 59.

<sup>51</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2009), 23-24.

<sup>52</sup> McCallum and Lowery, *Organic Discipleship*, 7-10.

machine to convert people or grow churches, but it is about developing and growing leaders who would be able to effectively disciple others.

The third component of traditional discipleship is the concept of mentoring. This is a critical component. It is the concept that those who have been discipled carefully select others to disciple either one on one or in a group of three or four. In *Organic Discipleship*, the authors conclude that mentoring was demonstrated in the New Testament and, by implication, should be a key part of the discipleship process today.<sup>53</sup> Even the subtitle of the book, “Mentoring Others into Spiritual Maturity and Leadership,” describes how important this is to discipleship. The authors go on to say, “to begin the discipling process, we need two things: a disciple maker and a disciple.”<sup>54</sup> Many traditional discipleship authors and promoters dedicate lots of page space to what makes a good mentor, what to look for in someone you would disciple, and what the process for making disciples looks like. These mentoring relationships would also include some kind of an accountability relationship.

There are other concepts that most of the writers and proponents of traditional discipleship would agree on: 1) making disciples is not simply following a process or limited to a series of classes or steps, 2) God is the one who ultimately brings about transformation, 3) it is more than learning the right information and 4) it is more than behavior modification or sin management.

The key benefit of the traditional disciple model is that it is grounded in the Bible. Additionally, it is a structured model that works well for those who are well disciplined.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 29.

It is strongly relationally based: a person pouring themselves into a single or a few disciples. It is easy to measure progress as a disciple becomes more consistent with the spiritual disciplines and it is easily replicable.

But there are some criticisms of this model as well. The main criticism is that it doesn't address the inner emotional life. Peter Scazzero in *The Emotionally Healthy Church* summarizes the ineffectiveness of this model this way:

The roots of the problem lie in a faulty spirituality stemming from a faulty biblical theology. Many Christians have received helpful training in certain essential areas of discipleship, such as prayer, Bible study, worship, discovering your spiritual gifts or learning how to explain the Gospel to someone else. Yet followers also need training and skills in how to look beneath the surface of the iceberg in their lives, to break the power of how their past influences the present, how to live in brokenness and vulnerability, to know their limits and to embrace their grief and loss. Despite all the emphasis today on spiritual formation, church leaders rarely address what spiritual maturity looks like as it relates to emotional health.<sup>55</sup>

I recently conducted a research questionnaire given to twenty-two key leaders of a thriving recovery ministry. Most who had been traditionally discipled reported that the spiritual disciplines were helpful, especially Bible study, prayer, and sharing their faith, but 88% of this group found that it was only “a little helpful” or “not helpful at all in helping with their recovery and brokenness.” The traditional discipleship model is less focused on the reasons behind sinful choices, dealing with hurts and wounds from the past including their impact on the present, and issues of the heart. When it comes to dealing with sinful struggles, traditional discipleship often takes a cognitive approach to it. In *Organic Discipleship*, the process for dealing with sinful behavior is very cognitive. It is about identifying the sinful actions or attitudes, then identifying the wrong beliefs behind them, finally establishing the right beliefs and gradually experiencing a change in

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<sup>55</sup> Peter Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 18.

habits and actions.<sup>56</sup> So often, when those being traditionally disciplined experience personal brokenness or a moral struggle, they are told to read their Bible more, pray more, memorize scripture more, and all the truths of scripture will change their way of thinking and this renewal of their mind will change their actions. Many have tried to follow this instruction only to experience frustration, with little real change.

Another criticism is that traditional discipleship is performance-driven and measured by external activities. The danger to this is that you can deceive yourself into believing you're spiritually mature without addressing some of the deeper issues in your life. Scazzero notes,

The spirituality of most current discipleship models often only adds a protective layer against growing up emotionally. Because people have real and helpful experiences in certain areas of their lives—such as worship, prayer, Bible studies and fellowship—they mistakenly believe they are doing fine, even if their relational life and interior world is not in order.<sup>57</sup>

A third criticism is that many of the models of traditional discipleship place a focus on following a process in a sequential manner or orderly progression. That makes these “models and programs much easier to design and administrate.”<sup>58</sup> The challenge is that our spiritual journey is often not a linear one and it doesn't neatly follow a series of steps. Even those who don't want to think of these models as steps but more as principles often lead their disciples down a very structured and sequential route. Sometimes life doesn't happen in steps and it is hard for this process to address real life issues when they arise.

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<sup>56</sup> McCallum and Lowery, *Organic Discipleship*, 129.

<sup>57</sup> Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality*, 15.

<sup>58</sup> Larry Osborne, *A Contrarian's Guide to Knowing God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2007), 55.

Often criticism is leveled against those who don't follow the disciplines as being spiritually immature. There is a greater focus on following the disciplines than on spiritual transformation because they are easy to measure.

A final criticism is that traditional discipleship doesn't work for everyone. Larry Osborne writes,

The conventional paths to pleasing God seemed heavily tilted in the direction of certain personality types.... On the one hand I was told that spirituality was within the reach of everyone. On the other hand, I noticed that almost all the books on spirituality and the inner life were written by introverts – smart ones at that. I got the distinct impression that God was partial to reflective types with high IQs, impressive vocabularies, and lots of self-discipline. And that left a lot of us on the outside looking in.<sup>59</sup>

Those with different temperaments, learning styles, and unique pathways, when it comes to connecting with God, might have difficulty with the more intellectual and informational approach to traditional discipleship.

### **Mutual Aid Support Groups**

Mutual Aid Support Groups (MASG) are peer-to-peer groups that follow the classic Twelve Steps developed by Alcoholics Anonymous. Since the start of AA in 1939,<sup>60</sup> a growing number of mutual aid support groups are now available to those struggling with addictions to narcotics (NA), families of addicts (Al-Anon and Alateen), gambling addictions (GA), addictions to marijuana (MA), and those struggling with food addictions (OA) and a wide variety of other conditions.<sup>61</sup> MASG primarily focus on the disease model and adhere to the core concept that we are “powerless” to control our

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>60</sup> William L. White, *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America* (Bloomington, MN: Chestnut Heath Systems, 1998), 131.

<sup>61</sup> Shaw, Ritvo, and Irvine, *Addiction and Recovery for Dummies*, 201.

“compulsive behaviors.” The key to recovery is to surrender control to and rely on a “higher power” for recovery. The higher power is not connected to any specific faith or religion. “The AA model follows a heavy moral agenda. The Twelve Step approach actually combines moral education with a cognitive-behavioral perspective and a hefty dose of social support.”<sup>62</sup> The key to these groups is attending the weekly meetings and working the twelve steps. Being a participant in MASG requires 1) public admission of the need for recovery, 2) believing there is no source for transformation other the higher power, 3) daily surrender to the higher power, 4) personal evaluation, 5) making amends with those you have hurt, 6) practicing prayer and meditation, and 7) impacting the lives of others. Important aspects of MASG’s are sponsorship and accountability.

The benefits of twelve-step groups are that all are welcome, there is no cost, they are readily available (as most urban centers have group meetings on any given day of the week), they are always in a neutral location, and they provide a genuine and caring community for mutual help and support. Comparing them against the components required for recovery they provide empowerment, support, education, spirituality, self-help, and hope.

There are criticisms of classic recovery. The primary criticism is its effectiveness. Only one in ten remain in the program up to a year and only 35% of those who remain in the program experience sobriety for ten years.<sup>63</sup> How does this compare to other options of therapeutic treatment? A 2007 study by the National Council on Alcoholism’s medical journal reported that people attending 12-step treatment programs had a 49.5% abstinence

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>63</sup> “Is There an AA Success Rate?” Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, accessed November 27, 2016, [http://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/articles/is-there-an-aa-success-rate\\_](http://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/articles/is-there-an-aa-success-rate_).

rate after a single year. Those who were in CBT programs were less successful, maintaining a 37% abstinence rate.<sup>64</sup> Much of the criticism, especially about effectiveness against long-term sobriety, is leveled against Alcoholics Anonymous more than the twelve steps themselves.

The second criticism about classic recovery involves the concept of “powerlessness”. Critics believe that admitting powerlessness frees a person from taking personal responsibility for their choices and actions. The third criticism is a clear lack of definition of God. The phrases “God of our understanding” and “higher power” are the foundation of this criticism. In some recovery groups, anyone and anything can be thought of as God. Critics claim that this idolatry waters down who God truly is. The fourth criticism is that being part of a recovery group is a lifelong process and it can feel like a prison itself that you are never free of. The fifth criticism is that it doesn’t deal with trauma that is thought to have a role in addictive behavior. The final criticism is that volunteers run MASGs; the groups lack professional guidance or direction.

### **Therapeutic Treatment**

Therapeutic Treatment (TT) includes professional counselors, residential and non-residential treatment programs, and the use of pharmacology to treat certain substance addictions. There are four facets of TT, and it often requires more than one of these options to facilitate therapeutic healing.

The first option is regular therapy sessions with a professional counselor, psychiatrist, or psychotherapist, forming a formal, professional, and confidential

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<sup>64</sup> Kevin Gray, “Does AA Really Work? A Roundup of Recent Studies,” thefix.com, accessed September 14, 2016, <https://www.thefix.com/content/the-real-statistics-of-aa7301>.

relationship. The second option is a residential treatment facility that specializes in addictions and mental health and offers 24/7 professional care, removing a person from their current environment and temptations. This can include individual counseling and group therapy sessions led by a professional counselor or therapist. The third option is a therapeutic community or a sober living center. Therapeutic communities are a one-month to three-month residential program in a communal living setting based on self-help, peer-to-peer settings. All residential treatment programs are a three-stage process. Stage one includes induction into the treatment facility (learning the rules and guidelines) and initial treatment. Stage two includes active treatment and rehabilitation, including the individual counseling—usually using cognitive behavioral therapy and group interaction, but not providing a supportive community. The final stage is the re-entry stage, helping the patient leave the treatment center and navigate their way back into their normal environment. Recommendations for aftercare can include participation in an MASG and ongoing sessions with a therapist. The fourth option is an outpatient treatment program that has all the dynamics of a residential program but allows the patient to go home in the evening, retaining some of their life responsibilities. The fifth option is a non-residential therapy support group. This is led by a professionally trained addiction specialist and is usually held at a mental health and addictions institution. Within each of these options, there are a wide variety of treatments and methods.

Therapeutic treatment options provide hope, empowerment, education, medication, and self-help.

The primary criticism of TT is its availability. Other than those referred to treatment by a court appointment, individuals are responsible for the cost, and most

counselors and centers are expensive. Although the number of these centers is increasing, the number of centers available in any given geographic region is still limited.

The second criticism of therapeutic treatment is that there must be a good match between therapist and client and/or therapist and the treatment center. “Many individuals leave treatment prematurely due, in part, to poor matches and treatment programs.”<sup>65</sup>

The third criticism, especially by those in the Christian community, is the lack of spirituality as part of these treatments. The fourth criticism of TT is that there is little genuine community or social support as part of the therapy. The fifth criticism is that the residential treatment programs require the participant to step away from vocational and family responsibilities during treatment. Although most employers and families would support this therapy, it creates both relational and financial hardship. The final criticism is that TT requires continuing care after completion of the treatment. Because of the wide variety of treatment options and the different definitions of success between therapists, counselors, and treatment centers, there is no quantitative way to measure the effectiveness of TT.

Is there a way to merge the options for greater effectiveness? There is a strong skepticism between those in the therapeutic and recovery communities. The characteristics of the Twelve Steps and MASG make many psychotherapists “uneasy at a minimum” and “sometimes frankly hostile to it.” Many believe that twelve step approaches fit within the bounds of what traditionally would be called quackery and the

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<sup>65</sup> Randolph Atkins and James Howden, “Religiosity and Participation in Mutual Aid Support Groups for Addiction,” *Journal of Substance Abuse* 33 (2007): 321-331.

spiritual overtones only increase the gulf between MASG and TT.<sup>66</sup> AA is skeptical of adding therapists/therapy as part of the solution; however, many of those in an MASG are also involved in counseling or psychotherapy.<sup>67</sup>

Richard Gorsuch, in his research on the religious aspect of addiction recovery, concluded that, “when a therapist and a person in recovery operated in the same religious worldview there was a great effectiveness on recovery.”<sup>68</sup> Muffler, Langrod, and Larson studied four religiously based recovery programs, and although they admitted that religiously based programs are not a perfect solution, these programs demonstrated comparable successful outcomes, if not better than, those in secular treatment, when it comes to preventing relapse.<sup>69</sup> Three separate research studies by Meylink, Gorsuch and Muffler have suggested that a collaboration of spiritual leaders with professionals in mental health may be effective in helping clients who were abusers and are religious.<sup>70</sup> Despite skepticism, benefits derived from collaboration between therapists and religious leaders could lead to fewer cases of relapse.

### **Conclusion**

Christian, therapeutic, and recovery communities (MASG) are three very different cultures. Although these cultures are not monolithic, they each have strong opinions and clearly identified boundaries. As with all tribes or cultures, they have unique language,

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<sup>66</sup> Robin Room and Thomas Greenfield, “Alcoholics Anonymous, Other 12 Step Movements and Psychotherapy in the U.S. Population 1990,” *Addiction* 88 (1993): 555-562, 557.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Richard Gorsuch, “Aspects of Substance Abuse and Recovery,” *Journal of Social Issues* 51, no. 2 (1995): 65-83, 78.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

values, beliefs, and traditions. Trying to live bi-culturally between two of these worldviews is a huge challenge, but trying to live tri-culturally is even a greater challenge.

There have been attempts by the Christian community to be somewhat bi-culture. Celebrate Recovery (CR), a Christ-centered twelve-step ministry started by John Baker in 1991, is an example of this. CR deals with the issue of the higher power by naming Jesus as the higher power, and participants don't find their identity in their addiction but in their relationship with Jesus Christ. CR has taken the spirituality of the classic twelve steps and made it specifically Christian. It has been an effective program in many churches. The challenge is that CR and other Christian recovery programs become just that, another *program* of the church. However, they don't change the church *culture* and they become just another ministry on another night. Two distinct cultures try to co-exist in the same organization, and the church remains the dominant culture. This often leads to failure of programs like CR because recovery is never embraced as part of the DNA of the whole church or supported by the pastor.

Christian culture has also tried to connect with the therapeutic world through the referral to Christian counselors. Some residential treatment centers also have a primarily Christian worldview. Teen Challenge is an example. Their website states they are a "residential drug and alcohol addiction faith based program...that offers help and hope to those with alcoholism and/or addiction to other drugs."<sup>71</sup> Although Teen Challenge is faith-based, it is a separate entity from the church. Despite sharing a faith, Teen Challenge uses therapeutic language rather than a Christian dialect.

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<sup>71</sup> "Who We Are," Teen Challenge, accessed August 27, 2016, <https://www.teenchallenge.ca/who-we-are>.

The recovery and therapeutic communities have made the largest bi-cultural inroads. Many treatment centers use a modified version of the twelve steps as part of their treatment programs and many treatment centers and counselors refer to MASG as a key part of the aftercare program or as a supplement to counseling and therapy.

The church embracing some of each of these two other communities while continuing to focus on its traditional discipleship is not a solution that will have a significant impact on an increasingly broken culture, and will not lead to the church be seen as an alternate healing community. What could possibly make this work could be the merging of the best of discipleship, MASG's and therapeutic methods into a new model or by these different communities finding a way to collaborate together.

## SECTION 3: THE THESIS

### **Introduction**

Over the last hundred years, the church has had some, but little, involvement in helping people with practical steps of recovery. Believing the twelve steps are secular, they have relied on more traditional methods of discipleship, which involve forming spiritual disciplines and habits, but with little success. Churches tell anecdotal stories of radical life change in the lives of those struggling with brokenness, yet simple observation indicates that recovery is not happening systemically in the church.

With trends pointing toward ever-increasing levels of addiction and brokenness, the church needs to understand and embrace their role in bringing about the hope of recovery to this broken culture. Helping people recover from their brokenness must be a mandate of the ministry of the local church.

Too many church leaders and churches are ignorant about addictions, brokenness, and recovery and their connection to spiritual formation. There is scepticism and criticism about whether the twelve steps are biblical or are part of a secular solution to addictions and brokenness. Churches recognize the problem but prescribe methods that at best don't help and can actually be counterproductive to the recovery process. Churches are perceived by the culture to offer inadequate and inaccurate guidance for those who are broken and their families.

Voicing concerns about the church and its diminishing impact on the current culture, Reggie McNeal writes,

My assignment that morning was to challenge the church to move forward into the future. After acknowledging the historical significance of Martin Luther in the progression of Christianity, I turned my comments to the church's next chapter. "We've been working at 'fixing the church' for the past five hundred years," I

said. “How’s that going?” I reflected on the fact that, in my lifetime alone, we’ve been through personal evangelism moments, the worship wars, the church health craze, and the charismatic and the neo-charismatic doctrinal debates. After sharing some current statistics about the growing disaffection of Americans with institutional religion, I proposed an alternate approach: “Why not just do what the church should be doing – partnering with God in this redemptive mission in the world – and let the overflow of that effort bring about the renewal we’re looking for.”<sup>72</sup>

Leonard Sweet writes with the same sentiments: “Christianity in the West has become a sterile, exhausted religion, its power to tell us fresh things about God and life expended in lifeless repetition, imprisoned conventionality and predictable pastiche. The result is a failure to offer a viable response to the challenges facing the world we are in.”<sup>73</sup>

The church has a credibility issue when it comes to offering practical solutions to the greatest problems in our culture. A spiritual awakening is needed. The church community continues to look for the right formula, the right nuance, the right modification or tweak, the right “fix” in order to find its lost credibility and enable it to again be an influential voice in the culture. But modification will not be enough.

In the Great Emergence, Phyllis Tickle describes a semi-millennial, cataclysmic, recurring pattern of change that happens to culture and to the church. The first was the death and resurrection of Jesus and the birth of the church in 33 A.D. The second was the fall of the Roman Empire and the monastic movement started by Gregory the Great in 540 A.D. The third was The Great Schism of 1054, when the Romans Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Church split. The fourth was the Reformation in 1517 that gave

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<sup>72</sup> Reggie McNeal, *Kingdom Come* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2015), xi-xii.

<sup>73</sup> Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2015), xiii.

rise to Protestant Christianity.<sup>74</sup> If Tickle is correct in her assumptions, there is another “great emergence” on the horizon and the church is on the precipice of another major “reformation.” Radical changes in culture point to this “great emergence.” Will the church be able to respond with a radical approach to these radical changes and find its voice again in the public square and be an influential participant at the table with the other creators and initiators of this next great emergence?

In order for the church to make the radical change required, a greater understanding of and empathy for the culture is required.

### **A Cultural Understanding and a Correct Response**

Cultural researchers and modern anthropologists have selected several categories to describe the current North American culture. Technology dependence is one of those key cultural categories. In the last twenty-five years, the Internet, email, smart phones, social media, and video games played on mobile devices have not only been introduced, but have been rapidly embraced by the culture and even molded that culture. We are more electronically connected with each other than we are physically. Information is available at any time on any subject. It has made “place” irrelevant. We can attend classes, seminars and even church services without ever leaving home. Technology dependence has increased the pace of life and removed much of the quiet space that once existed. As beneficial as technology is, it is also cited as a key cause of the increase in brokenness and addictive behaviors.

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<sup>74</sup> Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 14-30.

A second cultural category is globalization. This is not just a political reality where borders have been erased, but it is also an economic reality where new trading alliances have been established and the flow of goods between nations has dramatically increased. Economically, it is creating a more level global playing field, where low wages in one part of the world will increase and wages in other more affluent nations will slowly decrease. The effect of globalization on the average western citizen is that dual incomes are often required to meet financial demands. This reduces time families spend together as priorities are given to work more than to family. A single day per week (Sunday) to shut down and relax is no longer a reality. With increasing work pressure and growing family demands, the pace of life and the pressure that goes with it has led to family fractures and is a key part to the increase in brokenness.

The third cultural category is a growing lack of trust in modern institutions and structures. Historically, trust in law enforcement, the legal system, government, the military, and even the church was normative. Widespread scandals, abuses of power, frequent cover-ups, and well documented lies, most frequently reported through various forms of media has eroded trust in these institutions and for many trust is non-existent.

The fourth category is the post-Christian—even anti-Christian—environment prevalent in much of the West. Prayer has been removed from schools, the Ten Commandments from public buildings, and the influence of the Judeo-Christian worldview has slowly eroded and been rejected. The emergence of a “new atheism” led by names like Dawkins and Hitchens is gaining traction.<sup>75</sup> “Christian America [is] fading into the background, and despite the culture war waged to counteract it, the shift [is]

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<sup>75</sup> Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christian: How a New Generation Is Restoring the Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 20.

irreversible.”<sup>76</sup> The church once a respected voices acknowledged by the culture, is not being listened to or respected any longer by the culture. “The church’s role as a vital force in society is increasingly in question.”<sup>77</sup>

The fifth category is pluralism. “Pluralism rather than Christianity now marks America’s public square.”<sup>78</sup> No longer does the Judeo-Christian worldview act as the umpire for moral choices. Truth is often relative and based on experience, and tolerance of another’s “truth” is a must. Spirituality is the new buzzword versus reference to a single religion and a growing number of people are eating from the smorgasbord of spirituality with a little bit of many religions.

The sixth category is a change in the definition of marriage and the broadening scope of acceptable sexuality. The legalization of same sex marriage, the abandonment of what were once held moral sexual standards and with widespread public support for the LGBTQ community has created a new sexual landscape, has redefined marriage, and has changed family structure with increased co-habitation.

The final category is the increase in brokenness and addiction already noted in this research.

How can the church engage with this culture? Historically, the church has adopted two extremes when it comes to interacting with culture: either reflecting the culture or rejecting and running from it. Gabe Lyons, in *The Next Christian*, describes these as

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>77</sup> McNeal, *Kingdom Come*, xvii.

<sup>78</sup> Lyons, *The Next Christian*, 21.

separatists and blenders.<sup>79</sup> Separatists retreat into the church and create their own Christian subculture. They have Christian schools, Christian radio and television, Christian music and movies. “The motivation for retreating and separating from the broader culture can be attributed to a longing for purity, integrity, and holiness in life. But by default, their choice to live outside the typical rhythms of culture make them seem awkward, disconnected and judgmental towards others.”<sup>80</sup> Not only do separatists retreat from the culture, but they also attack the culture through social media, Christian television and radio, blogs, and books. Many of these attacks on culture are not said with grace, with talk that is seasoned with salt. “Many of these ‘cultural warriors’ are sincere and well intentioned, but they simply don’t know how to promote the ideals of their faith in the public square. Yet they are often unaware of how their tactics are perceived.”<sup>81</sup> Not only do separatists protect themselves from the culture; their mindset inhibits the culture from connecting or engaging with them. “The Evangelical world is not only difficult for outsiders to understand (consider the caricatures that abound) but also nearly impossible for them to penetrate.”<sup>82</sup>

The blenders, on the other hand, are Christians, churches, and denominations that attempt to blend into the culture. They resemble or reflect the culture in everything they do. They modify and adjust their beliefs, practices, and theology in order to be accepted by the culture. “This group best reflects the next generation’s values. Their lives mirror

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>82</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 87.

much of what everyone else is doing with little delineation between how they behave or what they believe.”<sup>83</sup> Blenders traditionally focus on the “social gospel” and instead of taking the good news of Jesus to the culture they take good works through the operating of poverty alleviation charities, soup kitchens, AA groups, and other philanthropic endeavours. “What is missing is the compelling narrative of the gospel from which all their good deeds emanate.”<sup>84</sup>

Is either of these strategies for interaction or engagement working? The simple answer is no. The collective impact of the Christian community on the nature and direction of the culture itself is negligible.<sup>85</sup> Is there another way to engage the culture and make a difference to the increasing brokenness and addictive nature of it? Before discussing a new option for interacting with this culture, new research on the causes and cures for addiction need to be explored.

### **New Research into Causes and Cures of Addiction**

In the ground-breaking book *Chasing the Scream*, Johann Hari continues to ponder the question he has spent years asking: “What is the cause of addiction?” He had been given the traditional explanations that are still part of mainstream addiction therapy—moral failing, disease, genetics.<sup>86</sup> Working with and being around addicts most of his life, he wasn’t satisfied with those answers and went on a quest to find the true

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<sup>83</sup> Lyons, *The Next Christian*, 40.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 48

<sup>86</sup> Johann Hari, *Chasing the Scream: First and Last Days on the War on Drugs* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015), 160.

causes of addiction and brokenness. In his research, he discovered a small group of Canadian scientists who had found new answers to this question.

Scientific research investigating the causes of addiction had traditionally used an experiment where they placed a rat in a cage with unlimited quantities of cocaine. Nine out of ten rats would become addicted and eventually kill themselves.<sup>87</sup> The conclusions were that addiction is the result of repeated exposure to very powerful chemicals or behaviors.<sup>88</sup>

Dr. Gabor Mate, after working with addicts in a more relational and less diagnostic environment, encountered patterns in those who were addicts that seemed to contradict the conventional conclusion about the causes of addictive behavior. In his research, Dr. Mate pored over thousands of studies and noticed a detail that had gone undetected in previous research. Thousands of people daily are given powerful opiates legally to deal with pain after severe accidents and surgery—many of the same opiates used by “street addicts.” If exposure led to a hijacked brain, these hospital patients should, at the end of treatment, be addicts. But they weren’t.<sup>89</sup> The Canadian Journal of Medicine reported that there was no significant risk of addiction from opiate exposure in hospitals, a common finding to related studies.<sup>90</sup> If exposure to substances led to the hijacking of the brain and long-term addiction, what about behavioral addictions like gambling, food, pornography, shopping, etc.? Dr. Mate concludes, “No substance is

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

addictive. It is always a combination of a potentially addictive substance or behavior and a susceptible individual.”<sup>91</sup>

Dr. Mate researched the affects of childhood trauma on addictive behaviors, looking at the ten most common traumas affecting children. His research led him to conclude that children experiencing more than two of these traumas were much more likely to grow up as an addicted adult than those who didn’t experience childhood trauma.<sup>92</sup>

He observed that children raised in disengaged, unattached, and cruel homes were more likely to become those with addiction and less able to form loving relationships than children who had loving and supportive families.<sup>93</sup> He concludes, “problem drug use [and other addictive behaviors] was a symptom, not a cause, of personal and social maladjustment.”<sup>94</sup>

The causes of addiction are not a hijacked brain, a disease, moral choices, an addictive personality, or a genetic condition. They are symptoms of environments people are exposed to, especially during their formational years. If a mental health condition is part of the causative reasons for the addiction, this would fall outside of this research. However, recent research has linked some mental illness to negative environmental and trauma based factors. A study examined children living in violent, low-income

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 167.

neighborhoods and documented an unexpectedly strong link between abuse, trauma and neglect and the children's mental and physical health.<sup>95</sup>

While Dr. Mate was discovering a cause for addiction related to traumatic childhood environments, a Canadian doctor, Bruce Alexander, was close to finding what might be a cure. Like Dr. Mate, he concluded that childhood trauma was a cause of addiction. But he also was curious about something related to the rats in the cage with cocaine experiment. He performed his own experiment and built two rat cages. One followed the original experiment—one rat in a cage with unlimited supply of opiates. The second cage he nicknamed “Rat Park.” In it he placed multiple rats and every pleasure a rat could want. What his team discovered was that the rats in the basic, isolated cage consumed on average 25 milligrams of morphine per day while the rats in “Rat Park” consumed less than five milligrams per day combined.<sup>96</sup>

They discovered that environments shape addictive compulsion, but they also might be part of the cure. The “junkie” rats from the isolated cages were then placed in “Rat Park.” While they experienced some slight withdrawal, they stopped using the morphine. Alexander concluded, “A happy social environment seemed to cure them of their addiction”<sup>97</sup> and that “addiction is not a disease; addiction is an adaptation.”

Could connecting broken people into a genuine, restoring, and healing community be a cure for addiction? Dr. Alexander's findings seem to affirm this. Dr. Alexander went

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<sup>95</sup> Erin Digatale, “Childhood Trauma Linked to Higher Rates of Mental Health Problems and Obesity,” Stanford Medicine, accessed August 9, 2017, <https://med.stanford.edu/news/all-news/2011/06/childhood-trauma-linked-to-higher-rates-of-mental-health-problems-and-obesity-says-stanfordpackard-psychiatrist.html>.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 179.

on to conclude that if you create a safe, happy environment, a community with healthy bonds and pleasurable things to do, you won't be vulnerable to addiction. Additionally, participation in genuine community could be the cure for addictive behaviors.<sup>98</sup>

Dr. Alexander concludes that one of the hidden causes of addictive behavior is isolation or aloneness. He believed the key to understanding the hidden cause of addiction “was found in this idea above all others—dislocation.”<sup>99</sup> He concludes, “Today’s flood of addiction is occurring because our hyper-individualistic, frantic, crisis-ridden society makes people feel socially or culturally isolated. Chronic isolation causes people to seek relief. They find temporary relief from addiction.”<sup>100</sup> Kent Dunnington supports this conclusion stating, “This alienation and loneliness endemic to modern individualism has been theorized and documented by intellectuals and social critics in several fields of inquiry.”<sup>101</sup> Has our culture’s hunt for affluence resulted in a decrease in the number of friends outside Facebook? The opposite of addiction is not sobriety, but genuine community, which is dramatically lacking in our current culture of loneliness.

In addition to childhood trauma, formative environments, and loneliness as causes of addictive behaviors, Dr. Alexander also notes a further cause of addiction as “being cut off from meaning, the inability to find true meaning and purpose. Human beings only become addicted when they cannot find anything better to live for and when they desperately need to fill the emptiness that threatens to destroy them.”<sup>102</sup> Our culture has

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>101</sup> Kent Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue*, 118.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 186.

turned to objects to find meaning and purpose, identity and happiness, which offer a slim satisfaction but a deeper emptiness. According to Sean Desmond Healy, “modern people, because of the tyranny of possibilities, lack a sense of purpose and drift around in a state of psychic doldrums, waiting for the wind to come up to give them propulsion toward a destination that they themselves cannot identify.”<sup>103</sup> The lack of identity and purpose play a significant role in the increase in our culture’s brokenness.

There are five core questions that every human being asks whether they have a relationship with God or not. The question of origin—how did it all get started; the question of destiny—what happens after I die; the question of hope—can tomorrow be better than today; the question of meaning and purpose—why am I here; and the question of community—where do I belong. According to Dr. Alexander’s conclusions, our answers to these questions may not only lead to addictive behaviors but might also be part of the cure.

Dr. Mate and Dr. Alexander were not alone in their search for a different cause of addiction. Maia Szalavitz, after studying the causes of addiction, concludes that addiction is not a sin or a choice, nor is it a chronic, progressive brain disease. Addiction is a developmental disorder—a problem involving timing and learning.<sup>104</sup> Addiction involves difficulties in connecting with others. Addictive behavior is often a search for safety rather than an attempt to rebel or selfishly turn inward. Szalavitz writes,

Addiction is not created by exposure to drugs nor is it the inevitable outcome of having a certain personality type or genetic background, although these factors do play a role. Instead addiction is a learned relationship between timing and patterns

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<sup>103</sup> Sean Desmond Healy, *Boredom, Self and Culture* (London, UK: Associated University Presses, 1984), 74.

<sup>104</sup> Maia Szalavitz, *Unbroken Brain: A Revolutionary New Way of Understanding Addiction* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2016), 14.

of exposure to substances and other potentially addictive experiences and a person's predisposition, cultural and physical environments and social and emotional needs.<sup>105</sup>

Szalavitz is affirming the conclusions of Drs. Mate and Alexander by noting that addiction is learned and developed, that it is the by-product of formative relationships and environments, that it has something to do with the relational connections we make, and yet it also has something to do with one's personal emotional makeup.

Szalavitz views addiction as “a coping style that becomes maladaptive when behavior persists despite ongoing negative consequences.”<sup>106</sup> Addiction is about trying to cope with our environments and formative relationships. It is about finding relief from the emotional baggage that we carry from the key environments we grew up in and from the key people who influenced us during those years when it would have the greatest impact.

There are two key concepts that Szalavitz details in *Unbroken Brain* that add to what Drs. Mate and Alexander have concluded. The first is that of personal identity. It is our identity—who we think we are—that helps or hinders our ability to cope with our environments, stressors, and addictive temptations. “Childhood ideas of oneself shape later self-concepts that can either increase or decrease resilience.”<sup>107</sup> Our identity is a key factor in both developing an addictive behavior and in dealing with it. So many addicts turn to places like AA because at least they can find some identity in their addiction. The second concept Szalavitz details fits into Alexander's idea of a safe, healthy, and connecting community being needed for healing—acceptance. “The particular symptoms

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 59.

that people use drugs to cope with may be infinitely varied, but the desire to feel accepted and secure when you typically feel alienated, unloved, anxious and in danger is common.”<sup>108</sup>

To summarize Mate, Alexander and Szalavitz, the key components to providing healing and freedom from addictive behaviors and brokenness are:

- Creating environments that are safe, transparent, accepting, and connecting, where healing bonds can be developed.
- Creating environments where meaning, purpose, and hope can be discovered.
- Creating communities that help establish a healthy personal identity, worth, and value.
- Creating environments and opportunities where the effects of childhood trauma can be healed.

These findings conclude that the opposite of addiction is not sobriety, but human connection in a safe and nurturing community.

What Mate, Alexander and Szalavitz didn't find in their research was the impact that the spirituality had on healing addictions and brokenness. Yet, there is a wide body of research that has affirmed the spiritual as a critical component of recovery. AA (Alcoholics Anonymous), which is considered a spiritually based program, has a 34% sobriety rate. AA yields total abstinence rates 10% higher than Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or Motivational Enhancement Therapy.<sup>109</sup> Research has found that those who not only embrace spiritual principles but demonstrate these beliefs via spiritual practices

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>109</sup> William R. Miller, Alyssa Forcehines, Mary O'Leary, and Marnie LaNoue, "Spiritual Direction in Addiction Treatment," *Journal of Substance Abuse* 35 (2008): 434-442, 434.

have a higher incidence of healing. Incorporating spiritual practices in the treatment process could enhance recovery. The continued success of twelve-step programs and research regarding the positive effects spirituality has on health and well being indicate that a more spirit-centered approach could enhance recovery from substance abuse and other addictions and reduce the incidence of relapse.<sup>110</sup> A growing body of evidence supports the claim that spirituality and religious practices can help someone start and maintain their recovery journey and that spiritual factors can play a significant role in recovery. Is our culture's preoccupation with moving God to the margins of society and the slow erosion and abandoning of our Judeo-Christian worldview one of the causes of the increase in addiction and brokenness? If spirituality is a key component to a cure, then is it right to assume a lack of spirituality can create conditions that lead to addictions and brokenness? There seems to be a strong correlation between the stats of increasing addiction and the slow erosion of faith and spirituality.

### **The Restoration-Focused Church (RFC)**

If these are the causes and possible cures for addiction and brokenness, the church is perfectly poised to be a place for restoration and healing. But it would take a complete overhaul of the way most churches currently function. This research proposes a new way of "being" the church, enabling it to respond to the radical changes in our culture and meet the needs of an increasingly broken and addictive culture. The church can become this place of restoration, but not by simply "tweaking" the current mindset and practices of the church or by adding another program to an already-long line up. It requires a

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<sup>110</sup> T.M. Carter, "The Effects of Spiritual Practices on Recovery from Substance Abuse," *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health* 5 (1998): 409-412, 411.

completely new way of thinking about the church, the gospel, repentance, discipleship, and small group ministries. It will require a complete transformation of mindset and methodology. An RFC is more than referring people to therapeutic solutions or the newest AA group, although that might be part of what they do. Rather, they see themselves as a place of restoration. The RFC can reverse the church's cultural credibility and become a trusted place for healing and recovery. Gabe Lyons in *The Next Christian* claims,

Restorers exhibit the mind-set, humility and commitment that seem destined to rejuvenate the momentum of faith. They have a particular way of thinking, being and doing that is radically different from previous generations. Telling others about Jesus is important, but conversion isn't their only motive. Their mission is to infuse the world with beauty, grace, justice and love.<sup>111</sup>

RFC is completely focused on restoration. According to the Webster Revised Unabridged Dictionary, restoration is defined as, "to bring back to its former state; to bring back from a state of ruin, decay, disease of the like. To repair, renew, recover."<sup>112</sup> The biblical meaning of the word is, "To receive back more than has been lost to the point where the final state is greater than the original condition."<sup>113</sup> This research defines restoration as "bringing healing and recovery to those struggling with addictions and brokenness (including spiritual brokenness) in a safe, spiritually maturing community of wounded healers." Restoration includes practical assistance to those struggling with issues of poverty and dealing with social justice issues. "Restorers envision the world as it was meant to be and they work toward that vision. They recognize that the world will

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<sup>111</sup> Lyons, *The Next Christian*, 47.

<sup>112</sup> Restore, Bible Hub Online Bible Study Suite, accessed August 23, 2017, <http://biblehub.com/topical/r/restore.htm>.

<sup>113</sup> What Is the Meaning of the Biblical Word Restore, Reference.com, accessed August 23, 2017, <https://www.reference.com/world-view/biblical-meaning-word-restoration-436ed0eb2e3b3d0c#>

not be completely healed until Christ's return, but they believe that the process begins now as we partner with God."<sup>114</sup>

Jesus began his ministry by declaring his mission statement, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18) Jesus is quoting Isaiah 61, which adds, "He sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to comfort all who mourn and provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise." (Isaiah 61:1-3) Isaiah goes on to describe the recipients of this healing and restoration: "They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. ... [You will be] priests of the Lord and you will be named ministers of God." (Isaiah 61:4). Isaiah is describing a community that is restored and has the focus of restoring others. Jesus said to his disciples in John 20:21, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." The overall ministry of Jesus was about redemption and restoration—restoring all that was broken by the fall. "Jesus demonstrated God's mission during his life here on earth. He lived the mission of the Kingdom, bring restoration and redemption everywhere he went in all areas of life."<sup>115</sup> The message of Jesus fits the definition of restoration. Dale Ryan of

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<sup>114</sup> Lyons, *The Next Christian*, 47.

<sup>115</sup> McNeal, *Kingdom Come*, 43.

Fuller Theological Seminary believes, “Restoration and Recovery should be the mandate of the church.”<sup>116</sup>

Reggie McNeal, in *Kingdom Come* states,

Jesus talked a lot about how we treat one another, especially when it comes to the poor and disadvantaged. He called us (the church) to a life of meeting the needs of others and alleviating the suffering and pain that is naturally part of living in a broken world. To drive home his point, Jesus healed people of disease, dysfunction, and disfigurement to show us the Kingdom in action and demonstrate God’s intention to redeem human existence in every dimension—physical, emotional and spiritual.<sup>117</sup>

He goes on to say, “God’s plan and purpose in the world are always cutting edge because the Kingdom is all about bringing healing to the afflicted, binding up the broken-hearted, releasing people from captivity and redeeming everything diminished by sin.”<sup>118</sup> James Davison Hunter, in *To Change the World*, refers to the kingdom mindset as, “A theology of faithful presence which is the theology of engagement in and with the world around the church.”<sup>119</sup> A restoration mindset is understanding the condition and the realities of the culture, being moved by the heart of Jesus, and being willing to do whatever it takes to bring restoration, as defined, to the culture.

The RFC also should theologically understand Jesus’ teaching on and the healing of the demonic and be willing to offer this kind of healing through deliverance or healing prayer ministry. Some forms of brokenness are the result of demonic forces in a person’s life and choices made that have allowed these forces to find a foothold. A church

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<sup>116</sup> Dale Ryan and Juanita Ryan, *Rooted in God’s Love* (Brea, CA: Christian Recovery International, 2005), 13.

<sup>117</sup> McNeal, *Kingdom Come*, xiv.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>119</sup> James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World*, 243.

focused on restoration should recognize this reality and not out of fear refrain from making this part of the restoration journey. However, this needs to be dealt with caution and sensitivity and must be biblically grounded in practice.

To become an RFC requires the church to be “restored” to the original mission of Jesus. “Restoration is the bringing back of the church to Jesus Christ and the original biblical pattern intended by him for his church that he is building.”<sup>120</sup>

There will be critics of the RFC. Some criticism is over the word recovery itself. One critic writes, “Recovery means a return to a normal state of health, mind and strength and we as Christians are supposed to be reborn not return to the people we used to be.”<sup>121</sup> Yet authors Teresa McBean and Elizabeth Swanson write, “Recovery is at the heart of everything Jesus came to do. It is the heart of the gospel. It is not a new ministry model but rather an attempt to replicate the ministry Jesus focused on.”<sup>122</sup>

Some call recovery nothing more than pop psychology and insist it should never mix with theology. John McArthur writes, “Christian psychology is an attempt to harmonize two inherently contradictory systems of thought. Modern psychology and the Bible cannot be blended together without serious compromise to or utter abandonment of the principles of scriptural sufficiency.”<sup>123</sup> Yet John Wesley, an early user of the term

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<sup>120</sup> R. Wayne Wilson, “What Does Restoration Mean to Christians in America,” October 2008, accessed August 14, 2017, <http://jesusandtheword.blogspot.com/2008/10/what-does-restoration-mean-to.html>.

<sup>121</sup> Mark Shaw, “Is Celebrate Recovery a Biblical Program?” Truth in Love Ministries Blog, April 14, 2011, accessed December 1, 2015, <http://www.histruthinlove.com/is-celebrate-recovery-a-biblical-program>.

<sup>122</sup> Elizabeth Swanson and Teresa McBean, *Bridges to Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 24.

<sup>123</sup> John MacArthur, “Insufficient Help,” Grace to You Blog, September 10, 2014, accessed December 1, 2015, [www.gty.org/blog/8140910/insufficient-help-part-2](http://www.gty.org/blog/8140910/insufficient-help-part-2).

psychotherapy, knew it meant the “healing of the soul,” and he and Jonathan Edwards believed that this was the central task of spirituality, and theologians needed to take seriously the findings of modern psychology in order to do their ministry effectively.<sup>124</sup> Critics wonder if recovery and restoration can be a source of renewal within the church without the church sacrificing its theology, identity, and integrity.

The RFC will have to satisfy all of the aspects that bring healing and freedom from addictions summarized by Mate, Alexander, and Szalavitz. They will have to be environments that are safe, transparent, and connecting—where healthy bonds can form. They will have to help broken people find meaning, purpose, and identity. They will have to be places where traumas and past wounds can be healed. As well, they will have to provide the spiritual aspects of healing.

To satisfy these components for restoration requires a radical new approach for the church. Everything they do must flow through the mandate and mission of restoration. It starts with members of the RFC understanding and being real about their own brokenness and addiction, even if their issues aren’t as easily recognizable as a heroin addict, or someone struggling with an eating disorder or a pornography addiction.

A restoration focus moves the church from an inward “it is all about us” focus to an outward focus, which requires going where the needs are. This is not about creating another “attractional” model of church, simply acting like a hospital where broken and addicted people come to find healing, but it is about taking the healing to the community. Members of the RFC are willing to show up in some of the darkest places where addictions and brokenness reside. This focus is fuelled by their love for Jesus and

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<sup>124</sup> Glenn Chesnut, *Changed by Grace: V.C. Kitchen, The Oxford Group and AA* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2006), 17-18.

because they have fully experienced the grace he has extended to them. They are motivated by the love of God and His powerful ability to restore.

“Restorers can’t help themselves; they are intoxicated with the idea that God’s love extends to all people. They believe this kind of love is expressed best in tangible, physical acts of goodness. They show up, don’t run from the areas that might typically offend the separatist Christians—they run to them. They seek out brokenness and offer hope.”<sup>125</sup>

They choose to get their hands dirty, to meet the needs of those others might call outcasts and are willing to go to places others would rather avoid. They engage with the culture without being negatively influenced by the culture.

Engaging instead of withdrawing requires restorers to be deeply rooted in their faith and genuinely connected in their community. Spiritual disciplines and accountability play a pivotal role in this grounding. Restorers are aware that “operating in the center of the world requires a deep anchoring in Christ”<sup>126</sup> and spiritual disciplines provide a way of holding on to their convictions and values.

Members of the RFC see the world through the lens of grace. “Come as you are” will be their mantra. They are fully aware that broken and addicted people will come with all sorts of habits and lifestyle choices. They have no expectations that those who are broken or addicted will adhere to their standards. They have a grace first mentality. It is critical to extend complete grace and unconditional acceptance of broken and addicted people. Grace should be more than a theological concept; it should be abundant and unconditional in an RFC.

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<sup>125</sup> Lyons, *The Next Christian*, 73.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

The extending of grace and unconditional acceptance can be messy at times. But Szalavitz's findings regard unconditional acceptance as one of the key factors to recovery. The fear that acceptance will deliver a message of affirmation can get in the way. But acceptance doesn't mean affirmation and the RFC knows how to distinguish between the two. When dealing with controversial moral topics and choices, the RFC learns to ask questions first, abstaining from immediately sharing their biblical values and theological positions. They learn to "stay in the conversation" as long as they can. Traditionally in the church, believing the right things was a prerequisite to belonging to community. In the RFC, this must be reversed—belonging in a genuine, grace-filled community will lead to believing the right things. With grace and unconditional acceptance being paramount, the RFC is a place of vulnerability and transparency, starting with appropriate vulnerability and transparency of the leaders in public settings. "Recovery leaders insist that an authentic culture is a pre-requisite for attracting people from inside and outside the walls of the church, and it's essential for seeing restoration and recovery ministries to take off and thrive. This culture must be lived and demonstrated from the highest levels of the organization."<sup>127</sup>

The RFC is knowledgeable about the causes of addiction and refuses to buy into the disease model, the moral choice model, the personality disorders model, or any kind of genetic condition. They understand the roots of brokenness and addiction. It is a place that understands relapse can and will happen—including in the lives of leaders. They are not ignorant of the issues, or the complexity or magnitude of addiction and brokenness.

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<sup>127</sup> Andy Williams, "The Best of Both Worlds: Recovery Ministries Combining and Mission to Reach Home and Abroad," Leadership Network, 2009, [http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RM-2009-AUG-Best\\_of\\_Both\\_Worlds-Williams.pdf](http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RM-2009-AUG-Best_of_Both_Worlds-Williams.pdf), 5.

The RFC doesn't continue to point out people's sinful behavior and brokenness in an attempt to shame them into recovery. Instead, they paint a picture of what can be. They focus on what is possible, what complete recovery can look like. "Churches can help people with addictions stay in recovery by encouraging them to seek the 'land of milk and honey' that will not disappoint them."<sup>128</sup>

The RFC is not only helping broken and addicted followers of Jesus, but its larger mandate is to help broken and addicted people who are far from God into a personal relationship with Jesus. Through the merging of the classic twelve steps of recovery and traditional discipleship, "this can introduce some people to the first personal relationship with God they have ever had and bring them into contact with people who value their experience and offer them hope to a fuller life."<sup>129</sup> The RFC believes that there is no restoration without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as the Higher Power. The twelve steps of recovery alone will produce only behavioral management of the addiction and will not lead to lifelong restoration.

At the RFC, Sunday morning worship gatherings have elements and language of recovery laced through them, from the song choice to the overall language and topics of the messages. The fear of this for so many church leaders is, "If only the message of recovery is proclaimed, we've missed a good chunk of vital biblical and church tradition."<sup>130</sup> Yet, if the message of Jesus was tied directly to his mission, and his mission was focused on restoration, does it not make sense for the church's teaching topics to

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<sup>128</sup> Jonathan Benz, *The Recovery-Minded Church: Loving and Ministering to People with Addictions* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2016), 99.

<sup>129</sup> Richard Reid-King, "Twelve Steps to the Church," *The Christian Century* (June 12-19, 1991): 613-614.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 614.

focus on its mission of restoration? This is something the RFC will continually wrestle with. Worship is a critical part of finding restoration and wholeness. Kent Dunnington contends that “addiction can be a counterfeit form of worship.”<sup>131</sup> Worship includes finding wholeness and expressing it back to God. Swiss psychologist Carl Jung writes, “Craving for alcohol was the equivalent, on a low level, of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness; expressed in medieval language: the union with God.”<sup>132</sup> The idea of the union with God is at the heart of worship. William Moyers, in *Broken*, writes, “Addictive desires have more to do with the soul than the brain. They illuminate the yearning for wholeness, for perfection, for making everything feel good and right again. They’re about the deepest human hunger and thirst to experience rapture, joy, heaven.”<sup>133</sup> The RFC understands the connection between healing, recovery, and worship and focuses on genuine, engaging, and experiential worship both in communal and individual connections with God.

There is continued debate within different segments of the church about what a church should be—attractional or missional. The RFC recognizes that a focus on restoration is both.

Churches that are leading the way in healing ministries are not only building multi-level systems and staffs that put the broken and battered souls of their churches back together. Those same churches are moving out with renewed leaders to minister recovery principles and practices in prisons, halfway houses,

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<sup>131</sup> Kent Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue*, 141.

<sup>132</sup> Quoted in Francis Seeburger, *Addiction and Responsibility: An Inquiry into the Addicted Mind* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 105.

<sup>133</sup> William Moyer, *Broken: My Story of Addiction and Redemption* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 207.

drug and family courts, homes for recovering prostitutes and some of the most devastated countries in the world.<sup>134</sup>

This is the description and essence of the RFC. Will it have an impact on our current broken and addicted culture? Christianity grew by more than 40 percent in each decade during the first three centuries after Christ.<sup>135</sup> Rodney Stark, in *The Rise of Christianity*, describes the impact of the church on the culture:

Christianity revitalized life in Greco-Roman cities by providing new norms and new kinds of social relationships able to cope with urgent urban problems. To cities filled with the homeless and impoverished, Christianity offered charity as well as hope. To cities filled with newcomers and strangers, Christianity offered an immediate basis for attachments. To cities filled with orphans and widows, Christianity provided a new and expanded sense of family. To cities torn by violent ethnic strife, Christianity offered a new basis for social solidarity. And to cities faced with epidemics, fires, and earthquakes, Christianity offered effective nursing services.<sup>136</sup>

The early followers of Jesus followed Jesus' mission of restoration and cultural engagement, and the impact rippled across three centuries. These earliest followers of Jesus looked at where the culture was broken and in need of recovery and they made it their mission to meet the needs of their culture with significant ramifications.

### **The Gospel of Restoration**

One the barriers to embracing the ministry of restoration as a mandate for the church, is a limited understanding of the gospel. Traditionally, the gospel message has been boiled down to a simple formula—man is a sinner, Christ is the Savior, accept Christ as that Savior and you will have eternal life. Limiting the gospel influences the

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<sup>134</sup> Andy Williams, "The Best of Both Worlds: Recovery Ministries Combining and Mission to Reach Home and Abroad," Leadership Network, 2009, [http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RM-2009-AUG-Best\\_of\\_Both\\_Worlds-Williams.pdf](http://leadnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RM-2009-AUG-Best_of_Both_Worlds-Williams.pdf), 2.

<sup>135</sup> Lyons, *The Next Christian*, 194.

<sup>136</sup> Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 1997), 161.

mission and discipleship of the church. Matt Chandler in *The Explicit Gospel* outlines the gospel as a complete story of “creation, fall, reconciliation and consummation.”<sup>137</sup> The limited gospel focuses primarily on the Fall and a very narrow definition of reconciliation. Our story of the gospel must include creation. “Creation shows us what ought to be. Our fascination with beauty, hunger for relationships, bent toward goodness and justice and longing for a transcendent God are all clues about our origin.”<sup>138</sup> To begin the story of the gospel at the Fall is to focus on the negative, the brokenness, the despair. It pushes aside the picture of what can be and what will one day be—a return to Eden. The gospel of restoration is a reminder that God longs to restore his image in us and to free us to pursue what it ultimately means to be image-bearers of God.

Chandler describes reconciliation using the image of three concentric circles. He writes, “We are reconciled to God in Christ, then to one another in covenant community, third to what God is doing in the renewal of all creation.”<sup>139</sup> He adds further clarity when he writes, “God’s plan of redemption is gigantic. The vision he has for the world then is not destruction, as some Christians see, but redemption, restoration.”<sup>140</sup> A key part of Chandler’s view of the gospel is that it is a continuous story from creation in Genesis to its culmination in Revelation and it includes both the Fall and reconciliation. Reconciliation is first, us connecting in a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ and then with one another in genuine community.

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<sup>137</sup> Matt Chandler, *The Explicit Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 17.

<sup>138</sup> Lyons, *The Next Christian*, 52.

<sup>139</sup> Chandler, *The Explicit Gospel*, 144.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

But reconciliation also includes renewal and restoration not mentioned in the limited gospel. The entire gospel is the complete work of God through his grace, but where the church acts as God's "co-laborers" is in the area of restoration. Reconciliation or redemption is not the end goal of the work of God in our lives, but it is an opportunity given to the church to be part of God's restorative work in others and us. The reason we find our own reconciliation and restoration is not for us alone, but for others as well. That is part of the purpose of the church. "We stand as part of God's restoring of all things, and we are brought into missional witness to God's restorative gospel, the body of Christ."<sup>141</sup> If we limit the gospel to salvation and consummation, Chandler writes, "It leads us to withdraw from the world and from engaging in God's mission."<sup>142</sup> When our theology and methodology is founded on a limited gospel, we stop seeing the culture through the eyes of grace and "we no longer buy into God's being for the least of these, we don't hear him calling us to engage in the world around us in its pain and injustice."<sup>143</sup> A lack of focus on the gospel of restoration creates churches that are insular to the world. Conversely, the RFC understands the critical part restoration plays in the entire gospel story. To some, including Chandler, there is a fear of focusing so solely on the gospel of restoration that we get immersed in nothing but the social gospel.<sup>144</sup> However, this becomes reality only when the gospel is limited to restoration and not focused on the entire gospel story—creation, fall, reconciliation, restoration, and culmination.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 190.

Not only has the church gravitated traditionally to a limited gospel and ignored restoration and renewal but it has led to an individual focused, self-centered gospel. Most Christ-followers read the Bible through an individualistic lens, asking the question, “What does this say to me and how will I apply it to my life?” “Most of the letters in the New Testament were clearly intended to be read to the congregation and were addressed to congregations and congregational leaders. The reading and hearing of the work in churches followed the patterns of the synagogues, which the synagogue Ruler would take out their “Bible” – a very rare and precious scroll - and read it aloud to the Jewish “congregation.”<sup>145</sup> The various authors of the Bible had an intended audience, knowing it would be read aloud and applied communally first and then personally second. When we embrace the entire gospel with restoration as a key part of the God’s good news and the church follows the mandate to be restorers, it will motivate the church to re-evaluate its mission and re-orient its ministries around the entire gospel—especially restoration, which is our partnership with God to renew his world until culmination becomes a reality. Focusing on the full gospel, with restoration at its core, will turn the church’s focus from inward to outward, from individualistic Christianity to the community inside and outside the church, and it will give genuine Christ-followers a cause worth living for. “Embracing restoration as part of God’s story sets off a chain reaction that can revitalize our faith in the post Christian century.”<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> James Nored, “Is the Bible Intended to Be Read Individually Or in Community?” Missional Outreach Network, September 2, 2014, accessed October 19, 2017, <http://www.missionaloutreachnetwork.com/profiles/blogs/is-the-bible-really-intended-to-be-read-individually-or-in-community>.

<sup>146</sup> Lyons, *The Next Christian*, 67.

### A New Understanding of Repentance

Traditional Christian theology tends to give more authority to Greek terms and concepts than to the corresponding Hebrew, and most theologians more heavily rely on Greek translations of words that are used both in the Old and New Testament. The word repentance in Greek is “metanoia,” which translates to “changing your thinking,” although it can go beyond the cognitive to access the realm of the heart.<sup>147</sup> “Metanoia” implies that a changed mind affects the choices that are made. It has two usual senses—a change of mind, and regret and remorse.<sup>148</sup>

Christian theology has tended to think of repentance as a change of mind or a change of direction. The danger of understanding repentance in this way is that it can lead to an attempt to cognitively change a behavior, habit, or addiction but prevent an inner restoration or transformation of what led to this behavior.

The Hebrew word has a much richer connotation. The Hebrew word for repentance is “teshuvah,” and it involves “nacham,” associated with the emotion of regret or remorse, and “shuv,” which is about returning.<sup>149</sup> “Shuv” means to return or to turn back to, to restore, refresh and repair, to be brought back to refresh.<sup>150</sup> Jewish thinking about repentance is turning away from evil and turning (returning back) to God. The

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<sup>147</sup> “Thoughts on Repentance,” Hebrew for Christians, accessed July 14, 2016, [http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Fall\\_Holidays/Elul/Teshuvah/teshuvah.html](http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Fall_Holidays/Elul/Teshuvah/teshuvah.html)

<sup>148</sup> Bible Study Tools, s.v. “Repentance,” accessed July 14, 2016, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/repentance>.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Blue Letter Bible, s.v. “Shuwb,” accessed July 14, 2016, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?t=kjv&strongs=h7725>.

action of turning back to God has the power to redirect the destiny and direction of a person's life. It affects the whole life of the soul.<sup>151</sup>

Repentance implies according to Hebrew doctrine 1) all transgressions and sins are natural and inevitable—they are consequences of straying from God, 2) it is man's destiny and duty to be with God as God is with him and 3) to find restoration from sin is about breaking away from it and turning toward God whose loving kindness is ever extended.<sup>152</sup>

Rabbinical literature adds, "Great is repentance, it brings healing to the world; it reaches to the throne of God." (Hos.xiv.2, 5)<sup>153</sup> Confession of sin is required and frequently illustrated in passages referring to repentance in a Hebrew context.<sup>154</sup> The RFC understands that repentance is more than a cognitive changing of the mind or changing direction; it is a return from their brokenness and addiction and a return to their relationship with God. They understand repentance is an action of restoration and renewal.

Is returning to God the beginning of enjoying the shalom of God? Prior to the Fall, Adam and Eve experienced the shalom of God. Cornelius Plantinga describes shalom as "universal flourishing, wholeness and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural seeds are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens the door and welcomes the

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<sup>151</sup> "Thoughts on Repentance," Hebrew for Christians, accessed July 14, 2016, [http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Fall\\_Holidays/Elul/Teshuvah/teshuvah.html](http://www.hebrew4christians.com/Holidays/Fall_Holidays/Elul/Teshuvah/teshuvah.html).

<sup>152</sup> Kaufman Kohler and Max Schlesinger, "Repentance," Jewish Encyclopedia, accessed July 14, 2016, <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12680-repentance>.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Bible Study Tools, s.v. "Repentance," accessed July 14, 2016, <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/repentance>.

creatures in whom he delights. Shalom in other words, is the way things ought to be.”<sup>155</sup> Plantinga describes shalom using the word “wholeness.” If recovery and restoration are about taking broken things and making them whole, then they are about making our way toward shalom. Sinful choices impede our ability to find shalom. Tim Keller writes, “Human beings are so integral to the fabric of things that when human beings turned from God the entire warp and woof of the world unraveled...we lost God’s shalom physically, spiritually, socially, psychologically, culturally.”<sup>156</sup> The RFC has this new understanding of repentance and that it is tightly tied to shalom and repentance becomes a key theological precept of the RFC.

People in community would be willing to do whatever it takes to bring that shalom to others who are addicted and broken. Shalom is experienced by focusing on repentance, returning to God, and finding renewal and restoration.

There needs to be a caution for the RFC regarding the issue of sin. There is a danger of using recovery and restoration language to entirely replace the language of sin. Kent Dunnington writes, “The tendency within the addiction-recovery movement to either insist on a clear demarcation of addiction from sin or to replace the language of sin completely with that of addiction seems unpromising from a Christian perspective.”<sup>157</sup> Yet organizations like AA continue to transition, to the point the concept of sin was removed from AA language because it was thought that it would become a barrier to its mission. The doctrine of sin reminds us that we all have a sin nature and our natural

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<sup>155</sup> Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not the Way It Is Supposed to Be: A Brevity of Sin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 10.

<sup>156</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 176.

<sup>157</sup> Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue*, 126.

orientation is away from God. Romans 3:23 says, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” In other words, because of our sin nature, we are all broken spiritually. If all of us are spiritually broken which can manifest itself in other areas of brokenness and our lives intersect the lives of other broken people in our world, this can’t help but lead us to experience our own brokenness to some degree.

One of the criticisms of the RFC is that there is no place for those who are not broken, which is a form of denial. All of us have some form of brokenness. The key is to hold to the doctrine of sin and the concepts of addiction and recovery simultaneously, finding ways to define and explain sin to a culture that doesn’t want or is unable to understand it. It will require the use of addiction and recovery language, but not in a way that minimizes the reality of sin in our lives. “The language of sin may accommodate the experience and discourse of addiction.”<sup>158</sup> We have to also understand that not all sin is addiction and some addiction is not sin. An example of this is that an addiction related to food or shopping might not necessarily be a sin but can still be addictive.

### **A New Way of Spiritual Formation**

The RFC will employ a new pathway of spiritual formation to help those addicted and broken find healing. This new pathway of spiritual formation will merge the best of traditional discipleship with the classic twelve steps. Where the twelve steps are weak, traditional discipleship is strong. Where traditional discipleship is weak, the twelve steps are strong. The combination of these two pathways of spiritual healing and formation could provide a holistic approach to spiritual growth, recovery, and renewal in the church.

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<sup>158</sup> Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue*, 134.

The twelve steps are weak in the areas of conversion, spiritual disciplines, and outreach or evangelism. Although there are three steps that deal with these areas (steps 3, 11 and 12), traditionally they have been a weak point and one of the focal areas of criticism. Some of the strongest criticisms levelled against the twelve steps are that the process of conversion is not part of the steps; the Holy Spirit is solely responsible for life change, not human efforts as the steps imply; the steps are “works righteousness,” putting an emphasis on personal responsibility; and there is no mention of God’s grace in any of the steps or corresponding literature.<sup>159</sup>

Step 3 reads, “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.” Although this is the step of surrender, it needs to be strengthened as a step of conversion through surrender. In the RFC, the complete gospel of creation, fall, redemption, restoration, and culmination must be clearly included in the teaching of this step. In the RFC, Jesus needs to be declared as the Higher Power. Although we don’t want to turn conversion into a transaction, as churches that follow a limited gospel do, we should ensure a conscious decision to seek forgiveness for the sins of our past, take steps of repentance toward God and his shalom, and turn our lives and will over to Jesus are integral in the new steps. What prevents so many from taking the final nine steps of recovery is that conversion is not part of this third step. The process of reconciliation needs to be a key part of the understanding of step three. Conversion, as defined by traditional discipleship, includes a belief in the person of Jesus, repentance, trust and assurance in the forgiveness of Christ because of his crucifixion, and devotion

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<sup>159</sup> Deborah J. Dewart, “Responses to the 12 Steps in a Christian Setting,” Christian Discernment, accessed December 1, 2015, <http://www.christiandiscernment.com/Christian%20Discernment/CD%20PDF/Book%20pdf/07%20%20Response%20to%2012%20Steps%20Christian%20Setting.pdf>.

to Christ.<sup>160</sup> Although step one is about admitting we have sinned and these choices have made our life unmanageable and step two implies that believing in God is the only way to be forgiven and healed, there is still a limited recovery if there is no focus on conversion in the steps. Bringing conversion as described in traditional discipleship into the steps makes the third step significantly stronger and addresses the criticisms. Included in the teaching of the third step, there also needs to be a clear understanding of the grace of God and how it applies to conversion—“we are saved by grace”—and a greater understanding of and emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit.

Step 11 states, “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God praying only for the knowledge of his will for us and the power to carry it out.” Although prayer and meditation are mentioned in this step, this is where the strength of spiritual disciplines as emphasized in traditional discipleship would be a critical addition. The importance of prayer emphasized in this step is both sharing requests and listening to have a greater sense of the desires and direction of God. The teaching of spiritual disciplines, especially reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on scripture, would bring strength to this step. Other disciplines like solitude, fasting, journaling and Sabbath keeping would also be welcome additions and would provide a greater conscious connection with God.

Step 12 explains, “Having had a spiritual awakening as the results of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all of our affairs.” Although this does echo evangelism, the step is not practiced that way. The key focus of this step is telling your story, but most of the stories are told in meetings of those

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<sup>160</sup> Luke Cawley, “What is Conversion?” Intersity Evangelism, January 31, 2013, accessed November 15, 2016, <http://evangelism.intersity.org/how/disciples/what-conversion>.

who are already following the steps. Taking the message or telling the story outside of these settings is limited. Traditional discipleship, with its focus and training on evangelism, is critical for this step. The preparation of the story in a simple deliverable message including how they became a follower of Jesus is an important inclusion in the teaching and practice of this step.

The key criticisms of traditional discipleship, mentioned previously, are that it doesn't encourage looking beneath the surface to examine the hidden areas of brokenness and the reasons for this brokenness. Traditional discipleship describes the power of God is required to move forward but spends little or no time dealing with how to truly break free from the past. In traditional discipleship, the methods to deal with sinful repetitive behaviors are strictly cognitive. They propose looking at the wrong behaviors, identifying the wrong beliefs behind them, understanding the right beliefs, and allowing those beliefs to play out in future choices. What would strengthen traditional discipleship is the use of steps four, five and six of the twelve-step program. Step four is all about doing a spiritual inventory, digging beneath the superficial aspects of a person's life and examine the deep resentments and regrets that have led to your brokenness. Step five is about confession—to God, ourselves, and at least one other person—the exact nature of our wrongs. This is where we share our inventory. This brings that hidden brokenness and the causes behind it out into the light where it can begin to be healed. Steps six and seven are about being willing and humbly asking God to remove our shortcomings. This is where the healing from our addictions and brokenness occurs. It is where we become aware of and honest about our brokenness and where we surrender it to the power of God for transformation.

Steps eight and nine are about making a list of all those who have been harmed because of addictive and broken behavior and then making amends to those who have been harmed whenever possible. These steps address rebuilding broken relationships, which, again, is not a primary focus of traditional discipleship and yet is a critical part to the process of restoration. Jesus said in Matthew 5:23-24, “If you are offering your gift at the altar (symbolic of our restoring our relationship with God) and there remember your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.” Too often traditional discipleship focuses on rebuilding our relationship with God but spends less time focusing on the rebuilding of human relationships.

Spiritual formation is a journey, and choosing to follow the steps merged with the best of traditional discipleship brings about transformation. The steps need to act as a framework for restoration because of their overall historical effectiveness. This is where criticisms could be levelled against this new pathway of spiritual formation. The main criticism is that the steps are not biblical and have no theological foundations. But author J. Keith Miller argues against these criticisms, stating,

As I was reading and working the twelve steps, I began to see that here in this “secular” program, a bunch of former drunks had taken some biblical principles, many of which the church has largely neglected or eliminated and had formed a spiritual way. This path not only brought me into a deeper and more realistic relationship with Jesus than I had ever known but has also turned out to be a way of calming and healing the driven compulsive life of intensity and fear that my Christian faith had not be able to touch.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> J. Keith Miller, *A Hunger for Healing*, xii.

Author Richard Rohr writes, “I am convinced that on the practical [read: ‘transformational’] level, the gospel message of Jesus and the twelve step message of Bill Wilson are largely the same message.”<sup>162</sup>

To address these criticisms, an examination of the history of AA is helpful in understanding the roots of the steps and to determine if there are theological foundations in these roots.

The Oxford Group was an evangelical Christian movement founded by Dr. Frank Buchman, a Lutheran pastor from Pennsylvania, in the 1920s. While on a spiritual retreat visiting a small chapel in Lakeland, England, Dr. Buchman had an experience that forever changed his life. As part of the experience Dr. Buchman:

- Caught a vision for the true meaning of the cross of Christ.
- Was convicted of his sin.
- Made an unreserved surrender of his life to Jesus Christ.
- Made a frank confession of all he had done wrong, vowing to make restitution to all those he had hurt.
- Witnessed the renewing power of Christ for the first time in his life.<sup>163</sup>

This vision turned into a series of life-changing principles evident in the Oxford Group movement. Buchman’s passion to make a difference on the university campuses around the world led to the creation of the Oxford Group. The Group had a worldwide influence, including places such as Asia, Canada, Great Britain, Europe and the United

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<sup>162</sup> Richard Rohr, *Breathing Under Water: Spirituality and The Twelve Steps* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2011), xvii.

<sup>163</sup> C. Irving Benson, *The Eight Points of the Oxford Group* (London, UK: Oxford University Press, 1936), 9-10.

States. The Oxford Group was aimed at rekindling genuine faith outside the institutional church. “The central idea of the Oxford Group was that the problems of the world could be healed through a movement of personal spiritual change.”<sup>164</sup> The group followed five key concepts: confidence (confidentiality), confession, conviction (understanding the seriousness of sin and the need to be freed from it), conversion, and continuance (evangelism)<sup>165</sup> and followed five procedures: giving to God, listening to God’s direction, checking guidance, restitution, and confession and witness.<sup>166</sup> The Oxford Group was not explicitly a program for alcoholism recovery but many desperate alcoholics were drawn to the movement.<sup>167</sup>

Two key influencing voices impacting the Oxford Group were John Wesley (1703-1791), a pastor in the Church of England, and Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), an American pastor and revivalist. The Oxford Group movement was highly influenced by the modern evangelical movement of the 18th and 19th centuries, and Wesley.<sup>168</sup>

Edwards, in his book *Freedom of the Will*, “singled out alcoholism as a behavior which could not be eliminated by the threat of external punishment,”<sup>169</sup> which was a common theme in the preaching of that day. Edwards believed the only way to eliminate deeply ingrained character defects and bad inner motives was to replace them with good

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<sup>164</sup> White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 128.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ernest Kuntz, *Not God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous* (Center City, MN: Hazeldon Education Materials, 1979), 48-49.

<sup>167</sup> White, *Slaying the Dragon*, 128.

<sup>168</sup> Glenn Chesnut, *Changed by Grace*, 17.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 22.

character attributes, which produced good inner motives.<sup>170</sup> This was all about revealing and removing negative character defects and was at the front end of what is referred to as cognitive therapy. These influential church leaders had a significant influence on Buchman's thinking when formulating the foundational beliefs of the Oxford Group.

John Wesley might have been one of the most influential voices in Buchman's thinking and theology. The key influences Wesley had on Buchman's thinking and theology are as follows:

- God's grace was the only power that could bring about life change.
- Confession and public testimony in a safe place were critical for transformation. Wesley believed that guilt and shame were slowly washed away each time the personal story was told.
- "Festering resentments" had to be dealt with by making amends with those who had caused hurt in a person's life.
- Doing an external reality check on a regular basis determined if the soul changes were becoming a reality.
- Regular times of prayer, meditation, singing of hymns, and keeping a spiritual journal were important for finding God's will and guidance and for discovering if any character defects needed to be changed.
- Genuine community and accountability in small groups were critical to bringing about and sustaining life change.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Chesnut, *Changed by Grace*, 23.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-39.

Comparing the principles of the twelve steps to the theology and methodology of Wesley and Edwards, their influence on the steps becomes obvious.

Buchman took these theological influences and created the foundational principles of the Oxford Group: The Eight Points. Below is a summary of the Eight Points of the Oxford Group. Also included are some of the scriptural passages the Oxford Group used as foundational texts and the ways these points influenced the Twelve Steps.

- **God Has a Plan for Every Life: Surrender** – The Oxford Group believed the most indispensable step was “absolute surrender of our lives and will over to God; a surrender of our total life. This was not a once for all surrender but must be done on a daily basis.”<sup>172</sup> Surrender included repentance, yielding oneself totally to God, and bringing our will into alignment with God’s will.<sup>173</sup> Step three states, “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand him.” Steps six and seven also require surrender. One of the criticisms of the Twelve Steps is of the phrase, “God as we understand him.” The original idea was not that a participant could make a God of his or her own understanding—this was a much later AA development—but that we surrender to God as we understand him at this point on our spiritual journey.<sup>174</sup> If a participant waits until he better understands God, this could make this critical step almost impossible. God is too big to fully understand, and this phrase allowed room for that thinking.

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<sup>172</sup> Benson, *The Eight Points of the Oxford Group*, 18.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>174</sup> Dick B., *The Good Book and the Big Book: AA Roots in the Bible* (Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications Inc.), 1997.

- **Confession is Good for the Soul** – Buchman believed that confession was essential to the healing of the soul. It was a confession to God and to others in safe communities. He believed that confession in a group setting where acceptance and forgiveness were extended made forgiveness more tangible.<sup>175</sup> Step five states, “Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human the exact nature of our wrongs.”
- **If Thy Brother Ought Against Thee: Restitution** – Buchman believed that making amends was critical for experiencing and expressing forgiveness. It was about making it right with those who have hurt you and those you have hurt.<sup>176</sup> Relational amends are critical to finding healing from character defects and brokenness. The choice to not extend forgiveness can keep you imprisoned by the hurts and wounds of others in the past. Steps eight and nine state, “Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. Make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”
- **The Four Absolutes: Daily Checking** – The Oxford Group uses “The Four Absolutes” (absolute love, absolute purity, absolute honesty, absolute unselfishness) for regular self-examination, which they believed was critical for spiritual growth.<sup>177</sup> This was the idea of doing a regular personal character inventory using the four absolutes as a guideline and then holding oneself accountable to another person in a safe community. The Oxford Group

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<sup>175</sup> Benson, *The Eight Points of the Oxford Group*, 28.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-39.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

believed prior to celebrating communion was a great time to do this self-examination. Step ten states, “Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”

- **Be Still and Know: Quiet Time** – This was about being still before God once a day to have a greater sense of God and a greater sense of his guidance for our life. Part of the practice was to start early in the morning, to find a place of solitude, to pray, and to journal (guidance book) thoughts about who God is.<sup>178</sup> They felt that in the stillness there was healing and hearing from God through his Holy Spirit. “It brings a new sense of order into untidy lives and a sense of tranquility, but it is more than that – it is the way to an empowered life.”<sup>179</sup> Step 11 states, “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood him, praying only for the knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry it out.”
- **Don’t Be An Ass: Guidance** – The Oxford Group insisted upon the necessity of a guided life to better know the will of God.<sup>180</sup> Divine guidance should be a normal experience for each follower of Jesus. They believed that guidance came from the scriptures and from the prompting of the Holy Spirit. That is why they practiced listening prayer to sense the leading and guiding of God. They believed that all guidance needed to be checked in various ways so that

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 52, 59.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 62.

self-interest wouldn't supersede God's leading.<sup>181</sup> The idea of not being an ass comes from Psalm 32:9 that says, "Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding." Verse 8 is all about the guidance, counsel and instruction of God. What the psalmist is saying is don't be a stubborn ass when it comes to God's guidance.<sup>182</sup> This is also part of step 11 listed above.

- **Life Changers All: Witness** – The Oxford Group believed the sharing of their personal stories of life change and the message of the gospel were a critical part of spiritual transformation.<sup>183</sup> Step 12 states, "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry the message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."
- **Lo, Here is Fellowship: Community** – The Oxford Group believed in the importance of community as the power to bring about real life change.<sup>184</sup> There is not a comparable step in AA, but this is foundational for working all of the steps—doing them in community. The influence of Wesley's small groups led to the establishment of a key Oxford Group practice known as "house parties"—groups of men and women who gathered to walk with each other in spiritual community toward transformation.

These are the theological and practical foundations for the twelve steps that influenced the founders of AA. "The Oxford Group rediscovered these fundamental

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 71-73.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 82.

evangelical principles laid out by Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley and they introduced them to the founders of AA who were the creators of the twelve steps.”<sup>185</sup>

Bill Wilson, one of the founders of AA, notes, “these basic ideas were not new; they could have been found elsewhere but the Oxford Group was where the early AAs had in fact been introduced to them.”<sup>186</sup>

Alcoholics Anonymous started on June 10, 1935 by William Wilson (Bill W.) and Dr. Robert Smith (Dr. Bob), both recovering alcoholics. In 1934, at age 39, Bill Wilson’s alcoholism was raging out of control and he was hospitalized. During that time, Wilson had a spiritual experience. He found himself crying out, “If there is a God let him show himself, I am ready to do anything.” Wilson goes on to say, “Suddenly the room lit up with a great white light. I was caught up into an ecstasy, which there are no words to describe. Then it burst upon me that I was a free man. All about me there was a wonderful feeling of Presence and I thought to myself, so this is the God of the Preachers.”<sup>187</sup> Wilson, thinking it was a hallucination, was convinced by Dr. Silkworth that this might be a “conversion experience.” The changes in Wilson’s life were immediately obvious. Upon release from the hospital, Wilson started attending meetings of the Oxford Group, led by Dr. Samuel Shoemaker. In 1935, Wilson met Dr. Robert Smith, who also struggled with alcoholism. Wilson moved into the Smiths’ home and he and Smith formed a group of recovering alcoholics who maintained sobriety by working together and reaching out to other alcoholics. This was the start of AA. The initial six

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>187</sup> William L. White, *Slaying the Dragon: The History of Addiction Treatment and Recovery in America*, 129.

steps would not be formalized until 1938. Wilson and Smith published a book in 1939, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, which contained all of the Twelve Steps and a spiritually based program of recovery for alcoholism.<sup>188</sup> As AA continued to grow and impact alcoholics across the United States, it became more focused on psychology and less on the spirituality that was part of its original roots.

If AA and its founders were the sole architects of the twelve steps, then the steps would primarily be a psychological-based program for alcoholics. However, The Oxford Group contributed significantly to the theological foundation behind the steps. Wilson attributed the twelve steps to the influence the Oxford Group had on his life and his sobriety.<sup>189</sup> Both Wilson and Smith attended Oxford Group meetings and based much of the AA program on that framework.<sup>190</sup>

To fully understand the influence of the Oxford Group had on the formation of AA and the Twelve Steps, we must refer to the words of Anne Smith, wife of Dr. Robert Smith, one of the co-founders of AA. She wrote in her journal a list of twenty-eight ways the Oxford Group influenced AA's thinking. Many of her points have already been covered in this research, but she also recorded:

- God is the creator, maker, Father, and Spirit – the living God.
- God has a plan for man's life and blessings come from aligning to His will.
- Life change is a spiritual experience where God becomes the primary focus.

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 129-131.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

- Jesus Christ is the Divine Redeemer by whose transforming power man can be changed.<sup>191</sup>

After reviewing the twenty-eight ways that the Oxford Group influenced the thinking of AA in Anne Smith's journal, it becomes obvious that there was a strong theological and biblical foundation behind the formation of the steps.

This new model of spiritual formation, the merger between traditional discipleship and the steps of recovery, would require the inclusion of Frank Buchman's "eight points." This new path for spiritual formation would include: 1) surrendering to God's plan for your life on a daily basis, 2) confession to God and others to provide healing, 3) relational reconciliation and extending forgiveness, 4) accountability with safe people, 5) having a daily time alone with God enabling the listening to his voice, 6) seeking guidance and decision making from God and wise counsel, 7) preparing and sharing your personal story of life change and transformation through Jesus, and 8) continuing to be part of a small spiritual community.

Finally, the RFC will respect the appropriate use of therapeutic practitioners and counselors, especially those with a Christian worldview who could reinforce and build on the healing and restoration already being experienced in the church. There will be some mental health issues and other severe forms of brokenness and compulsive behavior that will require the assistance of a trained professional in those areas. The RFC should see this as required additional healing instead of seeing it as competition to their work.

Metaphorically, the RFC is helping those who are broken and addicted to understand the chapters of their story that they have already written and the impact it has

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<sup>191</sup> Dick B., *Anne Smith's Journals: AA's Principles of Success* (Kihei, HI: Paradise Research Publications, 1998), 141-147.

had on them and others in their relational world, but it is also helping them, with God as the author, to write the next chapters in their life story that is about wholeness, healing and freedom. King David writes in Psalm 23, “He restores my soul” but that could be understood as he “re-stories” my soul, understanding the soul and the body are not separate but what impacts one impacts the other.

### **Conclusion**

Evidence points to a rapid increase in brokenness in our culture. Church leaders will agree with this reality because of limited observable evidence, but they will underestimate the severity and intensity of this reality without being confronted with the statistical evidence. This will result in many church leaders concluding that the problem is not that bad. The result is that they will choose to maintain the status quo and continue to plan and organize weekend services, small groups, and other church-focused spiritual formation ministries believing that they will be enough to make a difference in the rising tide of cultural brokenness.

The statistics speak for themselves—we have a pervasive problem in our culture that needs to be addressed by somebody or some organization. The church sticking to the status quo will not address the problem effectively and it will result in a countless number of people who will barely endure life and never come close to experiencing “the full life” that Jesus came to bring us. Maintaining the status quo will do nothing to help the church regain any credibility in this current anti-church culture; we will only see a continued erosion of its evangelistic efforts.

The RFC as described in this research might be at one end of a continuum, and not all faith communities will embrace this model fully. However, even having courage

to take steps toward the RFC end of the continuum will help the church fulfill the mission of Jesus. There will be a risk involved in taking steps away from the status quo. It has to be more than the odd tweak here and there to be effective. It will take courageous leaders who hold onto the belief that Jesus calls his church to restoration and healing. It takes church leaders and members to understand the incredible and unique time in which we live and to choose to be Christian in a world that has radically changed. It takes leaders who understand the opportunity before them and not to run and hide from it in fear. It will take church leaders who get rid of an “us and them” mentality and who will have a vision to bring healing and restoration to a culture that is badly broken.

For some, it might require restarting or replanting an existing church. For others, it might be starting something new, innovative, and culturally impacting. But something must be done, because if we continue to be what we have always been then we will get the same results that we have always got—or maybe even worse. If a church wants to reach those who no one else is reaching with the life-changing message of Jesus and the restoration that comes from a relationship with him, then they are going to have to do something new and different. This new thing has to meet the greatest needs of the culture, which just might be the healing and restoration of a culture drowning in sin-based brokenness.

#### SECTION 4: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

My artifact is a book titled *The Restoration-Focused Church: How the Church Must Change to Reach the Culture*. It will be written as a fable or parable about a pastor who is struggling with the ineffectiveness of his church to impact their community. Even though the church has grown significantly under his many years of leadership and teaching, growth over the last few years has been minimal, and most of it was people transferring from other churches. He sends an email to his staff leaders and his leadership board inviting them to gather for a weekend retreat. The purpose of this retreat will be to better understand what is behind this lack of community impact, to gain a clearer sense of the culture they are trying to influence and impact, to have a clearer sense of the church's current condition, and to formulate a strategy to radically change their mindset and methods in order to reach the culture with the life-changing message of Jesus in more practical ways. The book is a summary of that retreat weekend where many flipchart pages recorded the discussion.

There will be pages at the end summarizing the key information from the weekend retreat. The conclusion will encourage other pastors and church leaders to work through a similar process and find what needs to be done to impact the community around their church.

The epilogue will talk about the risk involved in doing this and how the pastor in this fable was terminated when he tried to make this mindset and methodology part of the future direction of the church.

## SECTION 5: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

June 30, 2017

David Ralph  
26 Blair Drive  
Guelph, ON  
Canada  
519-829-2617  
davidralph99@gmail.com

Greetings:

I am the pastor of Lakeside Church, a large Canadian faith community in a growing metropolitan center. I have written a number of articles for various periodicals, including Vision Ministries and World Vision. I am a doctoral candidate at Portland Seminary doing research on the dramatic increase in cultural brokenness and compulsive behaviors. I am proposing a book based on my thesis, titled *The Restoration-Focused Church*.

My research affirms the reality of increasing brokenness in our culture and that broken men and women are not turning to the church for help because it has a credibility problem in our culture. The traditional models of discipleship are not effective in helping those who struggle with addictions, mental illness, and relational dysfunctions. Recovery models and therapeutic solutions are somewhat effective but are missing the spiritual formation qualities of traditional models of discipleship. This book will focus on how the church can and should respond to the brokenness in our culture that will bring about transformation but also build credibility for the church in the current culture. It is this model that transformed others and myself during a very broken season of our lives.

I have enclosed a proposal for you review. I hope that you will consider this idea. I believe that this marriage between discipleship and recovery is critical for the future of the church to reach a growing population that wants little or nothing to do with it.

Thanks for taking the time to consider this idea.

David Ralph  
Lead Pastor  
Lakeside Church

## Book Proposal

Title: The Restoration-Focused Church

Author: David Ralph  
26 Blair Drive  
Guelph, ON, Canada  
519-829-2617  
davidralph99@gmail.com

Overview: The book will be a fictional story about a church ministry team who has discovered the increasing brokenness in the culture and are alarmed by the lack of credibility the church has in that same culture. The main setting of the book is a leadership retreat where the key leaders of this church work through the process to discover a solution and how they will implement it. While fictional, it will provide key truths and principles for any church willing to wrestle with these key realities.

Purpose:

- To highlight the increase brokenness in our culture, making more people aware of the current challenges our society is facing.
- To help churches reach out to their community with a relevant method and mindset that can have a missional impact on their community while increasing their credibility.
- To examine some of the key reasons why people struggle with addictions, compulsive behaviors and other forms of brokenness and how the church might be the best to provide a place for healing to be a reality.
- To provide some practical “how to’s” so a church can implement this kind of restoration focus in their own unique setting.

Promotion: This book could be marketed through Christian booksellers, targeting pastors and church leaders. It could be marketed through conferences like Celebrate Recovery Conference and National Association of Christian Recovery.

Competition: There are very few books written on this subject in this kind of detail. *The Recovery Minded Church: Loving and Ministering to People with Addictions* by Jonathan Benz would be the closest competition although it is focused more on recovery than restoration. Another book would be *A Hunger for Healing* by J. Keith Miller that deals with recovery as discipleship; however, it is for personal growth and there is no ministry application. *Life’s Healing Choices* by John Baker, which is more about a person’s journey through recovery than it is about churches transitioning their discipleship model. *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality* by Peter

Scazzero is a similar book, but he discusses emotional health rather than recovery.

**Uniqueness:** The style of this book makes it an easy and understandable read while still providing some key principles and practices. It also looks at this issue from a ministry standpoint rather than an individual standpoint. It is a book for the church leader and ministry leader who is trying to make sense of these cultural realities.

**Endorsements:** John Baker, Ministry Leader, Celebrate Recovery.  
 Dr. Henry Cloud  
 Dr. John Townsend  
 Theresa McBean, Executive Director, National Association of Christian Recovery

**Chapter Outline:**

- The Dilemma – Reviewing the problem of church growth plateauing and the church not reaching its community.
- Friday Night – Focusing on cultural realities, including the increase in brokenness in our culture
- Saturday Morning – Focusing on the current status of the church.
- After the Break – Focusing on the biblical foundation of restoration.
- Saturday Afternoon – Focusing on possible solutions to impact the broken culture.
- Saturday Night – Focusing on the obstacles that could stand in the way of being a restoration-focused church.
- Sunday Morning – Focusing on the plan for implementation of this new mission and strategy.
- The Drive Home – This will act as the conclusion of the story.
- The Notes – This will be a recap of all the notes that were written on the flip charts during the retreat.
- The Risk – This will encourage other church leaders to have this same kind of retreat with their leaders.
- The Epilogue – This will look at what happened six months after the sharing of this new mission.

**Intended Readers:** The primary audience would be church leaders who are looking for a way to make the church a relevant place of healing for a broken culture.

**Manuscript:** A 23,000 words manuscript is complete, has been professionally edited.

**Author Bio:** David Ralph is the Lead Pastor/Directional Leader of Lakeside Church, a church where broken people find wholeness through various recovery ministries and poverty alleviation. David has

been in ministry for 21 years. He was a marketplace leader for 15 years prior to going into ministry. He has a diploma from Humber College, a Master's Degree from Tyndale Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry from Portland Seminary. He is married to Susan and they have three adult children and three grandchildren.

Publishing Credits: None

Future Projects: I have an idea for a book that would be targeted at the non-church audience. It would be titled *A Hunger for Happiness* and it would be a novel that illustrates where happiness can best be found. It would be the fictional story of a very discouraged marketplace leader seeking happiness and he meets a new mentor at a coffee shop. The mentor walks him through eight ways to find happiness – one way each time they get together. At the end, the mentor reveals that the author of these ways to happiness is Jesus himself and reveals the eight ways to happiness are found in the Beatitudes of Matthew 5.

## SECTION 6: POSTSCRIPT

My original intention for my research was to see how the classic twelve steps of recovery could be “married” with the traditional model of discipleship to create a new model for recovery and healing of the increasing brokenness in our culture. As I continued my research, I discovered just how pervasive brokenness and addictions have been in our culture. I also continued to have this nagging issue about the church and its credibility in our current culture rolling around in my head. I realized the problem needed to be addressed by more than a new, simple method of spiritual formation.

As I dug into my research, I discovered some fascinating new discoveries regarding the causes of addiction that are flipping the recovery community on its head. The four academic essays I completed were helpful in the final product, but because the direction of my focus and research changed, I could not use as much of those academic essays as I hoped. The field research opportunities were very important and directed me to sources or research and information that I would otherwise have been oblivious to.

As I researched this topic and started to formulate my thesis, I became more passionate about the church’s role in dealing with the increased brokenness in our culture. I began to slowly and subtly introduce the model of the RFC into the mission of my current ministry as the Lead Pastor of Lakeside Church. We were already a recovery-focused church, but I believed we needed to take greater steps to embrace the RFC model. I truly believed this would have continued to bridge the credibility gap between the church and the community. However, it became quickly apparent that some key voices and leaders didn’t want to embrace this model because they felt it was divisive and excluded those who were not broken. As a result, I was asked to step down from my role. I fully understand how risky it is to introduce a radically new model, even into a

contemporary, forward-thinking, attractional church. The exciting news is that I have found a new ministry that totally wants to embrace the RFC model.

I submitted my dissertation eight months later than originally planned because of the unforeseen attack of a severe mental illness. This seemed to be the darkest time of my life, but the healing journey and the professional help I have received has been instrumental in my research. It has also provided me with a greater credibility as a broken leader to speak strongly into these areas of brokenness. During my recovery, my advisor, Phil Newell, was more than simply someone trying to help me get a dissertation finished. He became a spiritual advisor, mentor and friend. It was his advice, along with my wife's, that convinced me to extend the deadline.

The greatest challenge in writing this dissertation was to keep it under 25,000 words. There was so much information I had to edit out of the final dissertation. However, this discipline has taught me to write more concisely.

Finally, there is so much new research regarding the causes of addiction, compulsive behaviors, and brokenness that the RFC cannot be a fixed model but a flexible one that will continue to evolve. I believe that if courageous leaders are willing to risk introducing the RFC model to their current ministry, it will raise the church's credibility and, more importantly, transform the lives of many broken people in our culture.

## APPENDIX A: ARTIFACT

# The Restoration-Focused Church

A New Direction for the Church to Impact Their  
Community and Regain Credibility

David Ralph

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## INTRODUCTION

The attractional model of church ministry over the last thirty-five years has been devoted to the motto, “If we build it they will come,” and it worked. Churches began to grow. This methodology was all about attracting people to the “cool church,” which differentiated itself from churches of the past. The music was contemporary, played by a band, in theater-style auditoriums with concert-like lights. The teaching was biblical and practical, but at times felt more like a self-help talk than a biblically based message. Often, the points of the message were determined first and verses were added to support that point. There were cafes added and multi-styles of worship were introduced under the same roof. This method attracted churched, de-churched, and un-churched people. Conferences were held and many leaders followed the model, most often with good results. It was a safe place and lots of life change happened. For a while, this worked and worked well. In fact, this model of church is the foundation for the modern megachurch movement.

But culture has changed over the last thirty-five years. “Cool church” is still happening, but the general trend is that they are primarily attracting discontented churchgoers away from other churches and less and less de-churched and un-churched people are showing up. The culture’s opinion of the church has significantly changed. In thirty-five years, we have moved from a church-friendly culture to an anti-church culture. More and more Millennials are leaving the church, while few unchurched Millennials make their way to the church. Those who claim to be Christians but have no church affiliation are becoming the largest religious group in our culture. The church has a credibility problem of epic proportions. What can be done about this?

This book is a fictional account of a church staff and board members who know the church has plateaued and their community impact is diminishing. These two teams go away for a weekend, where the pastor calls an “advance” to examine where they are and why it happened, and to discern a new way to be the church, a new direction for the future.

The direction is a new model for the church: the restoration-focused church. Everyone on the teams initially believed that this is the right direction to go, but as the weekend progresses, some team members don’t feel comfortable with the changes it will create, and buy-in is not unanimous. The outcome at the end of the weekend is not what anyone expected.

Although this is a fictional account of this advance, it is based on a church that did this very thing, followed the process in this book and came to the same conclusions. Names and details have been changed.

It is my hope that leadership teams of churches would take the time to get away, discern with honesty where they are, and put together a direction that would impact a skeptical society and help the church to be relevant again. If the church is truly motivated by love and cares about taking the life-restoring message of Jesus to their community, then following a new direction is imperative.

A word of caution from someone who has led this process—taking a new direction like this can be costly. People who hold tightly to the way it has always been, even “cool church,” will not like this direction. It might even cost some leaders their ministry. But it is worth it for the sake of people in our communities and for the regaining of relevance for the churches. It takes courage to take this challenge. For the sake of the

kingdom of God, something must be done. Are you willing to listen to the voice of God and are you willing to take the risk and respond?

## THE DILEMMA

Pastor Phil Johnson sat at this desk, his hands firmly pressed against the side of his face, as if they were holding his head up. With his glasses removed, he took a deep breath and sighed. He stared out the window, but wasn't really looking at anything. He put his glasses back on and returned his attention to his computer screen, reviewing a spreadsheet of all the metrics used to measure the health of his church.

"I can't believe what I am seeing," he thought. "These numbers haven't changed in the past few years and I don't know why. Have we come to the end of the season of growth? Is this plateau, or even slight decline, going to be our new reality?" His mind swirled with a multitude of negative and bewildering thoughts. "We have tried everything over the last few years to regain the momentum we had when we started 25 years ago. Nothing seems to be working. We have been to all the conferences we can on how to grow a church and we've read most of the current books. What a waste of money.

"Attendance is stagnant and the offering hasn't changed, leaving us no choice but to make difficult financial decisions because of increasing costs. Added to that, there seems to be a diminishing sense of enthusiasm for the mission of Riverside. It wasn't that long ago when there was a real sense of excitement here at the church, but something seems to have sucked the excitement right out. It isn't that new people aren't showing up on a regular basis, because they are, but we still don't seem to be growing."

Riverside Church was founded twenty-six years ago by Pastor Phil. It was modeled after a popular megachurch, where he and his team had attended a conference and returned with renewed excitement and a folder full of ideas. Pastor Phil tired of trying to change the long-established church where he had been pastoring, with all the members' pushback and negative comments. He attended a leadership conference at the

megachurch, and he got a glimpse of what a church could really look like. Knowing he could never transition his current church to look anything like the megachurch without blowing it up, and after sensing a real leading from God, he decided that it was time to plant a new church that would be modeled on what he had seen at the conference. He talked to a few key members of his church who wanted to see the same significant changes happen and who also attended the leadership conference. Before long, there were about sixty people interested in starting something new.

This excited group of pioneers met a number of times, trying to keep it a secret from their current fellow congregants, dreaming and planning what this new venture would look like. When they felt the time was right, they shared it with the entire congregation. There were mixed reactions. Some people were angry, some were relieved because they didn't want change, and others wished them well.

They found a piece of property at the city's edge and raised enough money to put a down payment on it. They started construction on their initial building. It took about six months before this simple building was completed and the first Sunday was a celebration filled with excitement, dreams of what could be, and hopes for the future. For the next twenty years, the church grew year after year. Three building projects and associated fundraising programs allowed the facility to expand to meet the demands of growth. A second location was obtained and a new site became a reality. A number of key ministries were integrated to meet the needs of this growing congregation. It became, by far, the largest church in the city. Many hundreds of people were baptized, the small group ministry was flourishing, and outreach ministries were effective.

Riverside was the typical “attractional” church, continuing to live by the adage, “If you build it they will come.” It worked for almost twenty years. The Sunday morning service was the centerpiece of the entire ministry. These services took place in a large, theater-like auditorium, with the latest in sound, lighting, and multimedia equipment, with side screens to enhance what was happening on stage and the use of the arts incorporated into the design of the service. A service planning team met weekly to analyze the previous Sunday and to plan the current and future Sunday services.

The use of secular music fitting the theme of that Sunday was often used to open the service. Then the worship began, using only the most contemporary Christian music with words displayed on both side screens. Drama and video were used in conjunction with the teaching topic and the stage design was unique to each series.

Pastor Phil’s talk—he never calls it a sermon—was always relevant, based on scripture, and dealing with the felt need of those who attended regularly. He used an onstage, flat-screen TV to display the scripture used and the key points of his message. People continued to come and were impressed and impacted. The staff grew as the church grew, requiring continually reworked organizational charts, lots of operational meetings, and someone to oversee the human resource side of the ministry.

But over the past few years, something changed. Attendance plateaued and more people became less regular in their attendance. The staff management team, made up of leaders of different divisions of the church, attended as many conferences they could and read as many books as they could, trying to find the “secret sauce” to see growth again. They tried everything from a multi-venue approach, to adding recovery programs, to starting a poverty alleviation center, to becoming far more visible in the community, to

tweaking the services, including adding more lighting and more visuals. But none of it worked. Like Pastor Phil, the board of directors and the key staff leaders were becoming frustrated, disappointed, and bewildered. In fact, Pastor Phil considered on numerous occasions resigning, believing some younger, dynamic leader might kick-start the growth again, but he felt no peace about doing this.

As Pastor Phil sat at his desk, unsure of how to get the momentum moving in the right direction, he decided the key staff leaders and the members of the board of directors were smart enough and experienced enough to figure this out. He had his assistant contact several retreat locations to find a suitable place for the advance. Once secured, he sent a memo to all the staff management team and board of directors, inviting them to a weekend away, in a quiet setting, with the sole purpose of trying to figure out where they were at and how they could move forward. He called it an “advance” because he felt “retreat” only fed into the negativity people were feeling.

In the memo, he outlined the purpose of this weekend and gave them some work to do before the weekend took place. He wanted them to read as much as they could about the current culture, including what people were thinking when it came to the church as well as trends related to church attendance. He wanted them to have a grasp of the current culture they were trying to minister in. His hope was that the teams would be fully honest about the current state of Riverside and not to worry about offending anyone, including himself. He planned to look at the strengths of the ministries, the areas where they were vulnerable, what opportunities existed for growth, and some of the obstacles that stood in the way.

The memo was emailed to all the participants and soon several of them messaged him, thanking him for arranging this opportunity to get together away from their everyday responsibilities and for the excitement they were beginning to feel about this weekend. He encouraged all of them to pray as hard as they could for this advance, seeking God's insight and wisdom for the future. The weekend was a little over a month away and there was lots to be done.

THE TEAM

**Bob Murphy** – Bob is the Executive Pastor at Riverside and had been part of the staff for a couple of years. Bob has a MBA and a background in finance and human resources. He left the business world to become a critical member of the team.

**David Johnson** – David is the Director of Youth and Young Adults. David has been at Riverside for the last four years. He is in his late twenties, he sports a very trendy haircut and wears clothes that fit with the generation he is working with. David graduated from a local bible college and is currently working on further education.

**Todd Baker** – Todd is the Creative Arts Director at Riverside and is responsible for the entire programming for the weekend services as well as other worship events. He has been at Riverside for the past ten years and is an excellent musician and developer of new team members.

**Kathy Munroe** – Kathy is the Communications Director at Riverside and is fairly new to this role. She is responsible for all print and online communication including managing all social media and the Riverside website. She has a background in journalism and communications.

**Ryan Martin** – Ryan is the Campus Pastor of the City Central site of Riverside. He grew up in the church and had joined the staff originally as the Youth Pastor, but has changed roles several times at Riverside. He is currently obtaining a masters' degree from a distance education seminary.

**Krystal Paul** – Krystal is the Director of Riverside Kids. Krystal has been on staff for a little more than a year and has the task of revitalizing that ministry area.

**Josh Burns** – Josh is the Technical Director at Riverside and is only twenty-three years old. Even though he is young, there is not a technical problem that he can't seem to sort out. With the increased use of technology at Riverside he is a critical, although quiet, member of the team.

**Brad Unger** – Brad is the Director of Recovery Ministries at Riverside. More than a dozen years ago after joining the staff, Brad and Pastor Phil realized the need for a recovery ministry and started one later that year. Since that time other key recovery ministries in the areas of divorce and grief and a variety of support groups have been initiated.

**Marnie Williams** – Marnie is the Director of Spiritual Maturity at Riverside. She has been on the team about six years and has a real passion for small groups. She was the senior pastor of a small church before coming to Riverside. She also taught in the college that she graduated from.

**Tamara Boyd** – Tamara is a member of the Board of Directors and is in her second year of a four-year term. She is an older, more mature member of the team and is passionate about spiritual growth. She has a true shepherds' heart for people in the church. Tamara works at the local university in an administrative role.

**Ed Roberts** – Ed is a member of the Board of Directors and is in the final year of his four-year term. Ed has a dominant voice on the team. He is not afraid to share his opinion, even it means a little conflict at the table. Ed is a senior manager with a software development company.

**John Collins** – John is a member of the Board of Directors and is in the first year of a new term after serving many previous terms. John and his family have attended Riverside since the beginning. He is a member of the core group that started Riverside. He is a family doctor and has lived in the community most of his life.

**Rick Greenside** – Rick is the chairman of the Board of Directors and he is in the second year of his term. Rick has served in many ministries at Riverside including leading small groups, music and finance. Rick works for a large Christian company that focuses on international development

FRIDAY NIGHT

The staff management team and the board of directors arrived at the retreat center on time with a few stragglers rushing in a few minutes late. There were snacks to eat (lots of the unhealthy kind) and coffee to drink. Everyone engaged in non-ministry related small talk. There was a sense of excitement even in those conversations. The night began with some worship songs and a number of participants prayed for the weekend.

When worship and prayer were completed, Pastor Phil stood up at the front with three big flip charts and markers in hands. After a short welcome he asked, “What is the current condition of the culture in which we are trying to minister to, including the opinions about the church in general?” Bob Murphy, the executive director for Riverside, spoke first. “I recently found a survey discussing religion participation that shocked me. The fastest growing group are those who have no church affiliation at all. He then quoted, “26% of those polled claim they are not affiliated with any religious group and 44% acknowledge ambivalence toward any religious affiliation.” The he added, “When you look at the Millennial generation, those numbers go up significantly. Many who were once affiliated with the church, attending faithfully, drop out once they leave home.”

Pastor Phil wrote on the flipchart, “Less and less people connecting with any particular church”. He turned back to the group, “Why do you think this is happening?”

David, the youth and young adult pastor stated, “People I talk to think the church is a full of a bunch of hypocrites, who only care about converting people. They say, services are boring and irrelevant and all the church wants is money, that churchgoers can be judgmental, and they pretend they are perfect while continuing to criticize everyone else they think isn’t.” Pastor Phil asked, “Do the rest of you agree?” Most people

nodded. Pastor Phil wrote, “People are critical of the church. It is at best a post Christian culture and at worst it is becoming an anti-Christian culture.”

“Any thing to add to this?” Pastor Phil asked.

David jumped right in. “I think this is a bit of a generalization. I am not sure those are the words that I would use. People are anti-church but I am not sure they are anti Jesus. Many of my peers confirm that Jesus had good things to say about living in this world. They think the message of Jesus and the message of the North American church are different. I think they like Jesus. It isn’t anti-Christian as much as it is anti-church. I also hear a lot of criticism that the church is too political and I would have to agree. The church seems to focus more on being right than listening and entering into conversation with the culture.”

Pastor Phil said, “Thanks for that perspective David. I think that is more accurate.” He then wrote those words in brackets below what had just been written.

Todd, the creative arts director responded, “Many people are skeptical and critical of the church. They think it is irrelevant.”

Then Kathy, the communications director added, “It isn’t just people outside the church that feel this way. Many of those who were once very committed to the church, now consider the church to be one of many options. I see people inside and outside the church who have this picture of Jesus that is less than accurate. They are creating their own image of Jesus that fits what they want to do.”

Ryan, the campus pastor at the second site said, “People today don’t trust current structures like police, teachers, politicians, lawyers and churches.” Pastor Phil wrote, “People don’t trust the church like they once did.” Then he responded, “But aren’t people

in general pretty skeptical, negative and untrusting? Just look at the last election and all the social media fallout.”

Rick, the chairman of the board added, “This is true, but there seems to be a hunger for spirituality. The reality is they are not choosing one religion over another. It is like all spiritual options form a religious smorgasbord and people take a little bit from this and that, creating their own version of spirituality.” Pastor Phil asked, “Is there anything we need to add to the whole attitude towards the church?” No one spoke up so Pastor Phil asked, “What else did you discover doing your research?”

Krystal, the children’s ministry director, spoke up, “From my reading, there are some things that are affecting the way we work. Globalization has led to lower wages while at the same time costs are going up. Companies needing to be more competitive are asking more from their employees. Technology has led to increased availability and the workday doesn’t end when you leave the workplace. There has been a dramatic increase in the cost of healthcare and education, yet more jobs are demanding that higher education. Many Millennials are entering the workplace with lots of student debt. All this results in an increase in the busyness of people’s lives. With both parents working just to meet the increasing financial demands, then running their kids all over the place during the week, Saturday used to be a ‘family day’ but now it is a ‘chore day’. By Sunday most people wanting to crash consider church the last place they want to go. There are also many young families who spend much of their weekend carting their kids to sport tournaments and league games. People are exhausted. Even church people feel this way.” David added, “This is really impacting the family. Relationships between parents and kids and husbands and wives are more superficial and it is leading to family dysfunction.

I have kids in my high school group who are silently suffering because of this and it plays out in the way they act.” Pastor Phil wrote “Globalization, Technology and Family demands” and under it he wrote “increased busyness” and “shallow family connections”.

Tamara, one of the board members added, “People are less likely to point to a single source of truth any more. There is no ultimate authority. Truth is more often found in experience today. It is relative or situational and everybody has their own version of the truth.”

Bob added, “I agree. There is no black and white anymore. We are told we have to accept everyone’s version of truth or we’re not being tolerant.”

Marnie, the director of spiritual maturity added, “The Judeo-Christian values that were held so strongly for thousands of years are being challenged at every turn.” Pastor Phil summarized this on the flip chart under the heading “Pluralism”.

Josh, the young technical director spoke up, “I want to talk more about technology We are continually connected, so we never seem to get a break. People of all ages are almost glued to their phones and we have boatloads of information at our fingertips. The use of social media is widespread and rapidly increasing. It has lots of positives but there are also just as many negatives attached to it.”

Ryan added, “Technology is a great tool and we need to leverage it as much as we can, but it has taken over so many people’s lives. They are substituting genuine face-to-face relationships for technology based interactions.”

Todd jumped in, “With technology, place is no longer relevant.” “What do you mean by that?”, asked Pastor Phil. Todd responded, “Just look at the fastest area of growth at Riverside – our online community. Many people who used to come

consistently now attend more occasionally because they can stay home and watch online.”

Tamara added, “You don’t have to go to church anymore let alone any one church. There are so many great online church experiences with some of the best teaching and worship anywhere. I wouldn’t want to be a pastor these days. Too much comparison. Oh, sorry Pastor Phil.”

“That’s okay Tamara, I am aware of all of this. It is no wonder that I feel insecure.”

They all laughed. Pastor Phil captured all of this under the heading of “Technology”. By now a couple flip chart pages were full of information. Pastor Phil had Josh rip the pages off and tape them on the wall at the side of the meeting room.

“What else do we see in our current culture?”

Ed, one of the older members of the board spoke up, “We live in a pretty self-focused, consumer oriented society with so many people feeling that they are entitled to have as young adults what we as older adults worked for years to obtain. That is why debt levels are so high and people are frantically working. He then added, “When I was first married...” He saw a few people smiling and a couple of the younger staff roll their eyes and remarked, “I am getting old. I guess there’s no need to tell stories that are ancient history.” Everyone laughed and smiled.

Pastor Phil said, “Is there anything else we can add to this long list?”

Brad, the director of Riverside’s recovery ministries said, “I’ve listened to what has been said so far, but we haven’t even talked about the increase in brokenness happening among all the generations.”

Pastor Phil wrote “increased brokenness” and then asked Brad to elaborate. Brad said, “This might sound like a lot of facts, but I see these realities everyday leading our recovery ministries. Almost 7% of our culture struggles with an addiction to alcohol. More than 9% of the population struggles with illicit drug use. If you consider the possible legalization of marijuana, drug use will increase significantly. Just look at self-harm. Young men and women trying to measure up to the ‘right body type’, trying to live up to the social pressures, many of them children of dysfunctional families, are now turning to various forms of self harm include physical wounding, eating disorders and even suicide.” Brad added, “I read recently that self harm among young women is the fastest growing epidemic among young women 18 to 24. The rates of self harm have more than doubled in the last ten years.”

Krystal responded, “I have a daughter who struggled with an eating disorder. When I researched them online, I found that almost twenty million young women in the U.S. have been clinically diagnosed with some kind of eating disorder.”

Brad added, “On top of the addictions to alcohol and drugs, newer addictions have become more prominent. Because of the online availability of pornography, this has become a real addiction especially among young millennial men. Almost ten percent of men surveyed said they had an addiction to porn. Again, because of the availability of online experiences, gambling has also increased significantly. There is also an increase in sexual addictions where people are turning to sexual experiences to numb the pain they are experiencing.”

Pastor Phil wrote all of these stats on the board and then added, “As you all are aware, I have suffered from a mental illness recently. You have all been so supportive of

my battle with anxiety. Researching the area of mental illness for myself, I discovered almost 18% of the population struggles just like I do. On top of that almost 10% of the population struggles with depression and that number is increasing by 20% a year. The use of medication for mental illnesses has increased by 26% over the last few years.”

Brad added, “Often those who struggle with addictions also struggle with mental illness. I see that a lot in our recovery groups.”

Marnie added, “There is this increase in brokenness for sure, the stats all support that, but at the same time there is continual pressure on government and social agencies as funding is reduced. This leaves a real gap in treatment for these various types of brokenness.”

Pastor Phil agreed and then invited anyone else who had anything to add to the list to jump in. John, one of the more outspoken members of the board, who had said relatively little to this point added, “When you look at all that we have written, I believe that there is also an increase in despair experienced by many people today whose lives are impacted by the things we have summarized here. They are not sure what to do about it or where to turn. I think there are some significant generational differences as well. I am not saying that older people don’t struggle with this because we do, but I think Millennials experience things we don’t experience and vice versa. We have to keep this in mind.” Most heads bobbed up and down in agreement.

Marnie added, “The one thing that I see these days is people are trying to avoid pain at any cost. It is like we have become a society that hates pain and will do whatever it takes to minimise it.”

Pastor Phil summarized all that was shared and again asked Josh to remove and tape them to the wall. He then said, “Looking at all that we have written about the condition of the culture, it would be easy to get discouraged and wonder what can be done. I think there is a great opportunity for us as a church to address some of these issues.”

Rick added, “I think you are right, but it will take creative, even out of the box thinking to address the needs of the culture. However, I think we have a great bunch of people who are smart enough and creative enough to figure this out – well at least most of you.”

With that everyone laughed and Pastor Phil suggested it was time for a break. Before he dismissed everyone he added, “When we come back from our break I want us to try to determine what our culture really needs and is hungry for.” Take fifteen minutes and we will get back at it before we all head off to bed.”

After the break concluded, everyone slowly made their way back to their seats. Pastor Phil, with marker in hand, stood at one of the flip charts and wrote on top, NEEDS OF OUR CULTURE. Then he asked, “Based on all on that is written on the flip chart pages on the wall, what do you think are the biggest needs of our culture, especially our local community?”

There was silence for a few moments, then Bob spoke up, “I sense that many people are looking for a place to really belong, to find that genuine sense of relational connectedness.”

Krystal added, “People are looking for more depth in relationships, they are looking for a place where they can be themselves – where they can take off their masks and be real.”

Ryan spoke up. “ You’re talking about transparency, and I agree. I think people want to be ‘known’. They want to feel that someone understands them, accepts them for who they are.”

Todd added, “There are not too many places where this can happen in our culture.”

Pastor Phil recorded these thoughts on the flip chart – a safe place to belong, to genuinely connect, to be fully accepted and understood, an authentic transparent community.

“What else?” Pastor Phil asked.

David spoke up, “The young adults I work with are looking for a place to make a difference, where they feel like they have contributed to the greater good.”

Rick jumped in. “I agree with you, but so many want to make a difference but don’t get involved in doing it.”

David responded, “That is a bit of a generalization but there is some truth in it. “My generation has so much choice. We have become entertainment crazy. Visual stimulation is all around us. There is not a lack of entertainment choices, but they seem to gravitate toward experiences – not passive entertainment. When it comes to church, they don’t just want to sing songs, hear a cool band, listen to a great talk and go home. They want an experience. But it just isn’t church-ed young adults. This idea of an experience is common among un-churched Millennials as well.”

Then John spoke up. “I think it is a need for everyone these days. People are looking for a cause they can contribute to - a cause that provides a sense of meaning and purpose to their lives. I am part of the Rotary Club in town and this is why people join the club, because they want to make a difference.

Then Bob, the executive pastor, who remained silent up to this point added, “I hear the excuse that people are too busy all the time when we are looking for volunteers. That is why they can’t give any time to the church. But busyness is not really the problem, it is priorities. And the church isn’t a priority.”

Ryan added, “I agree. People are giving their time to so many other things, but not to the church. I think it is because we are not giving them a cause or mission worth giving their time and money to.”

Cathy spoke up, “I agree that finding meaning and purpose through participating in an impacting cause is important. Additionally, in conversations with my un-churched neighbours, I find that they are looking for answers to the big questions of life.”

Pastor Phil interrupted, “What are those questions they are seeking answers to?”

Cathy said, “I think there are five of them. The first is the question of origin – how did it all get started? Then there is the question of destiny – what happens after we die? The third question is the question of community – is there a safe place when I can belong? The fourth is the question of meaning and purpose – why am I here – which I think is part of the hunger to find a cause. The final question might just be the biggest of all of them. It is the question of hope – can tomorrow be better than today?”

Tamara added, “You’re right, I think that people are hungry for hope. Hoping that their marriage will make it, hoping that their kids will be safe and grow up healthy,

hoping that they can handle the pace, hoping they can get over their addictions, financial hope, career hope, and hope to find healing and wholeness from their brokenness.”

Pastor Phil responded, “I think you are right Tamara.” He wrote HOPE in big letters on the flip chart.

Then Brad, the recovery pastor piped up, “The whole idea of helping people find healing and wholeness from their brokenness might just be the strongest message of hope we can share. When you look at the stats we have put on the board, most of them have to do with one form of brokenness or the other. The message of hope should deal with these realities.”

Then Pastor Phil said, “But we already have strong recovery ministries and support groups that provided so much hope to so many. If what you are saying is true, then why aren’t we growing?”

Brad responded, “That is true, Phil, but these ministries have primarily been focused on those who are part of Riverside, with only a few outsiders attending. On top of that, recovery at Riverside is treated as if they are groups for ‘those people’ who have their issues. Recovery is treated as a special interest group, not a church wide focus.

Pastor Phil reviewed what had been written on the flip charts. The team had looked at the current culture and their attitude toward the church. They had summarized the current cultural realities and they listed what the core cultural needs were. Pastor Phil congratulated the group on an evening of hard work. He then gave them instruction for the following day, “Tomorrow we are going to do an autopsy on where our church is at and how we have tried to deal with these needs. Then we are going to try to come up with a future focus for Riverside that will help us to impact lives and grow again.

SATURDAY MORNING

Pastor Phil woke up earlier than usual. He hasn't had the best night's sleep. A lot of what was discussed the night before continues to plague his thinking. He feels sadness as he thinks about the broken and dysfunctional culture. He thinks about the felt needs of the people and wonders if any church, even Riverside Church, will ever be able to address these challenges and meet these needs. It was starting to feel like an overwhelming task. He knew a relationship with Jesus was the answer to all of this, but had no idea how to communicate that to a culture that wants nothing to do with Christianity and is only remotely open to Jesus.

Unable to return to sleep, he got out of bed, grabbed a quick shower and got ready for the day. He sat at the desk in his hotel room and opened his Bible and his journal, wanting to spend a few minutes journaling and praying over the day. As he sat looking into space, questions tumbled in his mind. It was hard to focus on the Bible and he felt distracted as he started to pray. Instead of fighting the distractions he gave into them. He grabbed a pad of paper and titled the right hand column. He put a title at the top of the column, "Conditions of the Culture." There he summarized the conversations from the previous night.

- Post Christian/Anti-Christian.
- People are skeptical and critical of the church and find it irrelevant.
- People work and live at a frantic pace and Sunday is there only down day.
- Pluralism – no single source of ultimate authority.
- A lack of confidence in government, education, and even the church.
- Technology - people have an abundance of information, relationships are shallow, and place is irrelevant.

- People are living for the moment.
- Truth is now found in experience and everyone's choices must be tolerated and accepted.

His mind wandered to the brokenness he'd observed in many conversations he had with Riverside people and those who have no church background. He added more bullet point to the list.

- Brokenness is increasing – addictions are on the increase – compulsive behaviours are running rampant – there is increasing emotional, mental, relational struggles.

As he looked over the words he had just written he thought of some of the Riverside people and their stories. Their faces came to mind.

He thought about a young woman who struggled with significant depression diagnosed after years of self-harm and cutting, which eventually led to her divorce. Another face came to mind - a young woman whose slight frame is a reminder of the battle she has had with an eating disorder since adolescence. He remembered the story of a key leader who had struggled with his sexual identity since being abused by a man in his teen years. He saw the faces of two friends who once were trapped in bondage to pornography, one leading to infidelity, jail time and job loss and wrecking his marriage, the other just hanging on by a thread. His mind retreated to a couple of victims of abuse at the hands of people who claimed they loved them. One suffered post-traumatic stress disorder and depression resulting in institutionalization, the other who found herself pregnant by a family member still lived with the guilt and shame of a subsequent forced abortion. He then remembered the story of a forty something woman who was sexually

abused for many years and who turned to substance abuse and sex to deal with the pain and the shame. He was comforted by the fact that most of them have found some measure of healing and recovery at Riverside, but wondered if they were doing enough.

Pastor Phil created a new column on his paper, titling “Cultural Needs”.

- There is a hunger for spirituality but not for Christianity
- A safe and genuine place to be accepted and get connected
- Healing and wholeness – recovery and restoration
- A community where you can be transparent and vulnerable
- A cause that gives life meaning and purpose
- A place where relationships could be sorted out and strengthened
- Identity
- Worth and Value
- To Know You Matter
- HOPE

He then stared at this list. Then he got his journal out and wrote a couple of questions down. First, “What does the church have to be and do to be able to bring help, healing and wholeness and meet the needs to this current culture?” Then he wrote a second question, “Is Riverside the kind of church that will be relevant enough to impact the culture and close the credibility gap?”

He began to think of the church as a magnet. There was a time when the church was seen positively by those outside the church. When life turned negative for people they were attracted to the church for help. However, it was now seen through a pretty negative lens. Instead of attracting those wounded and hurting, the church was now

repelling them. Few turn to faith communities for help. This troubled Pastor Phil. He wanted to understand how the church could bridge this gap, make a genuine difference in people's lives and regain some of the credibility it once had. Doing the same things over and over again, just adding a more modern or contemporary twist, a little tweak here and there, would not work in this culture.

He felt a little overwhelmed and fearful as he looked at the page with cultural characteristics and the needs of the culture down the right side of the page. A thought struck him and he wrote at the top of the left hand column. "What the church needs to be and do". He decided to share all of this with the team when they gathered to start looking for a solution. But he knew that before that could happen, there needed to be some open and honest dialogue about the current condition of Riverside. The thought of that discussion made him feel uneasy.

There was a knock at the door. As Pastor Phil opened the door, he saw Executive Pastor Bob Murphy. With his usually enthusiastic personality Bob asked, "Are you ready for a good day of thinking and planning?" Pastor Phil gave a less than enthusiastic, "Yes" and they walked towards the dining area together.

At breakfast the conversation was light hearted. Ryan, Dave, Todd, Kathy, John, and Krystal sat at one table. There was a lot of laughter and loud voices coming from it. Phil, Bob, Rick, Kathy, Tamara, Marnie, Tom, and Brad sat at the other table. The conversation seemed more serious and subdued. At one table sat all the Millennial staff leaders and at the other were the old guys and gals. Pastor Phil sensed the difference between the two tables and the divide between the different age groups was obvious. As others were talking at his table, his mind was wandering and he was still feeling

perplexed about what it would take to have an impact on the culture. Now he was thinking about what kind of church would be able to impact Millennials as well. He knew what the research revealed – more and more churched Millennials were moving away from the church as they left home for work or school. Also, a high percentage of un-churched Millennials wanted nothing to do with the church. Not only was there a credibility gap but, there seem to be a generational gap larger than had ever existed.

Brad asked, “So Phil, what are you thinking about?” Pastor Phil started sharing a little bit of what he had been thinking about and writing down earlier in the morning. As he shared, the others seated at the table nodded, adding some additional thoughts and supporting questions.

Soon Pastor Phil looked at his watch and told everyone that they had ten minutes to make their way to the meeting room. He quickly headed off alone to get it ready for the morning discussion.

He put two flip charts side by side with about a two-foot gap between them. He copied onto one flip chart all that he had written early that morning in his journal, summarizing the dialogue from the night before. On the other flip chart he wrote, “The Current Ministry at Riverside”.

Once everyone arrived at the meeting room, they opened the morning with a couple of worship songs that were all about the love and power of God. A few of the team led them in prayer and then it was time to get the day underway. Pastor Phil knew it could be a long and hard day.

He began by sharing the summary from the previous evening’s discussion. Then he outlined where he thought the discussion would go that morning. With marker in hand,

he headed toward the flip chart that read, “The Current Ministry at Riverside. He asked, “What about the current ministry at Riverside? Where are we really at?” He added, “I want you to be brutally honest in your evaluation.”

The room went pretty silent. It seemed that everyone was a little bit reluctant to speak, maybe afraid of hurting one of their teammate’s feelings. To break the silence, Pastor Phil said, “This is not personal or about criticizing someone else’s ministry area. This is about being open and honest about where we are truly at. Until we are completely honest about where we are, we will never be able to be the kind of life-impacting church we want to be. So let’s get honest, remembering it is not personal – and of course nobody is getting fired.” Brad pretended to wipe sweat from his brow and everyone laughed.

Ryan, the campus pastor spoke first, “I think for the last twenty-five years we have focused on being what is known as an ‘attractional church’. Our Sunday services are great with lots of creativity. The use of secular elements, the awesome lighting and technology are great. The message and music are always done with excellence.” He went on, “I am not saying we are doing a bad job on Sunday morning - quite the opposite, we might be the best show in town. But as good as it is, is it working? Are we impacting the lives of those outside the walls of the church? Are we making a difference?”

Todd, from his creative arts perspective added, “Our worship at times feels more like entertainment with fewer and fewer people really engaging.”

Pastor Phil started writing this on the flip chart.

Bob added, “I have been reading articles about church attendance and more and more people seem to be coming less often – mainly because they are so busy and have

other priorities on Sunday. They're still committed to the church, would probably call it their church home, but they are coming less often. Our data base proves this."

Krystal added, "I would agree with Bob. Our records in Riverside Kids show the same thing."

Rick jumped in with a tough question, "What are people busy with? Why are they choosing other priorities over Sunday morning church?" I am not sure that it is a busyness problem as much as a priority problem."

Brad added, "I hear what you are saying, but we do a great job on Sunday morning. We would all agree about that. Is this a cultural reality that we will never be able to win the battle over?"

Josh, who normally doesn't say much jumped in. "I am not sure that tweaking Sunday morning is going to be the answer. Or tweaking any of our ministries for that matter."

Kathy said, "Maybe we are using the wrong measuring stick to figure out if we are having an impact. Most churches use the number of people in the seats and how much money they bring in, but does that determine impact? Anybody can attract a crowd with a good show."

Pastor Phil moved to the third flip chart and started to draw a funnel with the wide opening at the top, narrowing to a large group of small circles at the bottom. At the large opening of the funnel he wrote, "Sunday Morning" and where all the circles were at the bottom he wrote, "The Ministries of Riverside." Then he explained the diagram. "In the past, the main entry point to Riverside was Sunday morning services. From there people would connect with the various ministries offered. If Sunday morning has plateaued it

can impact the rest of the ministries. Is this picture our current reality?"

Brad, the recovery pastor answered immediately. "From a recovery perspective this is kind of what we are seeing. We now have more participants coming from outside the church than those who coming through Sunday morning. Most, if not all of them are un-churched. For our recovery program it is about 60%, our grief ministry is about 85%, our divorce recovery is about 60% and our support groups are around 50%." Then he added, "What we have not done really well is connecting these non-Riversiders back into Sunday morning. Sunday morning might have plateaued but recovery ministries haven't - in fact they have grown."

Rick added, "I love our baptism services. The stories of life change are incredible. I have noticed over the last few years that most of them have come through our recovery ministries. Shouldn't that tell us something?"

Bob, who also gives oversight to Hope Place, the poverty alleviation center added, "We are helping more than 10,000 people a year with food, clothing, haircuts and a warm place to get lunch each day. We have done little to reach out to these community members, yet they likely have more needs than anybody."

Pastor Phil added, "Hope Place has given us so much more visibility and credibility in our community. Almost every time I introduce myself as the Pastor of Riverside, the immediate response is, 'you are the guys who started Hope Place.'"

What about our other ministries at Riverside?"

Marnie, who is pretty quiet in these types of meetings spoke up, "From a spiritual maturity perspective, I think we are doing alright but there is lots of room for improvement. We have tried small groups and for a while they were doing well, but they

seem to be stalled. We have gone to tons seminars and we have a clear strategy, but the small groups don't seem effective enough to connect people into genuine community and they aren't helping with the hurts and wounds in our community." Then she added, "We have tried spiritual assessment tools, followed the traditional discipleship model including practicing spiritual habits, but we are not seeing the kind of life change we are hoping for." She went on, "Our outreach ministries are okay, people are starting a relationship with Jesus, but it seems mostly church people coming through Sunday morning are showing up and less un-churched people."

Tamara jumped in, "That is because the dinners are so great." Everyone laughed and nodded in agreement.

John, who had a good way of summarizing things and was not afraid to add a more critical voice said, "It seems we do all of our ministries well – with excellence even. But, they are all about bringing people to the building. We might be ahead of most churches, but I think if we continue to believe we are all right compared to others, we will not have the impact all of us want to make. Right now, it is all about the building with a 'come and see' mindset."

Brad jumped right in, "I agree with John. Our ministries to address people's wounds, addictions and compulsive behaviors are all about coming to the building. You have to come to our building to see our counsellor – even our AA group at Hope Place is all about coming to the building. Where is the 'go to the people' mindset?"

Kathy, who had been trying to speak up, finally got heard. "We have been focused on fixing the church and tweaking the ministries, but has it helped and is it really working? Are we impacting this culture? Are we meeting those needs?" Are we truly

bridging the credibility gap?” With real passion she added, “I don’t think it is about a quick fix here or there, I think it is time to seek out a radical solution. As Pastor Phil has often said, ‘If you want to reach people no one else is reaching you have to do things that no one else is doing.’”

Everyone in the room smiled. Then Todd added, “We were pretty cutting edge when we started. Nobody did church like us. But now, we are just another option when it comes to churches in our community.”

Reflecting on these comments, David jumped in, “I’m with Kathy and Todd. It’s going to take a radical solution to reach this culture, meet the needs and bridge the credibility gap.” He opened his journal and continued, “I have been asking myself some hard questions about Riverside. Have we become subtly more inward-focused, wanting to meet the needs of the already convinced? Have we become a little self-centered and not Christ centered? Have we been using the wrong metrics to measure how we’re doing? Is our mission compelling enough? Is the cause great enough so that people will make it a priority when it comes to their time and resources?”

The group sat silent as they reflected on those questions. The mental wheels were really turning. Nobody knew whether they should answer them but there was a fear that David was right and the answers could be a bit unnerving. Pastor Phil as usual, broke the silence and asked a summarizing question, “Is what we are currently doing with all we have written about on the flip charts, with all our strengths and weaknesses, going to reach the culture around us?” He pointed to the first flip chart and added, “Is it going to reach these needs?” Then he stood between the two flip charts. “Will it be enough to bridge this credibility gap that continues to get wider? Raise your hands if you think what

we are currently doing is going to be the right strategy for the future.” Not one hand was raised. Then he asked, “How many of you believe we are at a critical crossroads at Riverside and it is time to look at a new paradigm for our ministry?” Every hand went up with certainty. So, what are we going to do about this?” He realized it was time for a midmorning break. He instructed everyone to take twenty minutes.

AFTER THE BREAK

At the end of their morning break, Pastor Phil called everybody back to their seats. The tone in the room was solemn. Reality can sometimes do that to you, especially if your whole focus or mission could be radically turned upside down.

Pastor Phil began, “In preparation for today, I asked each of you to read and reflect on a number of verses that might help us discern what God wants us to do as we move into this new season of ministry, with the potential for some big changes on the horizon. How many of you were able to read these and reflect on them?” All hands went up. He ripped the pages from the left flip chart off and gave it to Josh to hang up on the wall. “Who wants to go first?”

Tamara answered, “I loved the passage in Isaiah 58. It talks about prayer and fasting, but in my reflection, I think it could be summarized with the words, ‘when the community of faith worships’ and then it goes on to describe what I see as the marching orders for God’s people. They are to care about injustice—and there is a lot of that happening in our city and our world. They care about helping people find freedom from whatever holds them in bondage. It talks about caring for the poor and broken and vulnerable, to provide food, clothing, and shelter—the basic necessities of life.”

Then Ryan jumped in. “I love all the positives that happen in the community of faith when they do what they are supposed to do. They will find clear direction, they will find their own healing, God will be with them and guard them, and all their prayers will be answered because they will be praying for the right things.”

Brad added, “I love the part where the writer records God’s words, and He calls them rebuilders and restorers of what is broken up and down the streets.”

Pastor Phil wrote “Rebuilding and Restoration” on the flip chart and asked, “Does this accurately summarize that passage?” All agreed it did.

Todd said, “I have always loved that passage in Isaiah 61. It talks about sharing the good news with the poor, about healing the broken hearted, and helping those in captivity, whatever type it is, to find freedom. To comfort those who are mourning, to bring joy to those who are sad, and to help those who are in despair to eventually be able to praise.”

Brad added, “Again in this passage, it talks about rebuilding and renewing things that are ruined and devastated.”

Pastor Phil then asked, “Who are they talking about in the passage?”

Rick answered, “The Messiah, right?”

Pastor Phil affirmed that Rick was correct and then added, “These are the marching orders, or the mission, of the Messiah and it seems the mission of the community of faith is very similar, doesn’t it?”

A few nodded in affirmation. Then Marnie added, “I guess I had never really seen the connection between Isaiah 61 and Luke 4:18. Now I get why they wanted to toss Jesus over the cliff in anger. He was claiming to be the Messiah.”

Then Brad spoke up, “I think he is giving us his primary mission statement.” Most nodded.

Then Josh, the more than quiet technical director, jumped into the conversation. “My favorite passage was John 10:10.”

“Why do you say that?” asked Pastor Phil.

Josh responded, “I like that Jesus came to bring us life. To me that is the target we need to shoot for. Not the practice of spiritual disciplines, although though they are helpful tools. Not to know more about the Bible and not so that we could become part of some religion. Jesus came to bring life, and not just any kind life, but life to the fullest. I think helping people find a full and genuine life should be what we are all about. That is how I think we should measure ourselves. Are we helping people find a fuller and more genuine life?” Everyone sat in silence, almost stunned by the wisdom of this young, quiet man.

Ryan yelled, “High five to you, Josh. Way to go.” Everyone laughed.

Todd added, “The verse where it said that Jesus was about being a servant and that he gave his life as a ransom for many—I think it was adding depth to his mission statement. I thought about the word ransom. It means to give your life in place of another so that they could find freedom. I love the idea that Jesus came to bring us freedom.”

Then Bob added, “You could also say that about the verse that describes Jesus coming to seek and to save those who were lost. That adds depth to his mission. I thought about the word seek. There seems to be an urgency and intensity to that word. It is so action oriented. Then there is the word saved, which I looked up in an online Bible dictionary, and it really had nothing to do with asking Jesus into your heart. It is more about bringing deliverance, protection, and even wholeness to people.”

Krystal then spoke. “When I think of Jesus seeking those who are lost, I think of the story we tell the kids often—the story of the good shepherd who has one hundred sheep. He leaves the ninety-nine and goes looking for the one who is lost. What a great metaphor of what Jesus does and what he wants us to do.”

Tamara added, “I read those three verses that talk about going to all the world and being the witness of Jesus—I think I have heard it referred to as the great commission.”

Pastor Phil nodded, then Tamara added, “Going and being seem to be a priority with Jesus—they are part of the last words before he went back to heaven.”

Pastor Phil jumped in. “What words would we use to describe the mission of Jesus and the mission of the community of faith? We have rebuilding and restoration on the flip chart, but what other words would you use?”

Team members began to share. Going and being, helping people find life, giving it our all, seeking with urgency, helping the broken and vulnerable, caring for the poor, wholeness, recovery.

Pastor Phil frantically wrote all of this on the flip chart, then stood back to look at it and said, “That is quite a list, isn’t it? Is this our current focus at Riverside? Should it be?”

David, looking at the list and thinking about the current ministries, answered, “In some ways yes and some ways no.”

“Thanks for a very decisive answer,” Pastor Phil said, and the whole team started laughing. Pastor Phil then added, “I think this is critically important. But, I also think that if this is the scorecard we would use to determine ministry effectiveness, we would get a failing grade, right?” Everyone knew that he was right and it was a very sobering moment. “Anyone got anything to add?” asked Pastor Phil.

Bob spoke first. “I am not sure we are doing ministry poorly. I believe we are doing everything with excellence and to the best of our ability. Some people are being

impacted, new people are still showing up on a regular basis, and there is a sense of community. I see the problem as more about using the wrong scorecard.”

Rick added, “I have been at Riverside since it began twenty-five years ago. I think about how we measured ministry success in the beginning and all that was on that list, many of us have been concluding that we are doing well according to that list.”

Josh spoke up. “Since I wasn’t born twenty-five years ago, what was on that original list?”

Rick responded, “Now I really feel old.” Everyone laughed. “The list included awesome Sunday morning experiences where both seekers and believers could worship together. It was about the kind of music we used, the language we spoke, the way we taught, the use of technology. It was about having strong small groups, excellent family ministries, a great facility, being purpose driven.”

Tamara jumped in. “Those were the metrics presented at all the conferences we went to in those early days and from the megachurches we tried to exemplify.”

Pastor Phil added, “We came back and cloned pretty much everything we were taught, tweaking the model to fit our unique community.”

John added, “It worked for so many years. People were being reached, there were lots of baptisms, people were investing in relationships, creativity was flowing, groups were growing, and we had some of the best kids and student ministries anywhere.”

Krystal added, “But that was twenty-five years ago and so much has changed.” Everyone nodded in agreement.

Josh jumped in, “I am twenty-four years old and in my short lifetime the Internet was introduced and cell phones—then smart phones—have become the norm. Email

became the new way of communication and now we have added texting and other kinds of messaging. Social media has become a way of life for so many and so many electronic toys and gadgets we have today were not even invented twenty-five years ago.”

Before Josh could finish, Ryan added, “As a result, the pace of life for most people is frantic. People are busier than ever, both parents are working just to keep up and kids are involved in more activities than ever.”

Brad added, “There has been an increase in brokenness, too. Some families are hanging on by a thread, kids are feeling alone and uncared for. Maybe there is a correlation between all of this.”

Pastor Phil spoke, “So much has changed all around us but it seems Riverside hasn’t changed the way we are doing church to keep up.”

John defensively responded, “We have made changes to keep up. Look at the way we use technology. Look at some of things we do today that are so different than twenty-five years ago.”

Pastor Phil said, “I agree we have made some tweaks to our ministry and call it change, but we really haven’t changed our methods or our mindset. I would conclude those are still twenty-five years old.”

Then Rick asked, “How would we have to change and how would we do things differently to meet these cultural changes?”

David said, “It sounds like we need to make some big changes, not just a tweak or two like we have done in the past.”

Krystal added, “I think change scares people. Maybe that is why we have simply modified what we have done. I know it scares me at times.”

At this point Pastor Phil said, “I think this would be a great time to break for lunch.” Then he wrote SOLUTION at the top of a blank flip chart page. “After lunch, this is what we are going to work on, looking at what kind of church Riverside might have to become in order to impact the lives of people in our culture. A culture that is increasingly broken, but does not have a positive opinion or image of the church.”

Bob responded, “It sounds like it is going to be a long afternoon.” Everyone half laughed and nodded in agreement. Pastor Phil gave instructions about lunch and what time the team should be back in the meeting room. He also encouraged his team to take some time alone or in groups of two or three to pray about the afternoon. The group dispersed, some immediately checking their phones for messages, others heading straight to the dining room.

During lunch, Pastor Phil watched and listened to his team. The mood in the room was more solemn than it had been at breakfast. Overhearing some of the conversations, he realized that the morning conversations had not ended with lunch. There was a level of engagement between the team members and the conversations were not negative about what was being done but more positively focused on what can and must be done. Pastor Phil knew he had a fully committed team who were focused on finding a solution to the challenges Riverside faced, as well as the problems the church in general faced.

Some small groups and some individuals headed out after lunch. As Pastor Phil walked and prayed, his way of connecting with God, he noticed individuals and a few groups enjoying the sunshine but also deep in prayer for the afternoon. Pastor Phil knew that if they were going to find a solution to this ministry problem they would need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Pastor Phil stopped and sat on a big rock, praying for

wisdom and guidance and insight. Soon, the alarm on his phone went off and he knew it was time for what might just be the most important session of this whole retreat.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

As the afternoon session began, Pastor Phil grabbed two books off the chair in front of him and held them up to the group. The first was the book *Kingdom Come* by Reggie McNeal and the second was *Nudge* by Leonard Sweet. Pastor Phil had just completed a doctoral program and these two books were part of the required reading. Pastor Phil found these two books the most influential to his thinking during his coursework. He then spoke, “I asked each of you to read these two books in preparation for our retreat this weekend. How many of you were able to read both of them?” All hands went up. Pastor Phil, impressed, went on. “How about we start this afternoon by summarizing some of what you read and how it has impacted your thinking?”

David spoke first, “I loved the whole understanding of the kingdom of God in both of them. It seemed that being kingdom minded and having a restorative heart had a lot to do with each other.”

Ryan added, “I think that this was the first time I realized that the church and the kingdom of God were two different things. I always assumed they were one and the same.”

Krystal added, “I love what McNeil says about the kingdom, ‘God’s plan and purpose in the world are always cutting edge because the kingdom is always about bringing healing to the afflicted, binding up the broken hearted, releasing people from captivity and redeeming everything diminished by sin.’<sup>192</sup>” Then she added, “Isn’t this what we were talking about this morning, how to help the very same people described here? Isn’t that speaking to the increased brokenness in our culture?”

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<sup>192</sup> Reggie McNeil, *Kingdom Come* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2015), xvii.

Rick added, “But will this meet the needs and address the issues we talked about already? Will it bring credibility back to the church?”

Pastor Phil grabbed his copy of *Kingdom Come* and said, “Listen to what McNeil writes, ‘The key to church renewal lies in anchoring the mission and purpose of the church to the biblical teaching of what it means to be the people of God.’<sup>193</sup> Then he says, ‘Aligning the church with the Kingdom will both serve the community and save the church from missional irrelevance.’<sup>194</sup> Isn’t that what we are talking about today?”

Brad added, “Sweet says something similar, ‘Nudge argues for the triangulation of all three: Scripture, Culture and Spirit. But we walk a tonal tightrope: in touch with the world, in tune with the Spirit through highly pitched souls, with heightened sensitivities that connect to the scripture and then to the Spirit and then to the culture.’<sup>195</sup> Isn’t that what we want, the work of the Spirit, rooted in the scripture but focused on the community?”

David spoke up. “There seems to be some confusion about what the Kingdom of God is. Sweet says, ‘The metaphor of the kingdom has become for us a way of talking about a social and political activity in the world. Wherever Jesus is found, the kingdom of God is a present reality,’<sup>196</sup> so it is really about being sensitive where God is at work in the world, right?”

Then Kathy said, “Isn’t that what Sweet is saying when he quotes George W. Stroup, ‘Too often churches have understood themselves to be taking God to a godless

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>195</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Nudge* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 43.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 87.

world rather than following God into a world where God is already redemptively present’?”<sup>197</sup>

Marnie added, “I love what Sweet said, “Maybe it is time to get our heads out of the books and lift our heads up to see what is going on out there, and reaching for those around us in distress.’<sup>198</sup> Isn’t that all about our focus?”

Then it was Bob’s turn to speak. “Jesus talked a lot about coming for the broken, the poor and the vulnerable. He modeled this by most of the miracles he performed. It seemed he directed the church to meet the needs of these people in the same way, encouraging them to deal with the pain and suffering that happens in a broken world.”

“Isn’t that what McNeil is implying,” David added, “when we writes, ‘Jesus talked a lot about how we treat one another, especially when it comes to the poor and disadvantaged. He called us to a life of meeting the needs of others and alleviating the suffering and pain that is naturally part of living in a broken world.’<sup>199</sup> I think this needs to be a key part of the solution for Riverside. I think we have been too church focused and not enough kingdom focused.”

Rick added, “Our discipleship has always been about somehow being more holy and more like Jesus, but as Sweet puts it, ‘Holiness is not about being good. Holiness is about the bad: touching unclean lepers; eating and drinking with criminals, tax collectors, and prostitutes; letting yourself be touched by soiled souls.’<sup>200</sup> Isn’t that what Jesus was

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>199</sup> McNeil, *Kingdom Come*, xiv.

<sup>200</sup> Sweet, *Nudge*, 245.

all about during his ministry? Meeting the needs and hurts and wounds of people he met?”

Pastor Phil jumped in, “I think we are on to something. It is about being kingdom minded, believing that the idea of the kingdom is finding the life that God intended and helping others find it as well. It is about being outward focused and not so church centered. It is about taking the love and good news of Jesus to the world in practical and tangible ways so they can find the life they are already looking for. The thoughts we have shared and the ideas and insights in these two books need to be used as a foundation when it comes to finding a solution for Riverside.” Everyone nodded in agreement.

Pastor Phil then encouraged everyone to take a five-minute stretch break and grab a drink if they needed one.

After the short break, Pastor Phil walked up to the flip chart page that had the words that they had written earlier in the morning—GOING AND BEING, HELPING PEOPLE FIND LIFE, GIVING IT OUR ALL, SEEKING WITH URGENCY, HELPING THE BROKEN AND VULNERABLE, CARING FOR THE POOR, WHOLENESS, RECOVERY. Then he added the words MISSIONAL and KINGDOM FOCUSED to the list. He said, “We all concluded that these words are important to the foundation of our future ministry at Riverside.” Then he walked to the flip chart that had the word SOLUTIONS on the top of it and grabbed a marker and said, “We have to keep all of this in mind as we think about a solution. Let’s brainstorm for a while about what solutions are possible to meet the needs of a broken culture as well as help the church find greater credibility. There are no bad ideas at this point, just share what you are thinking about.

We need to think outside the box, and it is okay to blow up everything we are currently doing if it will help us impact our community.”

Bob jumped in, “Are you saying it is demolition time?” Everyone laughed, but Bob added, “Are we sure the people at Riverside are ready for this?”

Pastor Phil responded, “Let’s not look at the obstacles right now. We’ll leave that for our discussion this evening.”

Todd, the creative arts director, spoke first. “I think we need to start with Sunday morning. We need to move from a seeker-oriented ‘attraction’ model to a more fully engaged worshiping community. Not that I haven’t loved what we have been doing—some of the secular songs have been fun to do as musicians—but from what I have been reading and we have been talking about, it seems that our gatherings need to be more engaging, where people are truly worshiping—not just entertained.”

Ryan spoke next. “We have talked about Sunday morning being the funnel for all other church ministries and that would require what we have been doing, but if that is changing, I agree with Todd that our gatherings need to change as well.”

Rick added, “That doesn’t mean we have to change from being guest friendly, but it means that we need to do what is fully engaging.”

Todd spoke again. “If we are going to reach a new generation, then we have to change what worship services look like and make them more of an experience than simply entertainment.”

Pastor Phil turned to Josh who was the youngest member of the team and asked, “What do people in your generation want out of worship, Josh?”

Josh thought for a moment and responded, “I agree we want an experience and we want to engage in worship, but we want to also be more participative in the service. Not just through singing, but also through other forms of interaction.”

“Like what?”

“We want to feel like the staff knows we are there and what is important to us. We are even open to reading scripture and reciting creeds together, to have more interaction with the teaching, but I am not sure what that would look like.”

David jumped in. “Spending lots of time with our high school students, they want to take the message and discuss it through social media throughout the week. So maybe we need to find a way to facilitate that.”

Then Krystal added, “Being right at the older end of this current generation, the one thing that my peers are looking for is direct biblical teaching. No more ‘Three Ways to Find Happiness’ or ‘Five Ways to Have a Better Marriage.’ Instead we want to see how the Bible clearly speaks into real life and we want the truth even though we might not always agree with it.”

Todd jumped in. “When it comes to the music, we have pretty much eliminated all old hymns from the songs we use, but in a course I am taking on worship, there is a new love for and desire for the ancient hymns. Sometimes done the old way, sometimes done a new way with a new tune or added choruses.”

Pastor Phil said, “Doesn’t this, in some way, feel like we are going backward, re-using the things we once eliminated in order to reach people?”

Ryan added, “I think it is about embracing the best of the past and making it part of the best of the present. The seeker movement was bent on eliminating all from the

past, but maybe left some good things behind in doing so. It is time to embrace the best of both. I think I have heard it called Ancient/Future faith.”

Rick, the board chair, stepped in, “This would be a radical change for us. We would have to be careful how we made it happen. This could blow some of our founders right out the water.”

Ryan could hardly wait for him to finish, “But isn’t this why the church was started twenty-five years ago by these founders? In order to do what it takes to reach people in the culture? It looks like the culture has changed, even what the spiritual explorers look like, so maybe we have to do this and help the founders understand it has been done before—by them.”

Rick responded, “I fully agree with you, but we need to be careful about how we make these changes.”

Josh added, “I think the services have to have lots of images and pictures. We live in a culture where images and visuals are everywhere. The church of the past had wonderful stained-glass windows that reminded the worshiper of key stories in the Bible. We have stripped lots of that away and we need to find a way to put in back in.”

Brad added, “I know in our recovery ministries, one of the key components is community. People come because they get to hang out with the people they are recovering with. I think that people coming on Sunday morning want to experience that same kind of community. It is so hard with such a large group, but we still need to figure out how to do this better.”

Pastor Phil added, “I agree, Brad, in fact, the series that seemed to help us move this forward the most was ‘Table Talk.’ We talked about the importance of gathering

around the table and community. I remember we set the tables up in the front part of the auditorium and people really loved it.”

Tamara jumped in. “I think that is why so many people sit in the Café and watch the service on video. They like to sit with others around the table. They hang out with those people before and after services as well.”

Ryan, one of the other key teachers, jumped in, “I am part of this next generation and from what I am hearing and reading, stories and metaphors are the new language of our generation. We need to teach using more stories and more metaphors. The Bible is a book full of stories and metaphors, so we already have the basis to teach it. The Bible is filled with lots of stories about restoration and healing and life change and we need to build our messages around those stories if that is what our culture needs.”

Pastor Phil, sensing a need to move on, added, “We have already concluded that Sunday morning is not the wide end of the funnel anymore, so what other things do we need to change in order to have a greater impact on our culture?”

Marnie, who had been pretty quiet, spoke up. “I lead the spiritual maturity ministries at Riverside, including our small groups, and we don’t really have a clear spiritual maturity track that helps people grow in their relationship with Jesus. We have lots of pieces and different ministries, but there is no clear sense of direction.”

Brad responded, “In our recovery ministries, we have a clear track—it is called the twelve steps and we do see people in small groups working these steps leading to life change. Maybe we have to have a look at this with a broader perspective.”

Quickly, Marnie shot back, “Are you saying that all of our small groups should follow the twelve steps? That would never fly. It just wouldn’t work.”

Brad responded, “I am not saying that we use the twelve steps exactly, but there are some key things that I think could be covered in all forms of spiritual maturity, especially if those words like restoration and wholeness are going to act as a foundation for moving forward. The creator of the twelve steps built them on eight strong biblical growth principles that I think could act as a framework for any kind of spiritual maturity.”

Ed jumped right in, “So, what are these eight principles?”

Brad responded as Pastor Phil wrote on another flip chart. “They are 1) surrendering to the plan of God for your life on a daily basis, 2) confession to God and others to find healing, 3) relational reconciliation and extending forgiveness, 4) accountability with safe people, 5) having a daily time alone with God using spiritual disciplines in order to listen to his voice, 6) seeking guidance and decision making from God and wise counsel, 7) to prepare and share your personal story of life change and transformation through Jesus and 8) continue to be part of a small spiritual community.”

Marnie sat there thinking deeply, and responded, “You know what, I think you’re right. These are the critical components for spiritual growth. I like these. Why haven’t we talked about this before, Brad?”

Brad had nothing to say immediately in response to this question. Then he said, “One of the other key components of the twelve steps is that you do this thing called an inventory. You look below the surface of your life and examine some of the regrets you are living with and some of the resentments over what others have done for you. I am suggesting that everyone should do some kind of inventory because it gives you a great

starting point to grow from. It also helps you discover what is holding you back from growing.”

Marnie was intrigued and shared how she had been looking for a spiritual assessment tool that would help people determine where they are at and what it would take to grow. She wondered if the inventory Brad used in the recovery groups would be useful.

Rick jumped in at this point. “We are talking a lot about restoration, but what does this word really mean? If it is going to be important to our future, shouldn’t we all be on the same page when it comes to what it is?”

Josh, who always had his laptop open, started looking up the word on an online dictionary. After a few seconds he read, “Restoration means to bring back to its former state, to bring back from a state of ruin, decay or disease of the like. To repair, to renew, to recover.”

Pastor Phil said, “How do you feel about that definition? Does it fit what we are really all about?”

Ryan jumped in, “I like some of it the idea of repairing and renewing, but do we really want to bring back someone to their former state, which is really a sinful state?”

David, who also had his laptop open, followed up, “There is a biblical definition of restoration and it goes like this, ‘To receive back more than has been lost to the point where the final state is greater than the original condition.’”

Ryan responded, “I like that one a whole lot better because it is about helping someone not just return to where they were before their brokenness but move then beyond that. That is what following Jesus is all about, isn’t it?”

Brad said, “That’s what we are all about in our recovery ministries.”

Pastor Phil walked up to the “solution” flip chart and asked, “How about we create our own definition of restoration so that if this is the direction we are going, we can explain it to people who might questions? What words or phrases do we want to be part of our definition?”

Brad spoke first. “I think healing and wholeness and recovery need to be part of the definition.”

Krystal said, “I think it is about creating a safe place for people to find healing.”

Brad added, “I think it needs to include that those who find restoration are helping others find it as well.”

Marnie spoke up, “I don’t want to lose the idea of spiritual maturity in this definition because ultimately that is what we want people to do.”

Rick entered the conversation. “If we are talking about healing and wholeness and recovery, shouldn’t there be a ‘what’ are we recovering from?”

Brad asked, “What did you have in mind?”

Rick responded, “Maybe brokenness, maybe addictions, maybe the idea of compulsive behaviors?”

Pastor Phil jumped in and began writing on the flip chart. “How about this? A community of wounded healers who are bringing healing, recovery, and wholeness to those who struggle with addictions, compulsive behavior, and other kinds of brokenness in a safe, spiritually maturing community.”

Ed spoke up. “Pastor Phil, you have a great way of summarizing things. I like this. It would be a great mission statement if it wasn’t so long, but it might be the foundation for a great vision or purpose statement.”

“But will this accomplish our goal of reaching out to our community, meeting their needs in love and building credibility for the church so we have a stronger foundation to continue reaching out?” John added.

David jumped in, “Our student leaders have been reading through the book *Next Christian* together. The author, Gabe Lyons, talks about the importance of restoration. I have the e-book with me, and I know I highlighted some of parts of it with this weekend in mind.”

Pastor Phil added, “While David is looking this up, does anybody have any concerns to this point?”

John, who was never one to shy away from debate, asked, “What about those people who are not broken or don’t think they are? How will they feel if we go this restoration route?”

Brad quickly interjected, “We have a word for that group. It is ‘denial’ and it is not a river in Egypt.” Everyone laughed.

John replied, “I’m serious. There is a whole bunch of people who don’t think they have any brokenness. What about them?”

Pastor Phil halted the discussion. “Maybe we should leave that until tonight when we look at some of the obstacles and opposition to being a restoration-focused church. David, have you found those references yet?”

“Sure have. Let me read a couple for you. Gabe writes, ‘Restorers envision the world as it was meant to be and they work toward that vision. They recognize that the world will not be completely healed until Christ’s return, but they believe that the process begins now as we partner with God.’<sup>201</sup> He also writes, ‘Restorers exhibit the mind-set, humility and commitment that seem destined to rejuvenate the momentum of faith. They have a particular way of thinking, being and doing that is radically different from previous generations. Telling others about Jesus is important, but conversion isn’t their only motive. Their mission is to infuse the world with beauty, grace, justice and love.’”<sup>202</sup>

Kathy said, “I really like that. It looks like it will not only impact the culture, but it will also help us reach out to the next generation.”

Todd added, “Isn’t this what the gospel is really all about? Isn’t this why Jesus came? Doesn’t it seem to resonate with the mission and ministry of Jesus that we talked about earlier?” Most people seemed to agree.

Ryan responded, “When you think of the Bible as one big story, restoration is a big part of the story.”

Tamara said, “I am not sure what you mean, Ryan.”

“Instead of seeing the Bible as a bunch of chopped-up narratives, it is really one big story. It goes something like this: creation, fall, reconciliation, restoration, and consummation or heaven. God’s plan for his church was for it to be a safe place for people to reconcile their relationship with God and with each other but also to provide restoration.”

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<sup>201</sup> Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christian: How a New Generation Is Restoring the Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 110.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

Rick piped up, “It is really interesting how it all fits together. The mission of Jesus and the mission for the church are the same—reconciliation and restoration. I see how this makes sense.”

Marnie jumped in with what sounded like an objection, “I understand what we are saying and I do agree with it, but what are we leading people to? What does wholeness or restoration really look like? I think this is critical to helping people move toward it—they must know what ‘it’ really is.”

Pastor Phil responded, “I totally agree, Marnie. We need to figure out what wholeness really looks like.”

Bob, who hadn’t said anything for a while, jumped in. “I agree that we need to create an end point or picture of what it looks like, but I don’t want to fall into the trap of people thinking they have arrived or turning this into a bunch of spiritual habits to embrace and rules to follow.”

Ed responded, “I agree with Bob, we can’t let that happen. It can turn into legalism in a heartbeat.”

Krystal said, “One verse I have always liked is John 10:10, which talks about Jesus helping us find life and life to the fullest. Shouldn’t that authentic life Jesus promised be the description of wholeness?”

Pastor Phil said, “I like where you are going with this, Krystal. I agree that wholeness and the life Jesus came to bring should be one and the same.”

David responded, “But what does that kind of life look like?”

“That is a great question,” Pastor Phil said. “Why don’t we take a shot at describing that kind of life, making sure we use the teaching of Jesus as our source of this description.”

Pastor Phil ripped a page off one of the flip charts and then had Josh tape it to one of the few spaces remaining on the wall. Then he took a marker and moved toward the board. “Okay, how would we describe this kind of life?”

Kathy spoke first. “I think many people are looking for meaning and purpose and to make a difference and find a reason for why they are here.” Pastor Phil summarized that on the flipchart.

Bob added, “If there is one thing people are really looking for, it is hope. That sense that tomorrow can be better than today.” Pastor Phil added that to the list.

Brad added, “Since we are talking about addiction, there should be a sense of freedom from these kinds of behaviors.”

David jumped in. “I think there is so much relational instability in our culture that we need to include the idea of relational stability and intimate relationships.”

John added, “When I look around, I see lots of discontentment, with so many people chasing after money and stuff to bring happiness. What if the idea of contentment and freedom from consumerism was part of the picture?”

Todd added, “People today seem like they are on a never-ending search for happiness but they are looking for it in all the wrong places. What if this kind of life was about experiencing a different level of happiness?”

“What about the ability to make wise choices and not pay the price of making the wrong choices?” Tamara said. Pastor Phil continued to summarize all of this on the flip chart.

Then Ed added, “There is a lot of fear, anxiety, and uncertainty in our culture. Maybe we should include something about faith and the ability to face your fears.”

As people continued to share and Pastor Phil summarized, a sense of excitement filled the room. Pastor Phil asked, “What other words might be part of this picture?” Words like honesty, transparency, simplicity, generosity, gratitude, joy, passion, and excitement were added to the list.

Ryan jumped in. “There are some key questions all of us ask. Questions about how it all got started, questions about destiny, questions about how to fit in, what is my purpose, where can I find hope? Those questions would have to be answered.”

Brad added, “This life should be all about having a personal relationship with God, but one that is not about the rote rituals of religious activities.”

Kathy added, “I think not only do we find this kind of life, but we share our story with others so they can find that same kind of life.”

Then there was silence for a few moments. Pastor Phil asked, “Anything more needed to be added?”

No one responded, but soon Josh spoke up. “I have nothing to add, but I know all of my friends are looking for the things we’ve listed on the flip chart. Even those who have no church connection or relationship with Jesus.”

Ryan said, “I think you could share this list with anyone and they would want most, if not all, of it. If this is the picture of what abundant life looks like, I think it is a great one.”

Pastor Phil, sensing a bit of fatigue on the faces of his team, responded, “You all look like you need a break for some coffee or a drink or to use the washroom or just get a breath of fresh air. Let’s take ten minutes and then will come back and try to create a model for what we are trying to accomplish.”

AFTER THE AFTERNOON BREAK

Pastor Phil gathered everyone back together and they slowly made their way back to their seats. He then said, “Let’s quickly summarize where we are at so far before we take the next big step in looking at a model of what this might look like. Last night, we talked about the increase in brokenness in our culture and how the church has lost its credibility in the culture. This morning, we looked at Riverside and honestly assessed where we are at. After lunch, we talked about being Kingdom-minded and focused.”

Ryan jumped in, “Just on that point, the practical application of this for Riverside should be that we are not trying to build our church but we are trying to build *the* Church. If someone we help ends up going to another church in town, we need to be okay with that.”

“Good point Ryan,” Pastor Phil responded. “Let’s keep going on the review. We then talked about changes we need to make to our Sunday morning gatherings. I would like to include to what we said about continuing to focus on being guest friendly and using restoration-focused language. We talked about a new discipleship model that uses the key points of recovery as a framework. We described what it means to be restoration focused and why it was biblical. We detailed what wholeness might look like and did our best to describe it. We talked about being mission-focused, which is all about going and doing. We discussed helping the poor and vulnerable but I don’t think we need to spend too much time elaborating on that because of the great work Hope Place is providing. Does that summarize what we have talked about so far?”

Rick responded, “I think that does it. We have done a lot work during this retreat. I am going to have to take time off work just to recover.” Everyone snickered.

Pastor Phil then asked, “If we think that being a restoration-focused church is where we want to go, what might that mean for Riverside?”

Marnie spoke first. “We need to make sure our core people are spiritually maturing and finding a place of accountability. They need to be grounded in scripture.”

Brad added, “From my recovery experience, becoming restoration-focused could look very messy. Are we prepared for it?”

Ryan said, “We have to change the way we look at people. We have to make sure that we live out our slogan ‘come as you are’ and we need to look at everyone through grace-healed eyes.”

“As leaders,” Bob said, “we need to make sure that we are open and transparent about our brokenness. If we want this to be a safe place, we will need to create that by our own appropriate vulnerability.”

David added, “Building on what Ryan said, we are going to need to help people understand the root causes of brokenness, addiction, and poverty. Once they understand, it is so much easier to reach out and help.”

Rick said, “This is going to be a radical shift. We are going to have to carefully introduce it and make sure we are communicating the ‘why’ we are doing this over and over again.”

Pastor Phil added, “We have spent a weekend devoted to wading through all of this, plus the time we spent prepping for it. We are further ahead than the Riverside people and we will have to slowly bring them up to speed.” Everyone nodded in agreement to these last points.

Pastor Phil then asked, “This is what we want to be all about. We want to be missional in our approach, but also be attractional in our services, so that those who will check Riverside out for the first time will find our services worshipful but also practical. How do we work this all together? What might the model look like?”

Bob responded first. “I think Sunday morning should not so much be the funnel, as we have described it, but more like the hub. It needs to be at the center of all we do.”

Pastor Phil had Josh hang up a couple of flip chart pages so there was a clean place to write and he drew a circle in the center of the page. “This is Sunday morning. It is no longer the top of the funnel where people enter Riverside. There is a gathering aspect to it, but also a sending aspect as well. What does it look like beyond this?”

Bob, who is a good strategic thinker, got up from his seat and took the marker from Pastor Phil. “I think we need a circle around the outside of the page labeled ‘the community.’ This is about the people we are trying to impact and gain credibility with.” He then handed the marker back to Pastor Phil and sat down.

Ryan added, “If this is the start of the model and the church is the one trying to make an impact on the culture, then how do we bridge between the church and the culture?”

Bob jumped in, “We need to have different points flowing from the church that somehow connect with the people we are trying to reach.”

Ryan added, “I like the phrase ‘touch points.’ It kind of describes what we are trying to do. What does everyone else think?” Most seem to agree that these bridges to the community should be called ‘touch points.’

Then Pastor Phil asked, “What do these touch points, as we are calling them look like?”

Krystal responded, “I think they could be made up of a group of ministries that are reaching the community to help in the restoration process—if restoration is going to be our focus.”

Marnie added, “I agree, but it just shouldn’t be church ministries that are the touch points to the community. I think we need to equip, train, and help individuals reach out in restorative ways to impact friends, family members, and neighbors.”

Rick then added, “Maybe there are two types of touch points. One type is organized—the ministry ones—and the other happens more organically—the people reach out ones.”

David responded, “I like that. Organized and organic touch points.”

Pastor Phil took a marker in hand and he continued the diagram. “In the middle, we have the church and things that go on inside the church, Sunday services, youth ministry, kids ministry, small groups, etc. Then we have the big circle that represents the community we are trying to impact and find some credibility with. Then we have these organic touch points.” He drew a series of arrows with circles at the end of them on one side of the flip chart. Then he added, “On the other side we have organized touch point ministries.” He drew arrows and circles on the other half of the page.

John added, “But let’s not have the arrows only pointing one way, toward the community. I think they should also point toward the church, because these will be some key places where people start their connection with Riverside.”

Brad added, “We are seeing this already with our recovery ministries. More than half the people in these ministries have not attended a Sunday morning service yet. In our grief ministry, that number is almost eighty percent.”

Tamara added, “I don’t think ministries like children and youth and small groups should be excluded from having a touch point component as part of their activities.”

Krystal, David and Marnie all agreed that this was important.

Pastor Phil asked, “So, how do we define a touch point ministry?”

Todd responded, “How about something like this? A touch point ministry is a ministry of Riverside that is focused on reaching people in the greater community with tangible acts of love with the hope that some of them will find their way to the Riverside community. But it is okay if they don’t and they end up in another church or don’t connect with church at all.”

Ryan responded, “I like that. It could be simplified, that there is no hook to these ministries, just a hope that people would respond and choose to be part of Riverside.”

After a pause, John added, “That will be quite the change for us. We have always done what we have done to attract people to our church. Attendance is what we have always used to measure effectiveness, and this would look completely different.”

Bob said, “That is why we will need a new set of metrics for this new model. The old way of keeping score was how many people showed up on Sunday and how much offering we took in. That doesn’t fit with this model.”

Pastor Phil asked, “What kind of things are we already doing at Riverside that would be considered a touch point ministry?”

Brad, in charge of recovery, spoke first. “We have our twelve-step recovery ministry, our grief support ministry, our ministry to help people heal after a divorce, a variety of other support groups, and we can’t forget Hope Place.”

Ryan jumped in. “I agree. They help thousands of people yearly and we never consider them in the way we measure impact.”

“What else?” asked Pastor Phil.

Krystal spoke next. “From a children’s ministry perspective, we have our community moms group each week and we have our summer day camps. Lots of kids and moms who attend these groups are part of the community but not the church.”

Rick added, “Our outreach ministry is designed for this. However, we have simply marketed it inside the church, not outside. But we should.”

Pastor Phil responded, “That’s a good start and I am sure there are more things we are doing or could be doing.”

David responded, “I agree, but we don’t want to make our church people so busy that they don’t have time to build the relationships on the organic touch point side.”

Marnie added, “I couldn’t agree more. Too often people are so busy doing church stuff they have no time to build relationships outside the church.”

“We would also have to make sure that we talk a lot about these organic touch points to keep them in front of people regularly,” added Pastor Phil.

Marnie responded, “I think that small groups should include this as part of the study for each small group. Maybe a video at the start of each semester would be a great idea.” There was general agreement from the other leaders.

Pastor Phil asked, “Anything more anyone wants to add to this discussion and model?”

Rick immediately responded, “I really like this model, but it is such a radical shift when it comes to how we are doing ministry today. I think it is the right thing to do, but I am wondering how people are going to respond. I have a sense that some won’t like this restoration focus and they are not going to like this model.”

Ed followed up, “I agree with you, Rick. I worry about how the founders who are still part of Riverside are going to react.”

Bob added, “There might be lots of pushback, but if this is where we think God is leading us, we have to be ready to answer the questions and calm the critics, but then we need to move forward with this.”

Rick responded, “We will just have to be careful about it all. We don’t want to blow up Riverside.”

With those comments causing everyone to pause and think, Pastor Phil concluded, “We have done lots of great work over the last twenty-four hours. I think we should take a break to rest our brains—maybe go for a walk and gather for dinner in an hour. After dinner, we will have a shorter session this evening and we will look at some of the objections and obstacles to this focus and this model.”

## THE OBSTACLES

The dining room was quieter than it had been at breakfast and lunch. His team and his board were showing the signs of fatigue. He knew that this session, as critical as it was, needed to be the shortest one of the retreat. Giving his team a chance to linger a little longer at dinner, he finally announced it was time for the last session of the day and he promised them that it wouldn't be a long one.

As they arrived at the meeting, a few of the team grabbed another cup of coffee, hoping it would give them more energy and alertness. Pastor Phil had Josh remove the flip chart pages that contained the afternoon's notes and tape them onto the wall, then had him organize some of what had already been written. Pastor Phil quickly recapped what they had discussed to this point. Then he walked up to one of the flip charts and wrote "OBSTACLES and OPPOSITION."

"There is no doubt that this is a pretty radical change in direction for Riverside," Pastor Phil said. "I think all of us, or at least most of us, agree this is the direction that we need to take if we want to impact our community and regain some credibility for the church. But this will not happen easily. There will be people who will oppose these kinds of changes and there will be genuine obstacles that will stand in the way of us making this restoration-focused church a reality. What I want to do tonight is to look at some of the opposition and obstacles we will face. We can then briefly look at how we might overcome an obstacle or how we might compassionately respond to any opposition. So, who wants to go first?"

Rick didn't miss a beat. "I have been thinking that many people at Riverside are going to see this change in direction as a 'bait and switch' kind of deal. We started with a clear vision and mission and this feels like a dramatic change. There are founders who I

have talked to who love the current way we do church and are already sensing some changes to that and they are not too happy about it. How are we going to make sure that this doesn't become divisive and cost us some key people at Riverside?" There was a tone to his statement that made Pastor Phil wonder if Rick was completely on board, but he chose not to question him.

John spoke next. "I agree with Rick. This will seem like a very radical change from what we are doing and we need to take it really slow when it comes to implementation." His tone also made it sound like he was a little unsure of all the work the team had done that day.

Ryan, who was all about making significant changes to reach the young adults in his generation, added, "I think we have to make these changes and implement them at a pace that is manageable, but the most important thing is that we communicate why we are doing this over and over again."

Brad jumped in, "This isn't as radical a change as we might be assuming. Aren't we doing a lot of this already? Hasn't some of this been changing over the last five years or more? Are we letting fear get in the way of moving forward in this direction?"

Rick was quick to answer these questions, "I agree, Brad, but some people aren't going to see it that way so we need to be careful."

Brad responded, "As long as careful doesn't mean we take forever to do this or we let people change our mind."

Rick, a little heated, said, "I don't think that is what we are talking about. But I do think we need to be careful."

Pastor Phil, noticing people getting a little bit agitated, mainly because of fatigue, responded, “I think we all agree that we need to have a careful plan of implementation with lots of communication, especially around why we are making these changes. What might another obstacle be?”

Marnie spoke next, “From a spiritual maturity standpoint, if we are going to consider using some of the twelve-step recovery material and key principles as part of our spiritual formation process, and I agree we should, we are going to have to deal with people who believe the twelve steps are a secular process and might think we are simply spiritualizing them.”

Brad jumped in, “You’re right, Marnie. I have had people level those very criticisms about our recovery ministry at times. I have had to do a lot of research regarding how the steps were created. In my research, I was surprised that names like John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards state the importance of recovery during their times of ministry. I also discovered that a pastor named Frank Buchman led a spiritual community called the Oxford Group that was highly influenced by Wesley and Edwards. He was the one who came up with the original eight principles that I had shared earlier. He influenced the founders of AA. The twelve steps have some strong spiritual and biblical roots. Sure, they got modified and watered down a little by AA, especially the spiritual parts, but that shouldn’t diminish their original roots.”

Marnie added, “Maybe we could create a little written summary of how the steps came to be and show that they really do have biblical roots.”

Krystal added, “I didn’t know all that was behind the steps, Brad. I guess in my head I have had some of those critical thoughts about the steps and that really make a difference to my thinking.”

“Any other obstacles or opposition?”

Rick jumped in with a similar tone as before. “The whole area of restoration and recovery and brokenness, what about the people who don’t think they are broken?”

Brad responded, “Like I said earlier, we have a word for them—denial.”

Rick didn’t laugh and quickly retorted, “I know we talked about this earlier. But seriously, there are people who don’t see themselves as broken and they will have that sense that this church has nothing for them.”

Josh, who hadn’t spoken for a while, responded, “But haven’t we said that the church isn’t just about us, but also about those who are not already part of it? If people don’t see themselves as broken, then maybe they could see themselves as helpers of those who are.”

Pastor Phil responded, “From the mouths of babes comes wisdom.” Everyone laughed.

Todd, who also been silent for a while, added, “But aren’t we all broken? Didn’t Paul write to the Romans and say, ‘All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God’? Aren’t we all spiritually broken and needing the relationship between us and God restored?”

Bob added, “You can’t be spiritually broken and live with other spiritually broken people and not let it add to your brokenness, can you?”

Brad added, “Too often we look at those who are really broken, whose addictions are obvious, and we feel like we are not like them so we must not be broken. But brokenness doesn’t look the same in everyone. That doesn’t mean any of us are immune to it.”

Rick jumped in, “I’m just telling you that I have heard that very statement from a number of Riverside people.”

Pastor Phil added, “Maybe we need to teach more about this whole idea of brokenness.”

David responded, “I think you have done a good job, Phil. You have been very open about your own brokenness and your struggle with a mental illness, so that should have given people an idea that all of us struggle with something.”

Rick said, “Honestly, some people I have talked to are tired of hearing about your brokenness, Phil.”

Brad jumped to Pastor Phil’s defense. “That is unfair. I have talked to dozens of people who find it refreshing that a pastor would be so open about his struggle. They feel like it makes you more relatable, Phil.”

“Thanks Ryan. I really appreciate that,” Pastor Phil responded. “Are there other concerns?”

Tamara, one of the quieter board members, shared, “I don’t fully agree with some of the comments I have heard, especially about recovery, but there are some people who think that all we have to do is to call our brokenness sin and get more serious about discipleship and spiritual habits and we will be fine.”

Ryan, now sitting on the edge of his seat, ready to burst, responded, “That is a real issue. This whole idea that if we read our Bible more, pray more, fast more, journal more, our brokenness will go away is just a myth. How many people have felt like faith failures because they did all those things and never found total relief for their addictions and brokenness? This kind of traditional discipleship mindset keeps many people from fully finding healing and restoration. It too often keeps people from digging deep into what is going on inside them. They use superficial solutions to deal with the behaviors but they are short lived. I have watched people follow the disciplines and it becomes almost a barrier to seeing the root causes and allows them to deny they have a problem.”

Todd added, “Maybe that is the group that doesn’t think they are broken because they do all the right disciplines.”

Rick responded, “It’s unfair to generalize that way. Some people have found restoration through being disciplined. I am one of them.”

Kathy said, “I wonder if some people think we should do more referring of people with addictions and brokenness to other agencies instead of trying to minister to them as a church.”

Krystal added, “I have heard someone ask that very question.”

Brad responded, “There are times when the severity of the brokenness will require us to refer someone to a trained professional—especially if trauma is involved. But when you do that, and that alone, and these people are not actively part of a healing community, there is something missing in their restoration. Being part of a safe community is critical for restoration of any type. I don’t think that this is an either/or deal. We need to do both.”

Sensing the team was really getting tired and a little bit edgy with each other, Pastor Phil asked, “Any last obstacle someone wants to share?”

There was a pause, then Ed spoke. “Being on the board and also being the treasurer of the corporation, I think this new model could have some very large financial implications.”

“How so?” Ryan asked.

Ed responded, “If the way we fund the ministry at Riverside is through people who show up to weekend services and now the focus is not completely on weekend services, but impacting the culture through these organized touch points, my question is, how are we going to fund this?”

Rick added, “Money at Riverside is already tight. Hope Place and the church plant have already diverted funds from the main campus.”

Bob jumped in, “Aren’t they a part of Riverside? You make it sound like they are separate parts of the church.”

Rick responded, on edge, “You know what I mean, Bob. You oversee the operation finances. You know things are tight.”

“I agree, Rick, things are tight, but we have always believed at Riverside that finances follow vision and if this is the direction God is already working, then I believe that people will get excited and fund it.”

Ed responded, “I hope so, but my fear is that this will eat away further at resources we don’t have.”

Bob responded with some passion, “We have some pretty smart finance people at Riverside and I am sure if we got those people together, we could come up with some

creative solutions. I personally think that weekend offerings are not going to be enough to sustain any ministry in the future that is forward thinking so we need to be figuring this out anyway.”

With that last comment, Pastor Phil sensed that everyone needed to have some time to unwind before going to bed. Snacks were brought into the room. Some people grabbed them and started playing a table game. A few others moved to the ping pong table. Some just sat and watched. A few went to their room early.

Pastor Phil couldn't help but notice that Ed, John and Rick were having a strong discussion in the hallway. He wanted to listen to what was being said, but before he could move in that direction, the three of them walked down the hallway and made their way outside. Pastor Phil got a funny feeling in the pit of his stomach and was concerned about their meeting after the meeting. As he sat and ate his snack, his mind kept going back to some of the comments Rick and John shared. It wasn't so much the words they used, but the tones of their voices. At this point, one of the staff yelled across the room that it was Pastor Phil's turn at the ping pong table. Although he was tired and his mind was wandering, he got up from the chair and grabbed a racket. Over the next hour or so, people slowly headed to their rooms. Alone in his room later that night, Pastor Phil kept replaying some of the comments made, and he started to imagine what the three board members were talking about outside. These swirling thoughts made it hard to fall asleep, but because it was such a long day, fatigue finally took over and he drifted off.

SUNDAY MORNING

Pastor Phil was up early, with countless thoughts running through his mind. Some of those thoughts were positive and exciting. This whole idea of a restoration-focused church was something he believed Riverside needed to do to make a difference in the lives of people in their community. It would keep them from being irrelevant and give them a real mission-oriented focus. But he was also concerned about the tone and subtle pushback he got from the board chair, Rick, and the other board member, John. He still was wondering what might have been said during their private meeting outdoors. Were they excited about the new direction or were they against it? He wasn't sure, but he had an uneasy sense in his stomach that it wasn't a good thing and he wondered how it might affect the final session of the retreat.

He got out of bed, got showered and ready for the morning session, and sat down at the desk in his room. He took out his journal, read the next section of the Bible he was studying, and had a short time of prayer. As he sat there, all he could think about was the excitement he felt on one hand and what seemed like negative pushback on the other. Needing to prepare for the day, he began to write. At the top of the page he wrote the words, "Mission, Values and Strategy." That is what he wanted to focus on at their session. Instead of simply walking into the room after breakfast with a blank page, allowing everyone to try to write this together, he felt like, as the leader, he had to lead this final process. He began to put his own thoughts down in his journal. He paused for a few minutes so that he could summarize all that had been discussed.

Under the word "MISSION" he wrote, "A community helping broken people find wholeness and all people find life." He kind of liked it. Then he thought about the values that might direct this mission and keep it on track. Under "VALUES" he wrote the

words, “People Matter”. He figured that in order to be a restoration-focused church, Riverside would need to be a safe place, where people were transparent and vulnerable and everyone was welcome and accepted. Below that he wrote, “Life Change is the Goal.” He wanted to make sure that the people at Riverside had a sense of what needed to be measured if they were going to be a restoration-focused church. He then wrote, “Mission,” believing that Riverside needed to be a church where those who were finding healing, wholeness, and life change would be excited and orient their lives toward helping others find the same things. He flipped the page and wrote, “Authenticity and Excellence.” There had been a bit of a divide at Riverside between those who wanted excellence at any cost and those who couldn’t care less about excellence but claimed authenticity was all that mattered. Pastor Phil thought they were both integral. He then added to the list, “Worship” and tagged that with the words, “engaging, experiencing the presence of God, must lead to life change.” He then paused for a while. Was there anything left off the list? After some thought, he wrote “Relationships” and expanded the idea, writing, “families are a priority, helping people connect, sorting out conflict and inclusive.” Finally, he wrote the word, “Restoration.” If the mission was all about broken people finding wholeness, then the value of restoration must be on the list.

For a few minutes, he pondered what he had written, and after staring at it, he seemed pleased. He checked his watch and realized it was time for breakfast.

Arriving at breakfast, Pastor Phil noticed that the four members of the leadership team were sitting together. He wanted it to simply be a coincidence, but he wasn’t sure and his intuition was telling him this might have been planned. That table seemed to be having a serious discussion. The staff members were sitting at a couple of tables and he

could tell the conversations were nothing more than small talk. He decided it would be strategic for him to sit with the board members. As he pulled up a chair he noticed the conversation stopped. He asked, “How is everyone doing today?” and the responses were pleasant, so he felt maybe he was overreacting to what he was seeing and feeling.

The morning began with some worship songs. Ryan, the campus pastor, led this time of singing and there was a genuine sense of the presence of God. Pastor Phil had asked David to prepare a short devotional. David shared from Isaiah 43. He talked about how Riverside had gone through some tough times lately but God had been present through it all and was still with them. He then read Isaiah 43:18-19, “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing. Now it springs up in you; don’t you perceive it?” He shared how he believed it was a new day for Riverside and was excited about the new direction that had been discussed over the weekend.

Pastor Phil then led communion and had different members of the team pray in preparation. He had Bob pray for a clear sense of direction. He had Krystal pray for a letting go of the past and a willingness to change. He had Marnie pray a prayer of repentance for Riverside, because they seemed to have been self-focused and had lost some of their love for the community. He had Rick close this time of worship off by praying for unity. Pastor Phil felt that this kind of prayer was needed based on how he was feeling and he felt it might convict Rick a bit, sensing he was not fully unified over this new direction.

Then Pastor Phil folded over two blank pages, revealing behind them the mission and values that he had written in his journal. He shared with the team about what he had written and opened it up for discussion. The team was positive overall about what he had

shared with them. There was some discussion regarding whether there were too many core values and if some could be combined. There were a few questions asking for clarity. There was a suggestion or two of possibly adding a value, but it was decided there were enough and those suggestions could be included in these values. Overall, there seemed to be some pretty good buy-in from those gathered, especially the staff team.

Then Rick spoke up, “Do you think putting the word ‘brokenness’ in the mission statement is a good idea? There are those who find this word a bit divisive. To be honest, I am one of them. Additionally, do we need ‘restoration’ as a core value or could it simply be added under ‘life change?’”

Ryan jumped in immediately, “I think if we are going to be restoration-focused, then restoration would have to be a key value.”

Pastor Phil added, “If I had my way, that would be the first of all the core values because it is really who we want to be.” Pastor Phil could tell by the look on Rick’s face that he was a little bothered by this but he didn’t say anything further.

John then spoke almost like he was supporting Rick. “We just have to be careful with all this brokenness and restoration talk. I know that some people are going to push back against this and we don’t need any more people leaving.”

Pastor Phil, feeling a little frustrated, responded, “I know what you are saying and we need to be careful with how we share this new direction and the strategy we build around it, but to not move forward with this would be a big mistake from my point of view. We would end up doing the same old things we have been doing for the last twenty-five years and we will eventually see continued decline. We are already feeling some money pressure and if people get excited about a new direction and are willing to

do what it takes to make it happen, we will see impact and growth and greater credibility. The money will follow.”

Rick responded quickly, “That is all I am saying. We don’t want to rock the boat so much that people end up leaving.”

Pastor Phil responded, “But we have to make sure we are following the direction God seems to be leading and we need to not let those who are not early adopters of this keep us from moving in this direction.”

John responded, “We just need to be very careful. This is a pretty big change from who we have been. Some people might not like it and we need to make sure we listen to them.”

Pastor Phil realized that this was a three-way discussion so he decided that this might need to be talked more about at the next board meeting. It was close to noon and everyone looked like their brains were on overload. Everyone gathered their belongings in the meeting room. Josh took down the flip chart papers, rolled them up into a tube, and gave them to Pastor Phil. The team moved toward the dining room for lunch, but Pastor Phil noticed that John and Rick were still in the room having a serious discussion. He had a bad feeling about all of this.

AFTER THE ADVANCE

At the next leadership staff meeting, a large block of time was given for following up about the advance. There was a lot of brainstorming about some of the next steps, but there seemed to be a real sense of excitement in the room. Pastor Phil's assistant took copious notes about the discussion and summarized some of the strategic thoughts and created a set of minutes of the meeting. These minutes were forwarded to the board of directors. There was a strong commitment to this direction of being a restoration-focused church.

A week later at the next board meeting, after other agenda items had been dealt with, there was some follow-up discussion about strategy with lots of references to the leadership staff meeting. There seemed to be a general sense of enthusiasm toward this direction and an affirmation of some of the proposed strategy developed by the leadership staff. However, Pastor Phil was reminded by Rick and John, and now Ed, that there needed to be real caution and careful wording used when presenting this new direction to the congregation. Although they seemed to be going along with it, Pastor Phil had a nagging sense that they weren't as fully committed as he hoped.

Over the next two months, both teams discussed the mission, values, and strategy and a final document was ready to present to the congregation. Pastor Phil asked both teams, the staff and the board, if they were fully on board with the written document and all said that they were. However, Pastor Phil noticed there were more "in camera" sessions where he was absent from the board meetings and they seemed to go longer each time. He wondered how this might play out. Would there be a push by some board members to alter or change some of the key parts of this new direction? Time would tell.

The plan was set and would be presented by Pastor Phil on a Sunday set aside each year for a “state of the church” address. Pastor Phil liked the direction, but there was this nagging feeling inside. Something with the board members didn’t sit right with him.

## EPILOGUE

Pastor Phil was asked to meet with Rick and John about a week before he was to present the new direction for Riverside. He hoped they simply wanted to talk further about how the mission, values, and plan needed to be presented with real caution and sensitivity, but he had a bad feeling about this meeting. Rick and Ed shared with Pastor Phil that the board had met and they believed that this direction and plan was divisive and was not inclusive enough—especially the restoration and brokenness parts. Pastor Phil disagreed and gave some strong reasons why. Rick then told Pastor Phil that the board felt that this was a time for change and the first change would be a leadership one. They told Pastor Phil it was time for him to move to a new ministry or job. Riverside would find a new senior leader. Pastor Phil was both shocked and angered by this. He said that he was willing to have a third-party mediator come in and help negotiate a way for him to stay. But he could tell Rick, John, and the rest of the board had made up their mind about his and Riverside's future. Severance was negotiated and after a short time Pastor Phil stepped away from his role at Riverside. He was convinced his vision for the restoration-focused church was at the root of why he was asked to leave, although he was never given the reasons why.

Pastor Phil soon found a smaller church community that was ready to fully embrace this kind of a mission and values. They were a new church in an old building in a neighborhood of some very poor and broken people. Over the next couple of years, that church was involved with incredible stories of restoration and life change. Hundreds of people found a great sense of wholeness and a pathway out of their brokenness. The church grew and gained real credibility. It became a restoration-focused church and the mission of God became a reality. There was a sense of excitement and purpose that

flowed through that church that had been missing for a long time. It was transformational. Pastor Phil found this one of the best pastoral experiences that he had ever had. He was having fun again. He fully felt he was doing what God had called him to do and that his new church was fulfilling what he believed was God's mandate for his church.

APPENDIX:  
THE FLIP CHART PAGES

When the book is complete, these pages will include a summary of all the flip charts and a complete overview of the process. Because of word limitations placed on the artifact, these have not been included at this time.

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