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Faith Formation in a Frantic World: Leverage Your Phone to Transform Your Heart and Mind

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

FAITH FORMATION IN A FRANTIC WORLD:
LEVERAGE YOUR PHONE TO TRANSFORM YOUR HEART AND MIND

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
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All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *The New International Version*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.

Dedicated to my teammates at home:

Janine, Elaine, Rachael, and Kaitlyn Farah,

and to the staff, elders, and my church family at Shelter Rock Church

Special thanks to my advisor Dr. Phillip Carnes,

my professors and cohort members, and my dissertation prayer team

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ABSTRACT

Many faithful Bible readers fall short of experiencing a vibrant, growing relationship with God. Their daily reading has little impact on their Christian formation. This dissertation associates this failure with the pace of modern life and proposes a solution that capitalizes on a modern invention: smartphone technology supporting instant access to bite-sized Bible readings with engaging commentary. Daily engagement with God can be achieved with the help of an app that reminds users to pause, pray, and review a “sticky moment” from their Bible reading.

Section one of this dissertation notes that individuals have allowed themselves to be caught up in the rapid pace of today’s culture and have not developed the necessary skills to feed their souls. The church, meanwhile, has lost sight of its true purpose and, as a result, fails to teach with creativity and purpose.

Section two focuses on four of the most popular remedies the American evangelical church uses in its attempt to slow people down while striving to regain its primary purpose. All of their efforts utilize the Bible, but their strategies vary in scope: focus on the individual, work with a group, or mobilize an entire church.

Section three lays a foundation for daily engagement with God by introducing the J.E.S.U.S. life, a strategy Jesus followers of all ages and interest levels can adopt and practice on their own while they live it out in community. The Bottom Line Bible app is also presented as the primary tool believers can carry with them, offering ten ways to connect with their Bible reading with the goal of reviewing and acting on their reading throughout the day.

Finally, sections four through six provide a thorough description of the Bottom Line Bible app, along with the author's experience and engagement in using the app and equipping others to do the same.

SECTION ONE: THE PROBLEM

Just Another Day?

Each day, Robert's alarm sounds at 5:30 a.m. He turns it off, splashes water on his face, makes himself a cup of coffee, and settles into his favorite chair. Robert picks up his Bible and reads the three to four chapters his read-through-the-Bible-in-a-year schedule dictates. When finished, he pauses to reflect on what he read and how it might impact his day. He prays, asking for wisdom throughout his demanding day, makes requests for family and friends, and asks for help to live a life that honors God.

Except on rare occasions, once Robert gets up from his favorite chair and leaves for work, he seldom thinks about God or his Bible reading. He is too busy. If asked, he may struggle to recall what he had just read. Even on a day off, his to-do list seems endless. Although Robert wants to grow in his faith, he feels stuck. He is doing all he has been trained to do and his steadfastness is commendable. Still, he is not living the life of faith and adventure his pastor describes each Sunday.

In one sense, Robert's experience is typical. Many Bible readers fail to internalize biblical truths or engage God and the scriptures in ways that could impact their days. They read mechanically, Eugene Peterson notes, missing out on the richness of experience.

Reading is an immense gift, but only if the words are assimilated, taken into the soul—eaten, chewed, gnawed, received in unhurried delight. Words of men and women long dead, or separated by miles and/or years, come off the page and enter our lives freshly and precisely conveying truth and beauty and goodness, words that God's Spirit has used and uses to breathe life into our souls.¹

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 11.

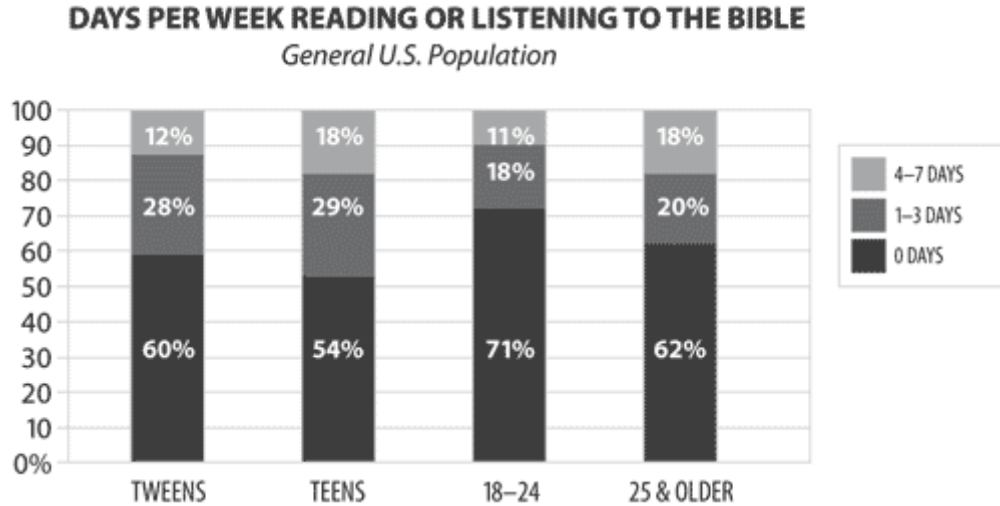
In another sense, Robert's Bible reading habit is unusual. Only 18 percent of the U.S. population age 25 and older reads a Bible regularly (see Fig. 1, page 3)—four or more times a week—with an additional 20 percent reading it one to three times a week. The remaining 62 percent of the same population do not read it at all,² despite the fact that 87 percent of U.S. households own at least one copy of the Bible.³

The dearth of consistent Bible reading and resulting lack of Bible literacy in the church is alarming. What is more troubling, however, is that many faithful Bible readers do not experience a vibrant, growing relationship with God. Their daily reading has little impact on their Christian formation. In spite of good intentions, they may actually be wasting their time.

Unless we savor the biblical text as Peterson encourages us to do, we will dispel the words and ideas as soon as we have read them. Bible readers may want to be conscientious, but they are busy people who have learned to multi-task. Unfortunately, their efficiency checking off items from a to-do list will not serve them well if they simply check off chapters from the Bible. They will miss out on a key purpose for Bible reading: life change.

² Arnie Cole and Michael Ross, *Unstuck: Your Life. God's Design. Real Change* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), Appendix 2. Logos Edition. Survey results were compiled from over seventy thousand Americans who completed surveys between 2005 and 2011, including people who attend church regularly as well as random samples of the general population. These results are similar to those found in the Barna Group's *State of the Bible* report in 2016 and 2017.

³ Barna Group, *State of the Bible 2017* (Philadelphia, PA: American Bible Society, 2017), 5, accessed July 15, 2017, <https://www.americanbible.org/state-of-the-bible>.

Figure 1. Days Per Week⁴

Blessed is the one ...
 whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and who meditates on his law day and night.
 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
 which yields its fruit in season
 and whose leaf does not wither—
 whatever they do prospers. (Ps. 1:1-3)

The Bible is meant to be consumed as Peterson describes: thoughtfully, prayerfully, and in the context of a relationship with its author. “Like newborn babies,” Peter writes, we are to “crave pure spiritual milk” (1 Pet. 2:2). The prophet Jeremiah says we are to eat the words of God and find joy and delight in our hearts (Jer. 15:16).

The church’s charge of making disciples (Matt. 28:19-20) requires the fostering of engagement with God and the Bible. To accomplish this goal, the church must take steps to overcome four dominant factors by (1) recognizing that people are busy, (2) understanding learning theory, (3) identifying the importance of the learning environment, and (4) evaluating the role of the learner.

⁴ Cole and Ross, Chapter 3, Faith and the Bible.

Factor One: People Are Busy

People are pressed for time. Farmers are busy; stock brokers are busy; stay-at-home parents are busy. Some people manage a frenetic pace in order to survive. Others put in extra time as a point of pride. “People are competing about being busy. It’s about showing status. That if you’re busy, you’re important. You’re leading a full and worthy life.”⁵ People pretend that they have no choice but to be busy, revealing an underlying spiritual problem in our culture. “I call it the non-choice choice. Because people really *do* have a choice.”⁶ “The present hysteria is not a necessary or inevitable condition of life; it’s something we’ve chosen, if only by our acquiescence to it. Our frantic days are really just a hedge against emptiness.”⁷ “One man says he works seventy-two hours a week because everyone else at his office does; he’s thinking about cutting back on sleep so he can be more productive. A woman says the last time she had a moment for herself was when she went for her annual mammogram. Another says she has decided that life is too hectic to have kids — ever.”⁸

Regardless of the reasons for busyness, pace of culture cannot dictate lifestyle. It may influence it or even vie for dominance, but we must exercise dominion. But how are we to succeed? If the effort to resist feelings of emptiness exists, time management

⁵ Ann Burnett, as cited in Brigid Schulte, *Overwhelmed: Work, Love, and Play When No One Has the Time* (New York, NY: Sarah Crichton Books, 2014), 45.

⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁷ Tim Kreider, “The ‘Busy’ Trap,” *The New York Times*, June 30, 2012, accessed December 5, 2015, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/30/the-busy-trap/?_r=0.

⁸ Brigid Schulte, “Why Being Too Busy Makes Us Feel So Good,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 14, 2014, accessed December 7, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-being-too-busy-makes-us-feel-so-good/2014/03/14/c098f6c8-9e81-11e3-a050-dc3322a94fa7_story.html.

books, conferences, and apps will fall short. Author Jerry Bridges directs us to a spiritual solution with time-tested wisdom:

We express our dependence on the Holy Spirit for a holy life in two ways. The first is through *a humble and consistent intake of the Scripture*. If we truly desire to live in the realm of the Spirit we must continually feed our minds with His truth. It is hypocritical to pray for victory over our sins yet be careless in our intake of the Word of God.⁹

In spite of pressing demands, we must overcome the temptation to ignore soul care and feed our souls daily. All too often, however, when encouraging others to take a step towards spiritually feeding themselves I have heard:

“I don’t like to read.”

“I don’t understand what I read.”

“I don’t have time to read.”

Those are honest responses, albeit frustrating. My initial thought echoes comedian George Carlin: “Scientists announced today that they have discovered a cure for apathy. However, they claim no one has shown the slightest interest in it.”¹⁰ We are busy, but that is likely because we do not recognize the value of engagement with God and the Bible. Authors Arnie Cole and Michael Ross identified being “too busy” and not having “enough time” as the top two reasons people do not read the Bible. The authors then quote a February 2010 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics survey identifying how average adult Americans spend their time:

- 1 hour eating and drinking

⁹ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1978), 75.

¹⁰ George Carlin, AZ Quotes, accessed May 20, 2017, <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/947120>.

- 8.8 hours working (includes e-mailing, web surfing, texting/messaging, phone calls during work hours)
- 1.3 hours caring for others (includes children)
- 1 hour on household activities (includes cooking and cleaning)
- 1.7 hours on “other” activities (includes personal time spent online, texting messaging, phone calls)
- 2.6 hours in leisure activities (includes TV)
- 7.6 hours sleeping¹¹

There is room in that schedule to claim for God, but time can also be incorporated into the cadence of everyday life, as the Hebrews modeled. Luke Cawley writes, “It’s more about rediscovering fresh ways in which the existing basics of a Christian’s life—mealtimes, conversations over coffee, church services, life in the neighborhood—can be recalibrated to help make Christ more concrete to people in our lives who don’t know him.”¹² This model and method highlights disciple making as a lifestyle, rather than limiting it to a class to attend.

This is an opportunity. People are busy and that will not change. Whether people are busy for legitimate or self-serving reasons, they need to slow down and hear from God. Busy people need a plan, resources, and ultimately the ability to create their own resources—or adapt current ones—so that they can grow spiritually, regardless of their pace. Christian disciples and the church need more than a determined spirit, however.

¹¹ Cole and Ross, Chapter 3, Why some believers don’t read the Bible.

¹² Luke Cawley, *The Myth of the Non-Christian: Engaging Atheists, Nominal Christians, and the Spiritual but Not Religious* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2016), 48.

Their minds and hearts need to be filled with the majesty of God, feasting on God's word as if their lives depended upon it. "Regular immersion in Scripture is like a daily trip to the bakery; it means you always have 'fresh bread' with which to feed your spiritually hungry friends."¹³

God has called his followers to make disciples. Although a magnificent task, it is one that disciple makers are unable to complete on their own. However, when they faithfully fix their eyes on God and gain some of his wonder and majesty, their efforts are blessed.

Without wonder, we approach spiritual formation as a self-help project. We employ techniques. We analyze gifts and potentialities. We set goals. We assess progress. Spiritual formation is reduced to cosmetics.

Without wonder, the motivational energies in spiritual formation get dominated by anxiety and guilt. Anxiety and guilt restrict; they close us in on ourselves. They isolate us with feelings of inadequacy or unworthiness; they reduce us to ourselves at our worst. Spiritual formation is distorted into moral workaholism or pious athleticism.¹⁴

Factor Two: Churches Emphasize Content More Than Application

Focus on Understanding

Disciple makers must avoid educational practices that fail to take into account how people learn. When educators emphasize content distribution without evaluating how or if students are receiving the information, they have lost sight of the primary goal of education—learning. Because the church focuses on life transformation, its leaders

¹³ Ibid., 96.

¹⁴ Eugene H. Peterson, *Living the Resurrection: The Risen Christ In Everyday Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 30–31.

must be particularly sensitive to this hazard. Kenneth Wilson identifies America's penchant for emphasizing content over learning:

America's educational system has had challenges for years and the nation was put on alert as early as 1983 when the National Commission on Educational Excellence published *A Nation at Risk*. "Actually, the route to real reform pointed in a very different direction. America's national inadequacies, which we sense and which we attribute to our failing schools, have arisen not because our schools have changed, but precisely because *they continue to do what they always have, in the same ways they always have.*"¹⁵

As a result, educators in churches and schools and publishers of discipleship curricula often produce fill-in-the-blank materials that minimize cognitive stimulation and human interaction. "The workbooks, worksheets, and textbooks that are an integral part of the drill-test syndrome cause anxieties or boredom, which in turn causes human brains to shut down or to learn that schooling is irrelevant to life."¹⁶

The temptation to continue doing what has always been done is not new. Jesus himself addressed the priority of learning: "When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path" (Matt. 13:19). Thom and Joani Schultz have attempted to reform education in the church claiming, "Understanding is the key. Without understanding, the seed—though perfect in every respect—falls along the hard-packed path."¹⁷ "Understanding is essential to learning and to applying learning to real life. Facts are often helpful. But understanding is crucial. Jesus knew this well.

¹⁵ Kenneth G. Wilson and Bennett Daviss, *Redesigning Education: A Nobel Prize Winner Reveals What Must Be Done to Reform American Education* (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1994), 4.

¹⁶ Lynn Stoddard, *Redesigning Education: A Guide for Developing Human Greatness* (Tuscon, AZ: Zephyr Press, 1992), 14.

¹⁷ Thom and Joani Schultz, *The Dirt on Learning: Groundbreaking Tools to Grow Faith in Your Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1999), 24.

Examine his teaching. How often did he drill his followers on facts? Rarely. Instead Jesus emphasized the *understanding and application* of spiritual truths.”¹⁸

Less is More

A second practice, both inside and outside the church, is to focus on the amount of information disseminated rather than the amount of information received and applied. The church needs a *less is more* philosophy. This is not a new idea, as Jesus limited his teaching to what learners could handle: “I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear” (John 16:12). Even Jesus’s great commandment and commission were attempts to synthesize key concepts and teachings he wanted his learners to know, remember, and practice. Still, the American educational system and church have a tendency to unload massive amounts of content, with little time spent on retention or application, to the detriment of all involved. “Exposure does not equal learning. And exposure certainly does not equal retention. By having students cover even more material it virtually assures that nothing will be covered in depth. Students may become good Trivial Pursuit players, but they will be lousy citizens and neighbors.”¹⁹

As a counterpoint, consider Japan’s approach to education:

Japanese educators want students to take time thinking and process their answers rather than trying to be the first to provide a correct answer. Japanese teachers want competence more than quickness. As a result, the pacing of a teacher’s lesson in a Japanese classroom is likely significantly slower than in America. “The pace is slow, but the outcome is impressive.”²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid., 28.

¹⁹ George H. Wood, *Schools That Work: America’s Most Innovative Public Education Programs* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1992), 167.

²⁰ Harold W. Stevenson and James Stigler, *The Learning Gap: Why Our Schools Are Failing and What We Can Learn from Japanese and Chinese Education* (New York, NY: Summit Books, 1992), 194.

Each concept and skill is taught with great thoroughness, thereby eliminating the need to teach the concept again later. It also increases the likelihood that what children have learned in one lesson will help them understand another lesson. Competence in procedures such as calculation may be achievable through rapid drill, but thinking takes time, and Japanese teachers strive to allow their students time to think.²¹

North American churchgoers typically experience multiple biblical inputs throughout the week: a Bible message at a Sunday service, a second message in Sunday school or small group, and additional messages through independent Bible readings, podcasts, or online teaching. Additionally, those inputs compete with secular messages from work, school, TV shows, movies, and social interactions, so it is not surprising that few people can remember or apply anything from the previous week's Sunday message.

One solution is to emphasize a single primary theme or idea throughout the week. For example, Sunday school classes or small groups would further explore and discuss content from their pastor's Sunday message. Youth and children ministries could offer discussion sheets designed to be used around the dinner table or in the car. For families that are too busy to share meals together, Leonard Sweet reminds us that, "For Jesus the home is not what defines the table; the table is what defines the home."²² Any setting—even a mobile one—can provide a meaningful venue for discussion.

Additionally, churches could send text message reminders or upload print or video devotionals that repeat and illustrate the theme or big idea for the week, stimulating the brain to repeatedly think about and process the same information, presented and applied in various ways. "A newly encoded memory may involve thousands of neurons

²¹ Ibid.

²² Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2015), Introduction, Logos Edition.

spanning the entire cortex. If it doesn't get used, it will quickly fade. But if we activate it repeatedly, the pattern of connection gets more and more deeply embedded in our tissue."²³ This not only allows a memory to have life but to have significance. A follower of Jesus who applies what he or she is learning is more likely to continue the process than a follower who wonders why he or she bothers to attend church in the first place.

Apply What You Learn

U.S. educators often fail to emphasize the application of material. Japan's system, on the other hand, seeks to build understanding and application through creative teaching methods and by limiting the amount of information to be processed. "In contrast, the structure of U.S. schooling still bears the stamp of the antiquated, quantity-based economy that it was organized to serve. Students move through courses and grades at a fixed pace, like products moving along an assembly line that can't be slowed long enough to remedy the flawed processes that lead, inevitably, to flawed products."²⁴ The church must put more time and effort into its goals, process, and curriculum. It must encourage students to think deeply and practice what they're learning. Aristotle illustrates this value:

Again, of all the things that come to us by nature we first acquire the potentiality and later exhibit the activity (this is plain in the case of the senses; for it was not by often seeing or often hearing that we got these senses, but on the contrary we had them before we used them, and did not come to have them by using them); but the virtues we get by first exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts.²⁵

²³ Geoffrey Cowley and Anne Underwood, "How Memory Works," *Newsweek*, June 15, 1998, 51.

²⁴ Wilson and Daviss, 10.

²⁵ Aristotle, "The Works of Aristotle," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, ed. Mortimer J. Adler, trans. Philip W. Goetz (Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1990), 348-349.

Followers of Jesus become disciple makers by making disciples. Disciple making is a learner-based model, "... an approach with a clear goal: that learners understand, retain, and apply their learning."²⁶ Disciple makers recognize that learners are unique and do not always learn the same way. Some acquire information best through their eyes, others through their ears, and others through touch and movement. Gary Thomas has identified nine pathways to God [Table 1, page 14], emphasizing that followers of Jesus should worship and experience God in the way God made them. He states that although the Old Testament was quite prescriptive in how Israel worshipped, "One of the shocking things about NT [New Testament] worship, as important as worship is, there's almost nothing in the NT about the 'how.'"²⁷

Regardless of how learning takes place, its effectiveness is proven if and when learners are engaged and part of the process. As referenced earlier, when learners are involved, they have a greater tendency to retain information, and their brains respond by moving applied memories and knowledge to long-term memory. "There's a small part in the center of the brain called the hippocampus. It acts as a gatekeeper, sorting information that will be held only a short time from the other information that will make the successful leap to long-term memory."²⁸ Science also explains how emotions play a vital role in moving information into long-term memory:

Colin Rose and Malcolm Nicholl, authors of *Accelerated Learning for the 21st Century*, write: "It's largely dependent on how strongly the information is

²⁶ Schultz, 45.

²⁷ Gary L. Thomas, *PD201 Introducing Spiritual Formation*, Logos Mobile Education (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Segment 27, Logos Edition.

²⁸ Schultz, 72.

registered in the first place. That's why it's so important to learn in ways that involve hearing, seeing, saying, and doing and which involve positive emotions such as when we learn collaboratively. All factors that create strong memories."²⁹

We would be shrewd to practice the words of the Chinese proverb, "Tell me, I forget.

Show me, I remember. Involve me, I understand."³⁰ "The primary aim of the Christian

leader should not be to cram knowledge into students' heads, but to help them *apply and*

use what they have learned."³¹

²⁹ Schultz, 73.

³⁰ Marlene LeFever, *Creative Teaching Methods: Be an Effective Christian Teacher* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2011), Chapter 5, Logos Edition.

³¹ Ibid.

Table 1. Gary Thomas's Nine Pathways to God³²

Pathway 1	The Naturalist	Believers whose hearts are opened up to God primarily when they get out of doors; when it comes to worship and praying and experiencing God on a regular basis, for naturalists, getting out of doors helps them to see God more clearly.
Pathway 2	The Intellectual	Believers whose hearts really don't open up until their minds are engaged; for the intellectual, they're going to need to get into books for their quiet times. They'll probably spend more on books than they would on worship tapes [or music apps].
Pathway 3	The Caregiver	People who like to love God primarily by loving others. It's when they reach out and care for others that God seems so real to them.
Pathway 4	The Sensate	Believers whose hearts are awakened to God primarily through the five senses. They need to engage their senses—what they can see, what they can hear, even what they can feel or taste or smell.
Pathway 5	The Ascetic	Someone who likes to get away, who needs the quiet, who wants to be by themselves; stimulation would distract them from God rather than lead them to God.
Pathway 6	The Activist	Believers whose hearts most open up to God when they're involved in causes on behalf of God.
Pathway 7	The Contemplative	Believers who have a very emotionally-laden relationship with God. When their heart is opened up, that's really their form of worship. Whereas the intellectual wants to understand God ... the contemplative just wants to sit and soak up God's presence.
Pathway 8	The Traditionalist	Finding patterns of worship that can involve ritual and symbol have great meaning for them; the power of ritual is just the power of reinforced behavior. It's the way that God created our brains. For some of us, doing something over and over could result in boredom. But for a traditionalist, it could result in great meaning and purpose.
Pathway 9	The Enthusiast	Believers who love God with mystery and celebration. They recognize that we serve a supernatural God. They live with a sense of risk.

Wise educators emulate the apostle Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12: the church is a body made up of many parts and each part has value. Just as there is diversity

³² Thomas, Segments 28-34, 36, 37.

in the body of Christ, so there is diversity in the worship of Christ and in how we learn about him. There is no one-size-fits-all Christianity. Jesus invites people with all learning styles to follow him. Life change is the goal for Christian educators. Therefore, they must encourage experimentation in all of the pathways, inviting students to experience diverse ways to spend time with God, and identifying one or two that are most meaningful.

Factor Three: Churches Have Lost Their Passion for Making Disciples

The local church must have more than a physical presence in its community. It must have a biblical purpose. Without one, the church will be idly identified as a landmark instead of the transformation hub, as it was designed. Jesus gave the church purpose, commanding her to make disciples. But for those words to be more than banner boasting, the church must first define what a disciple looks like and then formulate a strategy to achieve that goal. More often than not, local churches fail to do so.

A disciple (*mathētēs*) is a learner or student. “For his adherents Jesus alone is Teacher and Master, Rabbi. A Christian is always and only a student in relation to Jesus.”³³ The Christian’s life shifts from pursuing fulfillment on his own to relying solely on Jesus’s direction for his life. Charles Spurgeon echoed the sentiment in a lecture to his students: “I am jealous of anything which should hinder your daily dependence upon the Holy Spirit.”³⁴

³³ Hans Kvalbein, “Go Therefore and Make Disciples ... The Concept of Discipleship in the New Testament,” *Themelios* 13, no. 2 (1988): 49.

³⁴ Charles Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students, Vol 1: A Selection from Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Pastors’ College, Metropolitan Tabernacle* (London, UK: Passmore and Alabaster, 1875), 100-101.

Gerald Borchers notes, “It should be evident that discipleship in [the Gospel of] John is far more than a matter of saying the right words or belonging to a group. It is a matter of obediently following Jesus.”³⁵ Obedience and a new identity are critical hallmarks for the disciple. Dietrich Bonhoeffer paints a wonderful picture of the life of Jesus followers: “The image of Jesus Christ, which is always before the disciples’ eyes, and before which all other images fade away, enters, permeates, and transforms them, so that the disciples resemble, indeed become like, their master.”³⁶ Jesus intends for his followers to experience life transformation. This transformation means that believers are shaped by a hunger for knowing Jesus and expressing him through their lives or, as Jerry Bridges states, “a love for Christ creates a pursuit of holiness.”³⁷

David Putman expands the definition of a disciple further, however, by revealing a greater purpose or mission for the disciple. In addition to being a learner who hears from God and reflects his image, a disciple is one who:

- has a kingdom vision and is living with a sense of purpose.
- is part of a larger redemptive community and extends it to others.
- helps other do the same by reproducing themselves.³⁸

Those descriptions move the disciple out of the spotlight. Not only is she being transformed, but she engages in the process of helping others do the same. A daunting and intimidating task, yet Hans Kvalbein provides perspective and reassurance:

³⁵ Gerald Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 274.

³⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 281.

³⁷ Jerry Bridges, interview by author, Syosset, NY, November 27, 2015.

³⁸ David Putman, interview by author, Syosset, NY, December 9, 2015.

The great commission in Matthew 28:18–20 has a magnificent structure. It starts with a declaration of power: ‘All authority ... has been given to me’. It sounds like the enthronement of a king. This powerful king has an important message to his people. The message consists of two sentences. The first is an order: ‘Go therefore and make disciples ...’. The second is a promise: ‘And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.’³⁹

However, the church cannot be content to only offer a discipleship class or develop a structure through which aspiring disciples move. Discipleship is not the goal. Discipleship is not a biblical word—it is not found anywhere in the Bible. Disciple making is the goal. Disciple making communicates intentionality, and the church must create a disciple-making culture.

The value and priority for disciples to obey Jesus is not limited to a one-time decision, as Jesus regularly reminded his own disciples. “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). “The phrase *become my followers* uses the expression *opisō mou*. A follower/disciple is thus defined as one who has taken up a position behind Jesus. The second reference to following uses the verb *akoloutheō*, a word that implies movement along with (but still behind) Jesus.”⁴⁰ Greg Ogden describes the idea of taking a position behind Jesus and continuing to move with him: “Being a disciple is a lifelong process of dying to self while allowing Jesus Christ to come alive in us.”⁴¹

³⁹ Kvalbein, 48.

⁴⁰ Timothy Geddert, *Mark. Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Scottsdale, AZ: Herald Press, 2001), 205-206.

⁴¹ Greg Ogden, *ED101 Introducing Discipleship* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), Segment 14, Logos Edition.

What does this look like in the life of a disciple in the context of a local church? Matthew 28:18-20 has one command: make disciples. But that command includes three participles: go, baptize, and teach to obey.

Go

As Christian disciples go through life—whether at church, school, home, or work—they are to go with an evangelistic heart and mind. They are to develop eyes for God and a heart for people. “[*Go* is] the missional focus of the church. There is this natural sense that somebody who is infused with the life of Jesus moves beyond themselves and goes to a lost and broken planet.”⁴² This is to be a new expectation and calling for Jesus followers. They are to live in a way that no longer focuses on themselves. “It is essential to the nature of the church that its members be faithful in proclaiming the gospel. It is the only hope of salvation for mankind. As Peter declared, ‘There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12, RSV).”⁴³ The local church is part of God’s plan for the redemption of humanity. Because Christ is the hope of the world, Jesus followers must “go.”

Baptize

Christians make disciples as they are baptizing. What does that look like? Are they required to lead new believers or potential followers to water sources? Not

⁴² Ibid., Segment 15.

⁴³ Charles Tidwell, *Church Administration: Effective Leadership for Ministry* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 1985), 67.

necessarily. Baptism identifies the participant with Christ and the church. It is a picture of community and relationship, one shared by the community of the Trinity:

I think what Jesus is conveying here, in being baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is the ultimate destination of restoration into the life of the triune God. What if we translated Jesus' words like this: "As you are going, make disciples of all nations, immersing them into the life of the first eternal community, who is made up of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."⁴⁴

Baptizing is descriptive of community life, a new priority for Jesus followers.

"Everyone enters discipleship alone, but no one remains alone in discipleship."⁴⁵

Believers receive the gift of community.

There is no example in the Bible of a lone disciple. Even Paul, after his dramatic conversion and long stay in the desert, went to Jerusalem and associated himself with the apostles and later with the church at Antioch (Acts 9:26–30; 11:25–26). When he planted churches he always travelled in the company of others. He had a team-relationship at different times with Barnabas, Silas and Timothy. The relational, community-based model of discipling had been demonstrated by Jesus and the disciples, and it provided the necessary support for Paul and the early church in the turbulent period after Pentecost.⁴⁶

Disciples are family members, part of Christ's body, and as they live in community they are reflecting the triune life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Teach to Obey

Disciples teach for more than knowledge. Jesus followers are to love God with all their mind (Matt. 22:37), but that is not limited to acquiring facts. James reminds believers that "even the demons believe" (James 2:19) in truths about God ... yet they

⁴⁴ Ogden, Segment 17.

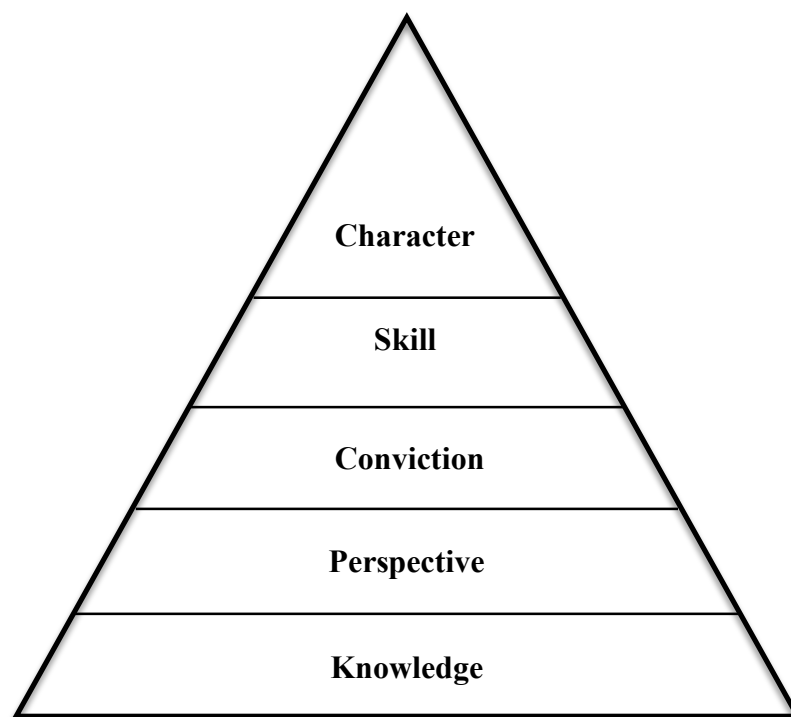
⁴⁵ Bonhoeffer, 99.

⁴⁶ Jeffrey Arnold and Stephanie Black, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), Chapter 1, The process of discipling, Logos Edition.

shudder for their knowledge is merely comprehension. Their lives have not been transformed. “He [God] wants to have His Word placed deep in our hearts so that it transforms us from the inside out.”⁴⁷ Life transformation is critical.

Author and teaching pastor Tom Holladay illustrates Saddleback Church’s pedagogy of learning with a pyramid.

Figure 2. Pedagogy of Learning Pyramid⁴⁸



Knowledge is important, but it’s the bottom of the pyramid. Holladay wants his church’s disciples to gain perspective on what they have learned and understand “why” God said what he did. Beyond that, he wants their disciples to develop conviction in what they believe and learn corresponding skills, such as how to study the Bible or share their faith.

⁴⁷ Ogden, Segment 21.

⁴⁸ Tom Holladay, interview by author, Syosset, NY, December 9, 2015.

But the top of the pyramid is their goal: character. This is their opportunity for men and women to be formed into the image of Christ, and it is why Jesus commissioned his followers to make disciples as they are going, baptizing, and teaching to obey.

Finally, the church must seriously consider her methodology in making disciples and the manner in selecting them. There are several important pedagogical and theological lessons appropriate for contemporary disciple making, including where, how, and why instruction takes place. First, setting and environment must be a priority. Simply, the location should not be limited to a church building, but when it is, disciple makers should create an attractive, inspiring learning environment by utilizing elements such as music, food, discussion, reflection, and application. “The story of Jesus is the story of the table. You can’t think about Jesus without thinking about the table, its meals and its rituals. In fact, if you are reading the Gospels and you are not getting hungry, you’re missing the meat of the Gospels. It’s hard to find a story or scene where Jesus is not fingering food, feeding himself or others.”⁴⁹

Luke Cawley addresses a fatal flaw churches rarely address: “The main model of communication in the church tends to be the monologue. Sermons and presentations dominate. Yet when we flick through the pages of the four Gospels we find Jesus far from dependent on one-way communication. Most of the time he is interacting on a personal level with individuals and groups.”⁵⁰ Today’s disciple makers are wise to incorporate the power of story, but not only through monologue. Instead, use story as a launching pad for further discussion and exploration through interactive questions.

⁴⁹ Sweet, Chapter 3.

⁵⁰ Cawley, 142.

Utilizing story equips others to minister to diverse cultures. It requires disciple makers to recognize subsets within large groups of people—or even different groups in a high-rise apartment building—necessitating “a strategy for communicating with all people to having multiple strategies for different groups.”⁵¹ “The New Testament understands education as a process of both instilling (imparting information to the pupil) and extracting (drawing out learning from the pupil or self-discovery)”⁵² and that “effective education is rooted in a mentoring relationship (note Jesus with his disciples or the apostles training others to follow their lead).”⁵³

Jesus’s interaction is personal and his teaching methods were diverse, but so were his settings. There were times Jesus taught in or near the temple or synagogue—similar to our traditional church setting—but he also used numerous informal settings to connect his disciples’ experience with truth he wanted to instill. The local church must learn to comfortably make disciples in an assortment of settings, using the community and culture as a classroom.

Regarding candidate selection, the church must be proactive and reach out to potential disciples. Jesus did not wait for people to request his investment in their lives, and neither should the church. It is imperative for disciple makers to prayerfully consider inviting those who would not normally be selected. Jesus’s disciples would not have been listed as top choices in a disciple-making draft. Similarly, believers must not look past

⁵¹ Ibid., 13.

⁵² Andrew E. Hill, “Education in Bible Times,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 196.

⁵³ Ibid.

potential candidates because either they do not fit a preconceived candidate profile or they are not individuals with whom they want to work.

Additionally, churches need a tiered-approach that reflects Jesus's style. He ministered to the masses, the large group, the intermediate group, the small group, and then gave focused attention to three individuals. The local church should not limit its approach to one style but, instead, incorporate disciple-making strategies in a variety of formats and settings. Luke Cawley calls this "contextual missiology" or "the practice of reflecting on a context and translating the entirety of life and faith accordingly."⁵⁴

"Accomplishing God's purpose for humanity and conquering sin, Jesus opened the way to a new world. When His earthly ministry was over, He left His followers with the mandate to continue the mission He inaugurated and established (Matt 28:16–20)."⁵⁵ The local church can and must do this, despite busy schedules and varied learning styles. Jesus's power and authority is at the church's disposal if she takes seriously her mission to make disciples. Jesus's mandate must be at the forefront of all the church does, and when it does not, it becomes one more factor for its inefficiency. However, even if the church takes her role seriously, there is a final factor to consider.

Factor Four: Jesus Followers Don't Know the Art and Skill of Soul Care

The church plays a significant role in shaping a disciple-making culture, but individuals must acknowledge and respond to Jesus's call to be and to make disciples. For many followers of Jesus, this requires them to rethink their role in the process,

⁵⁴ Cawley, 17.

⁵⁵ Dwight J. Friesen, "Mission in the Biblical Narrative," in *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), s.v. "Thematic Studies," Logos Edition.

despite the seemingly obvious opportunity and responsibility before them. Gillian Tett acknowledges that, “mental reorganization can sometimes be almost as effective as structural change, particularly if those two shifts go hand in hand.”⁵⁶ Tett studied the work of heart surgeon Dr. Delo “Toby” Cosgrove and reported Cosgrove’s query: “What would happen, he wondered, if he tried to ‘flip the lens,’ and defined medicine as *patients*, not doctors, experienced it? What might that mean for how a hospital was organized?”⁵⁷

Similarly, what would happen if believers rethought their devotional life? What would it look like from God’s perspective, instead of their own? The time a Jesus follower sets aside to spend with God is often rushed, rarely savored. Its purpose is often limited to accomplishing a task and checking off a to-do. What if disciples viewed time with God from the perspective of their heavenly father? Would God cherish the time his followers offer or spite them for their lack of urgency?

The kingdom is not something we build or create or bring about. Every time the word for kingdom is used in the Bible, it describes a presence we enter, a present we receive, a promise fulfilled. You enter the kingdom not as a reward for goodness or as a response to God’s “justice” but as a gift of God’s goodness and mercy. We enter the kingdom not because God is just but because God is merciful.⁵⁸

The God of the universe wants to spend time with his followers. Most understand that intellectually but fail to embrace it emotionally.

⁵⁶ Gillian Tett, *The Silo Effect: The Peril of Expertise and the Promise of Breaking Down Barriers* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015), 197.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁵⁸ Leonard Sweet, *Me and We: God’s New Social Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), Introduction, Logos Edition.

Another required shift in thinking relates to a believer's role in his or her growth. Western Christians are spoon-fed and served in a way that best suits them. If they don't like their church, they attend another. If they don't like a Bible's translation, hundreds of alternatives are available on the internet, as are a variety of worship and preaching styles. John Gregory stated a truth more than a hundred years ago that today's disciple must hear: "The learner must attend with interest to the fact or truth to be learned."⁵⁹ In other words, it is to the believer's advantage he learns to care for and feed his soul. Jesus followers will grow deeper if they take ownership of their Christian formation. "In the greater part of our acquisitions," Gregory writes, "we are all self-taught, and it is generally conceded that the knowledge is most permanent and best in use which is dug out by unaided research."⁶⁰ Not only will Christians' hearts and minds grow strong when they pursue God on their own initiative, but their effort will produce longer-lasting results.

"Everyone, then, who professes to be a Christian should ask himself, 'Is there evidence of practical holiness in my life? Do I desire and strive after holiness? Do I grieve over my lack of it and earnestly seek the help of God to be holy?'"⁶¹ Jerry Bridges learned early on that simply grieving over his lack of growth and hungering for more of God wasn't enough. "How foolish I was. I misconstrued dependence on the Holy Spirit to mean I was to make no effort, that I had no responsibility. I mistakenly thought if I turned it all over to the Lord, He would make my choices for me and would choose obedience

⁵⁹ John Gregory. *The Seven Laws of Teaching* (Boston, MA: Congregational Sunday-School and Publishing Society, 1886), 25, Kindle Edition.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 73.

⁶¹ Bridges, *Holiness*, 38.

over disobedience.”⁶² Regarding becoming personally responsible for his growth, Bridges states the following:

Years ago a fellow Christian warned me that Satan would try to confuse us on the issue of what God has done for us and what we must do ourselves. I have come to see the insight he had in making that statement. Lack of understanding on that issue has led to great confusion in our pursuit of holiness. It is very important that we make this distinction; for God has indeed made provision for us to live a holy life, but He also has given us definite responsibilities.⁶³

Christians are liable for their own faith formation and it requires disciplined effort on their part. The idea of discipline is not popular, particularly in an era in which Christians are encouraged to express their freedom in Christ. Some might argue that a disciplined approach may lend itself to formality and rigidity. Bridges disagrees.

Yet Paul says we are to train or discipline ourselves to be godly (1 Timothy 4:7). The figure of speech he uses comes from the physical training that Greek athletes went through. Paul also said, “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training” (1 Corinthians 9:25). He said this was an attitude of his life, and one that each Christian should have (1 Corinthians 9:24–27). If an athlete disciplines himself to obtain a temporal prize, he said, how much more should we Christians discipline ourselves to obtain a crown that lasts forever. As these verses indicate, discipline is structured training.⁶⁴

Author and pastor Pete Scazzero advocates disciplined time with God, particularly contemplative practices. “The practices of contemplative spirituality—silence, solitude, the Daily Office, meditation on Scripture, prayer, Sabbath—enable us to tune in to the awareness of God’s inexhaustible love of us. They help us stop!”⁶⁵ Bridges concurs on the need for specific interaction with a biblical text, via prayer, reflection and

⁶² Ibid., 79.

⁶³ Ibid., 51.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 96.

⁶⁵ Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It’s Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature, While Remaining Emotionally Immature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), Chapter 3, Logos Edition.

meditation. “There is absolutely no shortcut to holiness that bypasses or gives little priority to a consistent intake of the Bible”⁶⁶ and “If we are to pursue holiness with discipline, we must do more than hear, read, study, or memorize Scripture. We must meditate on it.”⁶⁷

Both Scazzero and Howard Hendricks rethink spiritual growth options for believers. Scazzero looks back at Christian history, advocating developing a rule for living: “A Rule of Life, very simply, is an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do. It provides guidelines to help us continually remember God as the Source of our lives. It includes our unique combination of spiritual practices that provide structure and direction for us to intentionally pay attention and remember God in everything we do.”⁶⁸ Hendricks steps even further back, recognizing that God often takes initiative in the spiritual development of his followers when he has something specific to develop within them: “God moves into our lives by divine design, to periodically disturb our equilibrium. That’s how he develops us.”⁶⁹

Jesus entered a fragmented and argumentative society, filled with varying views on hearing from and connecting with God and, not surprisingly, Jesus’s approach differed from other Hebrew teachers. Instead of being one who waited for potential disciples to come to him, Jesus initiated contact, reaching out and inviting others to follow him. Jesus made room for all. He did not limit disciple making as an academic pursuit but, instead,

⁶⁶ Bridges, *Holiness*, 126.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 99.

⁶⁸ Scazzero, Chapter 10.

⁶⁹ Howard Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1987), 44.

emphasized community care and heart transformation. Per the words of Rabbi Yose b. Yoezer: “Let your house be a gathering place for sages. And wallow in the dust of their feet. And drink in their words with gusto.”⁷⁰ As a result, a disciple of Jesus could be one who did three things: “opened their homes for scholars to meet in; secondly, performed the basic needs for them, such as washing their feet; and third, enjoying listening to their discussions.”⁷¹ Jesus opened the door for all to come and follow him.

Hope for a New Day

People are busier than they want or need to be. Fifty-year-old Betsy Birmingham, a mother of five and professor at her local university, sadly—albeit humorously—illustrates this. “‘The last time I had a moment to myself, to breathe?’ She pauses. ‘Last week. When I went to my doctor’s office for my annual mammogram.’”⁷² Disciples of Jesus want more out of life than attempting to keep a frenzied pace that does not produce healthy bodies, hearts, minds, or souls or foster lasting relationships. They have got to establish a new mindset and develop a new skill set. “We’re not meant to operate in the same way machines do: at high speeds, for long periods of time, running multiple programs at the same time. Human beings are designed to pulse between the expenditure and the intermittent renewal of energy.”⁷³ But Tony Schwartz warns his readers that they will not make changes by merely attending a workshop or setting a goal. “Making

⁷⁰ Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 673.

⁷¹ David Instone-Brewer, *NT390 Jesus as Rabbi: The Jewish Context of the Life of Jesus* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), Segment 30, Logos Edition.

⁷² Schulte, *Overwhelmed*, 42.

⁷³ Tony Schwartz, *Be Excellent at Anything: Four Keys to Transforming the Way We Work and Live* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2010), 277.

changes that last requires building positive rituals—highly specific behaviors that become automatic over time and no longer require conscious intention.”⁷⁴

But there is hope for the church that wants to strategically make changes, for church attendees, and for others interested in engaging in a relationship with God. There is a heart and hunger for many to live lives of purpose within a sustainable pace.

I know from all those bumper stickers that this is my one and only life, and from the Romans that time flies. And I know from the Buddhists that we should embrace the moment. I wake with every good intention of making the most of my day—to do good work, to spend quality time with my children, to eat less trail mix, to stop driving off with my wallet on top of the car.⁷⁵

Jesus’s followers must commit to new habits and thought patterns. They need to change the settings so the rhythm of the day fits them and their goals to connect with God and stay engaged with God throughout the day. Without a determined effort, they will fail to make an impact.

As powerful as the culture is, we hardly notice its effect on us. It is the sea we swim in. One useful way to think about it is as the default culture. In computer software, a whole host of default settings comes with every new program you buy. If you choose, you can change these settings to suit your preferences but if you don’t, the defaults create the rules.⁷⁶

Believers can overcome the rising tide of this sea. “If we decide to act on what matters, then we shift our consciousness about pace. There is always time to do everything that really matters: If we do not have time to do something, it is a sign that it does not

⁷⁴ Ibid., 279.

⁷⁵ Schulte, *Overwhelmed*, 6.

⁷⁶ Peter Block, *The Answer to How is Yes: Acting on What Matters* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002), 143.

matter.”⁷⁷ The question is, can Jesus’s followers successfully navigate to the correct resource amidst the sea of options floating around them?

⁷⁷ Ibid., 79.

SECTION TWO: ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

Amazon Spirituality

Metaphor, man. You're out walking all alone and suddenly in the middle of nowhere, you see a dogfight near a cheese farm. What does that dogfight mean? And despite its literalness, the idea of a pilgrim's journey on this road is a metaphor bonanza. Friends, the road itself is amongst our oldest tropes. The high road and the low, the long and winding, the lonesome, the royal, the open road and the private. You have the road to hell, the tobacco road, the crooked, the straight and the narrow. There's the road stretching into infinity, bordered with lacy mists favored by sentimental poets. There's the more dignified road of Mr. Frost, and for yanks, every four years, there's the road to the White House. Then you have the road which most concerns me today, the wrong road, which I fear I must surely have taken.⁷⁸

Jack from Ireland in Emilio Estevez's *The Way* cries out in agony as he searches for meaning in every sight and sound he experiences. Struggling with writer's block, he is desperate to discover a hidden meaning that might free his mind to new ideas, words, and phrases. At best, today's pastors, teachers, and disciple makers would have such eagerness in their craft. At worst, this same group continues ineffective practices, not taking time to evaluate their efficacy or strive toward new, improved theories and methods.

It is imperative that disciple makers identify their goals for current or future disciples. The same is true for identifying a solution for Bible readers who do not experience a vibrant, growing relationship with God because their daily reading has little impact on their Christian formation. As churches and disciple makers search for a solution, Leonard Sweet fears the church's default prototype: the business world. "We

⁷⁸ *The Way*, directed by Emilio Estevez (Producers Distribution Agency, 2011), accessed October 12, 2016, <https://www.netflix.com/>.

have been presumptuous enough to believe that the techniques and methods of the business world will adequately equip us to battle the powers and principalities of the world.”⁷⁹ Authors Thom and Joani Schultz warn educators that, “Creativity is not the goal. Creative activities can (and should) be used, but each should add to students’ understanding and application of biblical truths.”⁸⁰

When churches and disciple makers do not provide appropriate next steps, Amazon delivers. A simple Amazon search for books using the word “spirituality” produces more than a half-million hits. When refining the search to “spiritual growth,” Amazon offers 144,342 products. Limiting the search to books reduces the number further: 86,277.⁸¹ Spiritual growth offerings are ubiquitous. Just as Jack from Ireland was aghast at the metaphor options he could explore, so are those seeking to make a soul connection with their creator. Even refining the Amazon search further by adding “Christian spiritual growth,” the result still produces more than 50,000 books.

Disciple makers need to evaluate how they evaluate. Not only is it important to be open to what God is doing in and through them, but they also must identify their goal for faith formation, what their vehicle is to achieve that goal, and how they intend to use that vehicle. The end product must be one thing: changed lives. While some question the ability to evaluate whether or not someone’s life is changed, Leonard Sweet likens it to being a fruit inspector.

⁷⁹ Leonard Sweet. *I Am a Follower: The Way, Truth, and Life of Following Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2012); *The Way: The Great Exchange*, Logos Edition.

⁸⁰ Schultz, 31.

⁸¹ Amazon search performed July 6, 2017.

How do you know you are growing in the image of God? How do you know if your church is maturing spiritually?

Here's how. You answer these questions:

Are you conceiving?

Are you "being fruitful?"

Are the "fruits of the Spirit" being conceived in your life and in the life of the Commons?⁸²

Howard Hendricks adds, "The name of the game in Christian education is not knowledge—it's active obedience."⁸³

Adherence to the Bible is a vehicle to make disciples. Bruce Wilkinson is a strong advocate of such a position and endorses D.L. Moody: "Moody had it right when he said, 'The Bible wasn't given for our information but for our transformation.'"⁸⁴ However, simply opening the Bible and trusting God to make an impact do not produce changed lives. Wilkerson has seen that method emulated far too often with detrimental results: "Some people have been able—with years of practice—to master the skill of boredom."⁸⁵ Rote memory has its place in education but not as a primary teaching method. A teacher or disciple maker must not be content with that methodology. Gregory says, "Nor will he, on the other side, be satisfied with cramming the memory with useless facts or empty names, without any increase of the powers of thought and understanding."⁸⁶ Is it possible to help Bible readers experience changed lives? Can daily Bible reading impact their lives and produce a vibrant, growing relationship with God? While Amazon offers

⁸² Sweet, *Me and We*, Part III, Conceiving a Christ economy.

⁸³ Hendricks, 70.

⁸⁴ Bruce Wilkinson, *The Seven Laws of the Learner: How to Teach Almost Anything to Practically Anyone* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 2005), 146.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁶ Gregory, vii.

thousands of solutions, I will consider the four most commonly employed by today's local church. Each of these has merit and many followers of Jesus have experienced growth through them, but an equal number of participants have not. Also, are any of these options realistic in the life of a busy follower of Jesus?

Alternative One: The Quiet Time

A quiet time is a phrase familiar in evangelical circles to describe spending time with God for the purpose of growing one's relationship with God. It is usually (but not always) scheduled and usually (but not always) includes reading the Bible and praying. Other common elements comprise journaling and practicing silence. Quiet time publishers and resources abound, as do the methods. Pastor and author Adrian Rogers believes a quiet time should last at least thirty minutes. Pastor Ron Edmonson says you need fifteen minutes. Saddleback Church's 201 Class teaches how to have a quiet time in ten minutes. The Navigators ministry offers a resource on how to have a quiet time in seven minutes.

The apostle Paul offers two reasons for such a discipline. We are to "train ourselves to be godly" (1 Tim. 4:7), and "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things" (Col. 3:1-2). Because followers of Jesus live in a busy world with a competition for their time, heart, and mind, they would be wise to discipline themselves to focus on the things God wants them to know, think about, and practice. The quiet time is a wonderful resource to accomplish that goal as it provides a template for reading and praying in a timeframe that varies according to one's interest and availability.

Donald Whitney acknowledges the “world is more complex than ever, and it becomes more so by the nanosecond. As a result, almost everyone eventually feels the need to simplify. For many people, simplifying means nothing more than ‘doing less.’ But simplifying is not so much about doing fewer things as it is about doing the right things.”⁸⁷ Whitney and others advocate the quiet time as one of the “right things” to mold and shape hearts and minds and equip believers to withstand the tyranny of the urgent that culture, colleagues, and family present. The quiet time is a means for the busy person to hit pause on his day and connect with his creator. Most people choose the early morning for such a practice, as it provides an opportunity to focus on God before engaging with the world. Others prefer to spend time with God during lunch, as a means to reconnect and refocus, or in the evening before going to bed, as a way to reflect on the day and quiet one’s spirit.

The quiet time becomes part of what is known as a “rule of life,” or a structure or rhythm for life that helps participants respond to God, enabling them to both receive and share God’s love. While many think of the Rule of St. Benedict, a monk who lived from 480-547 CE and whose monastic rules have shaped the faith practices of many to the present day, a rule of life can be identified in the Hebrew scriptures in the life of Daniel. Daniel abstained from specific foods in order to maintain a lifestyle focused on God while also disciplining himself to a set of spiritual practices. These were his rules for living, even though they were not endorsed by the authorities of his day. So, any means to incorporate a quiet time today would be for the purpose of establishing a rule of life, a

⁸⁷ Donald S. Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life: Spiritual Disciplines for the Overwhelmed* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2003), 13.

“conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do. It provides guidelines to help us continually remember God as the Source of our lives. It includes our unique combination of spiritual practices that provide structure and direction for us to intentionally pay attention and remember God in everything we do.”⁸⁸

There are several challenges to practicing the quiet time as part of one’s rule of life. One challenge is the plethora of resources. While filtering an Amazon search further by choosing books with the words “quiet time,” one still has to sift through more than eighteen hundred resources. Churches and disciple makers can dramatically reduce that number for its congregants to a handful of resources, but the number is daunting and growing.

Second, developing a consistent quiet time requires a follower of Jesus to live a disciplined lifestyle. One of the great dangers for disciplined people is legalism. “Legalism is the improper emphasis on works in our relationship to God. It focuses on the manifestations of spirituality that can be measured by number, frequency, duration, amount, and so forth.”⁸⁹ Scazzero points out that “Job’s three friends represent ‘classic religion’ or ‘legalism.’ It goes something like this: ‘The reason you are not healed is you don’t pray enough, fast enough, read the Bible enough. You are suffering more than most because you have sinned more.’”⁹⁰ God will not punish us because we miss a quiet time. He is more interested in developing a relationship with us than he is inspecting our timesheet. God wants his followers to rest in his presence. Time with God should be a

⁸⁸ Scazzero, Chapter 10.

⁸⁹ Whitney, 146.

⁹⁰ Scazzero, Chapter 7.

“living room for intimate interaction with the Father.”⁹¹ Followers of Jesus who embrace the quiet time as a helpful tool must develop a healthy knowledge and practice of grace so they can enjoy time with God rather than fear punishment because they missed spending time with God.

Finally, the issue of time is the primary concern. Most people do not have a rule of life that includes a quiet time because they believe they do not have time. Even when encouraged to simply set aside ten minutes for the practice while being reminded that each twenty-four-hour period includes 144 ten-minute chunks of time, most will not choose to set aside one of those ten-minute slots for a quiet time. As a result, many in the church have not learned to feed their souls and require spoon-fed meals each week in the form of a sermon. When faith formation is limited to an hour on Sunday, it is impossible for a follower of Jesus to have her heart and mind transformed or be equipped or excited about Jesus manifesting himself through her.

Alternative Two: Read Through the Bible

A second alternative for Bible readers to experience a vibrant, growing relationship with God is to insure they are not only reading the Bible but reading enough of it. One solution is to challenge them to read through the entirety of the Bible. Instead of merely picking and choosing select books or portions of the Bible with which they are familiar or comfortable, a read through the Bible plan guarantees participants will experience the whole counsel of God. It also is a way to confront the rising biblical

⁹¹ Pete Greig and Bear Grylls, *Dirty Glory: Go Where Your Best Prayers Take You* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2016), Chapter 4, Logos Edition.

illiteracy in the church, challenging Jesus followers to understand their sacred text and discover they are invited to be part of God's grand story.

Discipleship Journal describes reading through the Bible as “a sweeping panorama of the amazing love and mercy with which God has dealt with humanity over the centuries. You’ll also pick up the pattern of the assorted responses he’s received from men and women down through the ages—ranging from heroic faith to blind disregard to flaming rebellion.”⁹² Jerry Bridges notes, “The book of Hebrews doesn’t make sense unless one is at least knowledgeable of the Old Testament priesthood and sacrificial system. The New Testament writers’ many allusions to the Old Testament would remain a mystery unless we had read the passages in their original setting.”⁹³

Besides the benefits of better understanding how Bible teachings connect throughout the text, a reading plan supplies the structure and motivation to read each day, lest readers fall behind. Reading each day—as part of a quiet time—provides the focus some easily distracted or negligent readers require. It is a helpful, orderly means to accomplish several goals: gaining familiarity of the entire Bible, seeing how all of the Bible’s stories fit into one larger story, and utilizing a reading plan to keep on task and minimize distraction.

One of the biggest challenges to a read through plan is found on Amazon—an abundance of options. Participants can choose to read through the Bible cover-to-cover, chronologically, or a portion of Old and New Testament with some Psalms and Proverbs

⁹² “Read Through the Bible This Year,” *Discipleship Journal* (January/February 1983), Logos edition.

⁹³ Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1983), 40.

sprinkled in each day, for example. In addition, most Christian book publishers offer “one-year” Bibles with numerous features, including varying reading lengths. The most common read through plan length is one year, and the majority of one-year plans include options for expanding the length to two or three years. Scripture Awakening⁹⁴ challenges the typical approach by publishing resources for individuals, groups, or churches to read through the Bible in ninety days. A ninety-day strategy allows people to commit more daily time—approximately forty to forty-five minutes a day⁹⁵—over a shorter period, with the goal of building relationships and accountability through small group participation. Bible software and phone apps also allow readers to personalize their reading plan by choosing any length of time and even determining which days of the week they read. Once again, there is no shortage of selections.

Another challenge is completion rate and the potential for someone to feel defeated or frustrated for not finishing. Connected to this is the possibility that someone measures God’s love and acceptance to his or her ability to complete such a task. It is important for participants to evaluate their motives when pursuing a large goal like reading through the Bible. Disciple makers have a responsibility to help readers know the goal is to get to know God in order to better understand the love God has for them, not try to acquire the love God already offers. Participants should also be encouraged to join a reading group for the benefit of sharing the experience with others, not only to gain

⁹⁴ To learn more, visit their website: <http://scriptureawakening.com/product-category/b90/>.

⁹⁵ There are approximately 750,000 words in the English Bible. If someone reads 200 words a minute for forty minutes each day for ninety days, the person will have read 720,000. If someone reads for forty-five minutes the total is 810,000.

additional insight on the readings but also to be held accountable to complete each reading.

Reading through the Bible can be a tremendous tool for those seeking to grow in their relationship with God, but readers need to build in “grace periods” where they feel the freedom to skip sections if they’ve fallen behind, catch up by listening to an audio Bible as they drive, walk, or run, or by not limiting their interaction with the text to the target date. If a person who seeks to read through the Bible in one year is growing in her relationship with God but takes a year-and-a-half to complete the reading, that is success. Additionally, another challenge is that some may choose to “read through the Bible like proofreaders, looking for errors.”⁹⁶ Attitude is paramount in these instances. For individuals to get the most from a reading plan, they must be honest with themselves regarding their goals and discern what type of plan is best for them and why they are choosing to read.

Alternative Three: Join a Small Group or Sunday School Class

A third way people seek to develop their faith and ability to hear from and follow Jesus is through the small group or Sunday school class. While many churches offer either small groups or Sunday school classes—some offer both—this presentation will focus on small group ministry, the growing trend over the last few decades. A small group generally consists of 3-12 people where participants gather (usually) weekly to fellowship, participate in Bible study, and pray for one another. And therein lies the problem.

⁹⁶ Norman L. Geisler and Daniel J. McCoy, *The Atheist's Fatal Flaw: Exposing Conflicting Beliefs* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 127.

Pastor Brian Jones wrote an impassioned blog post titled “Why Churches Should Euthanize Small Groups.”⁹⁷ He claims that despite the time, energy, and both people and financial resources required to recruit, train, and develop leaders, small groups do not make disciples. “Small groups are things that trick us into believing we’re serious about making disciples. The problem is 90 percent of small groups never produce one single disciple. Ever.”⁹⁸ Jones acknowledges there is value to groups, such as building community and helping a large church feel smaller. But if churches are serious about making disciples, they must seek a higher goal than merely increasing the number of participants from the church. Instead, church leaders must be intentional in how groups are formed, nurtured, evaluated, and how they best connect to making disciples in their context. Jones is adamant that people make disciples, not groups, classes, or programs. So, in order to have disciple-making groups, there must be an authentic disciple leading the group. Additionally, disciple making takes time—much more time than most are willing to admit. A six- or twelve-week series emphasis will not produce a disciple, but a committed investment in a relationship for three or more years may do so. And while most groups tend to average eight to twelve participants, the most effective number is likely three, modeling Jesus’s inner circle of Peter, James, and John. Finally, Jones states that true disciple-making groups do more than huddle in a home or at the church. Effective groups extend their ministry beyond their own group by adopting a missional mindset and serving others outside of their group.

⁹⁷ Brian Jones, “Why Churches Should Euthanize Small Groups,” Senior Pastor Central, accessed July 22, 2017, <http://seniorpastorcentral.com/953/why-churches-should-euthanize-small-groups/>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Warren Bird's research reveals that churches grow larger by getting smaller. "Large churches are very intentional about helping people find their identity in some kind of group or team. Some 60 percent of attenders say they are involved in one or more groups, a percentage that's growing."⁹⁹ From a 2000 survey, Bird identified approximately 50 percent of large churches included small groups in their disciple-making strategy. Yet in 2008, that same study reported 84 percent of large churches were now actively promoting groups.

Brian Jones acknowledged the relational benefit of group life for churches. But Bird identifies additional advantages in promoting and maintaining active group life in churches. People who find connections in churches are likely to experience some form of spiritual growth. Bird's survey of 25,000 church attenders (see Figure 3, page 46) reveals that 62 percent of those who attend a megachurch claim they experienced "much spiritual growth" in the past year (58 percent of all church attenders). Forty-two percent of those in the megachurch connected their growth directly to church involvement (39 percent of all church attenders).

Another way to measure a positive experience is to evaluate a person's willingness to invite others to church. "Generally speaking, if church attenders do not feel enthusiastic about their church or their spiritual experience at that congregation, they are less likely to invite others to participate."¹⁰⁰ In Bird's study, he discovered 87 percent of megachurch attenders had invited one or more people in the year the study was taken (see Figure 4, page 46). Twenty-seven percent of those invited more than six people.

⁹⁹ Warren Bird, "Why Do Small Groups Matter In Larger Churches?" *Leadership Network*, July 1, 2014, accessed July 22, 2017, <http://leadershipnetw.wpengine.com/do-small-groups-matter/>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Figure 3. “Spiritual Growth” Compared to Church Type¹⁰¹

62 percent of Megachurch Attenders Experienced “Much Spiritual Growth” in the Past Year

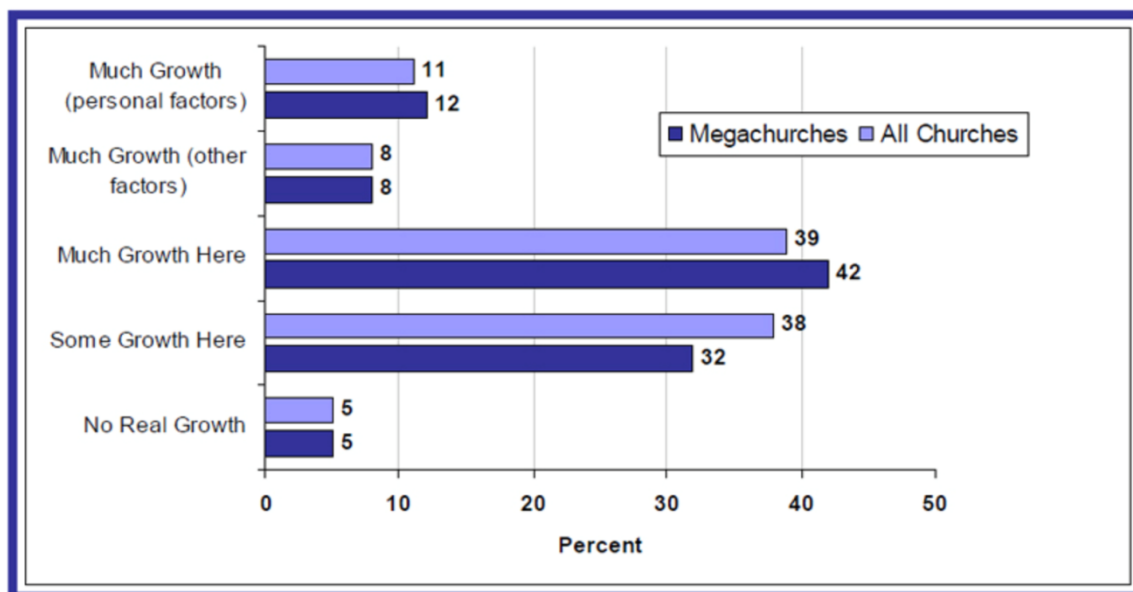
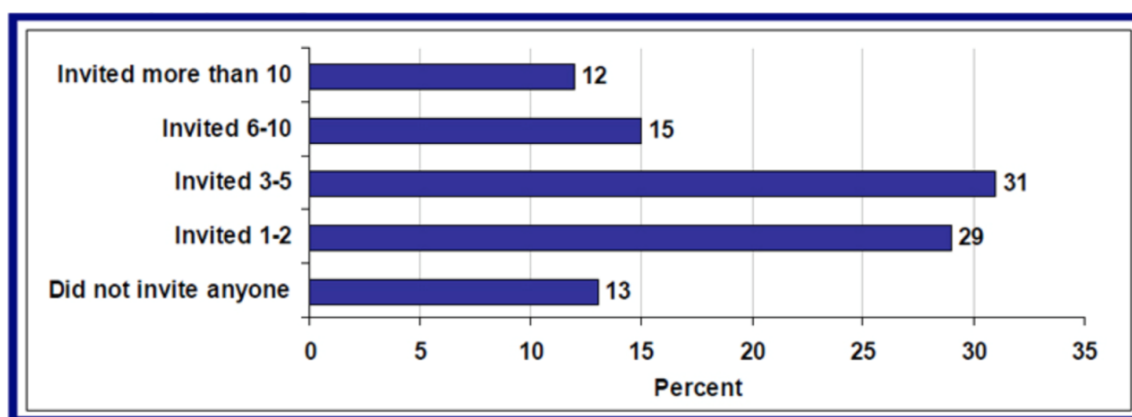


Figure 4. Invites to Church¹⁰²

Vast Majority of Megachurch Attenders Have Invited Others to Church in the Last Year



¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

One purpose for small groups is to develop a span of care amongst participants. While this does not produce disciples, it certainly creates a culture for disciple making. Dietrich Bonhoeffer notes that when he authentically commits to and cares for others he “can no longer condemn or hate other Christians for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble they cause me.”¹⁰³ Responding to one another in love requires an understanding and discipline that is best learned and practiced in community. This is one mark of a disciple. Bonhoeffer also acknowledges the depth in relationship with God and others that can develop through community: “The more genuine and the deeper our community becomes, the more everything else between us will recede, and the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is alive between us.”¹⁰⁴ There is a place for small group ministry in the church and it can breathe life into a disciple-making process. Disciples need community and community can aid the development of disciples. This will not happen haphazardly, however. There must be a structure in place that identifies the value of community and intentionally fosters it for the purpose of making disciples.

Alternative Four: Participate in a Church-Wide Reading Campaign

A final alternative to encourage Bible reading with the goal of meaningful, measurable impact in the life of a follower of Jesus is through a church-wide Bible reading campaign. Campaigns are available in all shapes and sizes. Churches can choose to read through the Bible in a year, read through the Bible in ninety days, or read through

¹⁰³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible*, eds. Gerhard Ludwig Müller, Albrecht Schönherr, and Geoffrey B. Kelly, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtress, vol. 5, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 90.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 34.

the New Testament in eight weeks, just to name a few. And in order to insure church leaders have promotional resources, lesson plans, and niche Bibles, nationally known churches, publishing houses, and Bible ministries offer an abundance of resources for sale. It would be easy for the skeptic to view a campaign as another means to generate income in the evangelical money machine, yet campaigns have tremendous potential for impact in the life of the believer and in the overall health of the church.

The first benefit is that readers are forced to prioritize their relationship with God by scheduling time to read—or listen to—the Bible. Accomplishing a goal such as reading through the New Testament in eight weeks requires discipline. It will not happen apart from following the prescribed reading plan. Resources abound to help participants do this by providing access to the Bible through a variety of formats: print, electronic, audio, and web. In addition, emails or texts can be sent to remind participants to read or to overview highlights of each day's reading—via text or video. The International Bible Society provides one popular plan called the Community Bible Experience. They produce a New Testament using the NIV translation, but it is formatted to read like a story. There are no chapter or verse numbers, no notes or commentary, and its layout is done in one column in order to emulate a novel with the hopes that participants will read more by becoming engaged with the storyline.¹⁰⁵

A second benefit is the power of social capital. Momentum is gained when a church chooses to accomplish a goal together. If a pastor encouraged his congregation to discipline themselves to read through the books of the New Testament over eight weeks,

¹⁰⁵ For a helpful overview of their Bible text layout, view their intro video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hk_IVp2tXXk.

many would recognize the value of such an undertaking, but not as many would participate. But by inviting the congregation to take part together, the church has a greater chance to gain momentum through social capital. “In fact, with a little help from our friends, we can produce a force greater than the sum of our individual efforts. But we can do this only when we know how to make use of social capital—the profound enabling power of an essential network of relationships.”¹⁰⁶ A church can further support its congregation by connecting its weekly teaching series to the Bible reading campaign in order to address questions that might arise over the week. This not only encourages church members to continue reading, but it provides a launching pad for those new to the church to jump in or motivates those who might have fallen behind to begin again.

The greatest benefit however is the invitation to meet regularly to discuss the reading with others in a book club or—using church language—a small group. A weekly small group not only motivates participants to read and provides a forum to discuss questions and discoveries, but it provides potentially the most important element: community. While a person might be willing to read through the New Testament in order to accomplish a goal, she may discover the unexpected benefit of friendship and support that lasts beyond the eight weeks. Participating in a church-wide Bible reading campaign is a potential catalyst to initiate the discipline to read the Bible, provide the structure needed to accomplish the goal, and develop new friends to journey with for eight weeks and potentially beyond.

¹⁰⁶ Joseph Grenny, *Influencer: The New Science of Leading Change*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education, 2013), 193, Kindle Edition.

There are many challenges with such a plan, however. While publishers strive to create resources and aids for those who do not enjoy reading, it is difficult to enlist non-readers in such a stringent endeavor. Churches must work hard to find ways to motivate them to participate so they do not feel left out.

A significant issue for most churches is how to respond to those whose eagerness falters in week three, four, five, and following. If one or more members have a personal or work or school crisis, that can significantly impede their efforts in accomplishing their weekly reading goals. As a result, they will not be able to participate at the level they desire in their small group and may choose not to participate. Or they might simply become so overwhelmed by the amount of reading required to catch up that they give up. This is a teachable moment for church leaders, and one aptly described by A.W. Tozer: “It is most important to our spiritual welfare that we hold in our minds always a right conception of God. If we think of Him as cold and exacting, we shall find it impossible to love Him, and our lives will be ridden with servile fear. If, again, we hold Him to be kind and understanding, our whole inner life will mirror that idea.”¹⁰⁷ Church leaders and—especially—group leaders must be gracious. The spirit of grace must be emphasized again and again to remind people, as Tozer encourages, that we are to be grace-filled because God models grace for us.

The biggest hurdle for churches using campaigns to overcome is what to do after the campaign. Once the last page is read, a new teaching series begins, and small groups have ended, campaign participants may feel at a loss of what to do next. After disciplining themselves to accomplish a worthy goal, they may experience an emotional

¹⁰⁷ A. W. Tozer, *The Root of the Righteous* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread, 1986), 12.

low and distance themselves from their new friends and even from Bible reading.

Churches need to provide next steps. Those steps can include new reading plans and encouragements to continue meeting as a small group, but the most effective method will be casting vision for why personal soul care is important and teaching congregants how to do so.

Narrowing the Search

“Careful planning puts you ahead in the long run; hurry and scurry puts you further behind.”¹⁰⁸ We live in an age—and Amazon culture—where ideas and devices proliferate. While resource streams continue to be stocked, the challenge for today’s followers of Jesus who strive to grow in their relationship with God and stay engaged with God throughout the day is to learn the art of finding or refining the best resource to accomplish that goal. There is no shortage of content but being able to apply the content is the primary concern.

Too many educators prioritize content as their sole goal and either fail to plan for application or leave little time for this critical component.

Content relates to facts, information, and material. Application relates to wisdom, transformation, and maturity. Content is the “what” and application is the “so what.” Content is typically what is discussed during class and application is primarily what is done as a result of class. Content centers around “knowing” and application around “being” and “doing.”¹⁰⁹

The church must be vigilant to take time for application and to teach its members to do the same on their own. This requires a deliberate effort. “Intentionality is that focus that

¹⁰⁸ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2005), Proverbs 21:5.

¹⁰⁹ Wilkinson, 139.

feeds us and fixes us firmly in the Lord of All in the face of inertia's pull of the everyday. Intentionality is the reminder that we need to be nourished each and every day in the experience of God that we need to encounter Jesus fresh every morning and renew our covenant with him daily."¹¹⁰ Intentionality is what will help form our faith in a frantic world.

One local congregation that has had success with application is Saddleback Church in southern California. During Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church Conference*, he outlined his church's strategy based on eight beliefs about spiritual growth:

1. Spiritual growth is intentional.
2. Spiritual growth is incremental.
3. Spiritual growth is personal.
4. Spiritual growth is practical.
5. Spiritual growth is relational.
6. Spiritual growth is multi-dimensional.
7. Spiritual growth is seasonal.
8. Spiritual growth is incarnational.¹¹¹

Saddleback advocates taking action on biblical imperatives rather than simply enumerating them. They recognize it is easier to process information and far more difficult to overcome the law of inertia by putting what they have learned into motion. As a result, they write small group content that is application based and all sermon outlines

¹¹⁰ Sweet, *Me and We*, Part 3, Conceiving a Christ Economy.

¹¹¹ Tom Holladay, interview by author, Syosset, NY, December 9, 2015.

are written as action steps. They model intentionality and practicality and practice these in community.

The four alternatives considered when seeking to overcome the problem of faith formation in a frantic world all have merit and strive to emphasize application. Each makes a viable case for itself while also containing flaws. It is important for a follower of Jesus to learn to nurture her own soul, and establishing a quiet time to read, reflect, and pray will prove beneficial. Reading through the Bible is more than a notable goal—it ought to be a primary emphasis for a believer who takes his faith seriously. It is not good enough for a Jesus follower to know bits and pieces of his faith story. He must strive to read and read and read again until the Bible’s stories are part of his own story.

Additionally, because man was not intended to be alone, he must not try to live out his faith in isolation. It is one thing to strive to feed himself spiritually, but the fleshing out of his faith is best done in community. And the local church is an ideal place for a believer to practice her faith so that she can not only learn from others but build into those in her faith community. An excellent resource for such an undertaking is a church-wide Bible reading campaign.

So how can we narrow the search? These alternatives are a few among thousands. What filters can we place on Amazon’s search to limit the plethora of ideas and resources that can so easily overwhelm? Simply adding the Boolean operator “and” will dramatically modify a web search. What would it like look to search for “quiet time” and “Bible reading” and “small groups” and “church-wide strategy”? What resource would combine those elements and additional features while functioning in a mobile environment?

SECTION THREE: THE THESIS

Get an MRI

*The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.*¹¹²
—John Milton

The contemporary evangelical spiritual growth movement does not work. At least not in the western hemisphere. Western Christians are a people who like to be busy, check off “To Do” lists, and get on with their lives. If Jesus followers are content with filled schedules, regardless of whether or not busy lives produce fruit, they can succeed. But if the church aspires to fulfill the apostle Paul’s teaching in 2 Timothy 3:14-17, it must acknowledge that “the Word of God was given for two primary purposes: That the Christian may become complete; That the Christian may become equipped.”¹¹³ By this standard, the current model fails.

The church must reimagine what modern biblical health looks like. Nineteenth-century pedagogue John Gregory gives insight regarding the contemporary teaching structure or disciple-making model: “We can only train by teaching, and we teach best when we train best. Training implies the exercise of the powers to be trained; but the proper exercise of the intellectual powers is found in the acquisition, the elaboration, and the application of knowledge.”¹¹⁴

¹¹² John Milton, *The Harvard Classics 4: The Complete Poems of John Milton* (New York, NY: P. F. Collier & Son, 1909), 96.

¹¹³ Wilkinson, 141.

¹¹⁴ Gregory, vii.

Application is critical, but that takes time ... a limited resource in fast-paced environments. But if believers do not slow down and apply what they are taught, their attempt to make disciples simply becomes another fill-in-the-blank knowledge-based learning activity—an ineffective approach.

Jesus followers must recognize they choose the pace they keep. They do not have to chase those before them, particularly if the leader's direction is questionable. In addition to monitoring pace, Jesus followers must eschew the quest to find balance in life.

What do we mean when we say we want more balance between life and work? For one thing, it means that we see work and life in opposition to each other. Does this mean that we feel we are not alive at work? That our personal lives are separate from our working lives? When I am not working, it is my life, and when I am working, is it someone else's life? Resolution lies in becoming more balanced between engaging in what has meaning for us and doing things that are useful and practical, or in a sense, instrumental. Being fully alive is to be in balance wherever we are.¹¹⁵

For many, the pursuit of balance is another box to check off, one that allows them to accomplish additional tasks or gather more information with the hope of succeeding in their numerous roles. Balance is an honest, noble quest. It is the desire to prioritize what matters most in life. But the quest for balance may be achieved in another, healthier way. It is found when spending time with God.

Daily engagement with God is possible. In fact, when followers of Jesus learn a rhythm whereby they frequently—three to six times a day—pause, pray, and review a “sticky moment” from their Bible reading, they will learn to hear from God and have opportunities to respond to God's instructions. The result will be a more meaningful and joy-filled life, and Jesus followers can respond to the same invitation Jesus's first-century

¹¹⁵ Block, 141.

disciples heard: “follow me” (Matt. 4:17). When this lifestyle and mindset is combined with consistent interaction with other believers and supported by a church through a campaign or as part of a church’s disciple-making strategy, it can revolutionize a church and its community. But this type of engagement—with God, his word, his people, and his world—begins with a strategic and impassioned commitment to God. One valuable tool to assess a believer’s or a church’s potential is the MRI.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging allows medical professionals to gain valuable insight through detailed images of human anatomy. The church can gain similar insight, by using a modified MRI as its operating system to “encode the secret to a disciple’s life, a life of followership. The First Secret of Life is ... Missional. The Second Secret of Life is ... Relational. The Third Secret of Life is ... Incarnational.”¹¹⁶ Leonard Sweet describes the MRI as the OS for the church, not merely a teaching series or boxes to check off. Instead, it is the “operatic sweep of the gospel in brevity, beauty, and threeness.”¹¹⁷ “It embraces and employs the whole theater of faith: the marks of mission, the arts of relationship, the arts of incarnation.”¹¹⁸

When Jesus followers want renewal in their lives, they need to be missional—not only giving money to those doing the work of ministry, but manifesting Jesus themselves where they live, work, and play. “To not find your job to be the primary place of discipleship is to automatically exclude a major part, if not the most, of your waking hours from life with him. The gospel turns your work into a spiritual formation training

¹¹⁶ Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful: Divine Design for Life and the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2009), Introduction, Logos Edition.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

center.”¹¹⁹ A commitment or practice of being relational is more than promoting small group involvement or sharing coffee between services—it is a true expression of faith, where believers practice the “one anothers,” forty-two biblical commands used seventy times in the Bible.¹²⁰ Fifty-six are commands Christians are to do (e.g., love one another, serve one another, honor one another), and fourteen are commands they are not to do (e.g., grumble, envy, lie, speak evil). Being incarnational requires the church to roll up its sleeves and show God’s love to all. Incarnational living is not a program, but it is a lifestyle. It requires a church body to embrace people of all backgrounds, learn their stories, understand who they are, and look for opportunities to serve them in meaningful ways.

“Missional is the mind of God. Mission is where God’s head’s at. Relational is the heart of God. Relationship is where God’s heart is. Incarnational is the hands of God. Incarnation is what God’s hands are up to. A so-beautiful world [church] requires a Trinitarian logic of thinking, loving, and doing.”¹²¹ This is not the church many have experienced, but it is one that positions the church to fulfill God’s plan to love him and love others. It is also the church Jesus casts vision for and invites others to participate in. But it requires a new mindset and a new lifestyle. It necessitates new vision. No longer must Christians think of their “spiritual life.” “There is no spiritual life. There is only life. One life where the spiritual is not separate but the whole.”¹²² It is one where believers

¹¹⁹ Ken Shigematsu, *God In My Everything: How An Ancient Rhythm Helps Busy People Enjoy God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 173.

¹²⁰ See Appendix 2, 91.

¹²¹ Sweet, *So Beautiful*, Introduction.

¹²² Ibid.

learn to expect God to work in their lives because he is already working. French Jesuit Jean Danielou illustrated this when he suggested that people gained a healthy view of missionary efforts when they “stop[ped] thinking of bringing Christ to India ... but rather start[ed] thinking about finding Christ already there.”¹²³ It is possible for believers to develop a new mindset and renewed vision, but it requires they learn new practices. One practice is that they begin living in a new way with a fresh mindset, and a second practice is for them to leverage modern technology to transform their hearts and minds.

Practice One: Live the J.E.S.U.S. Life

The J.E.S.U.S. life is a biblical strategy that can be replicated in fast-moving environments. It has five components: one commitment supported by four actions.

- **Join** Jesus’s mission
- **Engage** with God and his word
- **Simplify** your approach
- **Unite** with like-minded people
- **Stop** and reconnect throughout the day

Join Jesus’s Mission

Jesus’s mission is making disciples. His followers do that when they commit to follow Jesus and equip others to do the same. It does not need to be more complicated.

I want to strip down the faith to its bare essence. After years of piling on traditions and unrealistic expectations, let’s slough all that away and examine the lives of Jesus and His disciples. Crucial to obeying Jesus’s command to make

¹²³ David Burrell, quoted in Leonard Sweet, *So Beautiful*, Introduction.

disciples (Matt. 28:19) is an understanding of what it means to be a follower of Jesus who is determined to take that glorious light into the world.¹²⁴

David Putman references Matthew 28:19, the middle verse in arguably the seminal biblical passage on disciple making:

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

Putman defines a disciple as “a follower of Jesus who is learning to live like him, love like him, and leave what he left behind.”¹²⁵ Yet today’s believers live in an age with misplaced priorities. Disciple makers and disciple-making churches can make course corrections, but they must focus on Jesus’s mission. “We are supposed to be in the disciple-making business, not the church-making business. No matter how big and impressive the church you build becomes, if you have not made disciples on the same scale, your business has failed.”¹²⁶

Many churches borrow a business model and focus on developing leaders. Rusty Ricketson issues a foreboding warning: “I am a recovering leader ... The Bible is a book ... by followers, about followers, for followers ... I am always first and foremost a follower.”¹²⁷ He continues:

God didn't create us as leaders; God created us to be followers ... to follow his commands. The core of any person's being [is to be a follower]. Be the follower God has called you to be. And then, if necessary, and in God's providence, you

¹²⁴ David Putman and Ed Stetzer, *Breaking the Discipleship Code* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2008), 6.

¹²⁵ David Putman, interview by author, Syosset, NY, December 9, 2015.

¹²⁶ Sweet, *I Am a Follower*, The Way: The Wayfarer's Fruit of Heaven Casting.

¹²⁷ Rusty Ricketson, *Follower First* (Cumming, GA: Heartworks, 2009), 7.

find yourself in a position of responsibility over other followers, you need to learn skills in order to best use your influence in the lives of those people. And you will naturally be called a leader by them.¹²⁸

Timothy Keller concurs. Keller wants churches to shift from having discipleship programs to establishing a church-wide discipleship culture. Keller's view may appear to be a simple word change, but the difference is monumental. A program is an add-on, an addendum, whereas a culture creates and monitors programs. Churches and businesses that attempt to do too much, pursuing multiple purposes, rarely excel. They often fail. Keller advocates a singular purpose: a disciple-making culture producing followers who are disciple makers. Keller believes disciples make four commitments:

1. Visible change (transformative learning)
2. Unconditional obedience (Lordship of Jesus)
3. Serving rather than being served (ministry mindset)
4. Dying in order to live (gospel sacrifice)¹²⁹

Keller's first characteristic, visible change, complements Ricketson's "follower first" in that a disciple "roots himself in disciplines to change his life."¹³⁰ Instead of seeking to distinguish himself from others, the disciple develops disciplines in order to manifest Christ. The second trait, unconditional obedience, is derived from Jesus's instruction to his disciples: "Then he said to them all: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me'" (Luke 9:23). Nothing receives higher allegiance than God. Keller asked two evaluative questions for followers

¹²⁸ Rusty Ricketson, interview by author, Syosset, NY, October 27, 2016.

¹²⁹ Timothy Keller, "What Is Discipleship?" (lecture, City Lab: Making Disciples in the City, New York, NY, September 8, 2016).

¹³⁰ Ibid.

making this commitment: (1) Am I willing to obey whatever the Bible teaches whether I like it or not? (2) Am I willing to trust God in anything he sends in my life whether I understand it or not?¹³¹

Regarding having a ministry mindset—that is, serving rather than being served—Keller highlights the ministry accomplished in Acts 4 where everyone shared their resources with one another. He offers two evaluative questions for this trait: (1) Am I ready to root out selfishness in the demands I make of my family, friends, and associates? (2) Am I ready to change my habits?¹³²

The fourth trait, dying in order to live, provides accountability for the first three traits. Apart from the gospel sacrifice found in this fourth characteristic, one might be vulnerable to abusing others, knowingly or unknowingly. This trait personifies a spirit of grace, exuding a gratitude and graciousness that is infectious.

Living the Jesus life requires followers of Jesus to prioritize making disciples: learning to follow Jesus and equipping others to do the same.

Engage with God and His Word

Jesus followers engage with God and his word to make feeding their souls a priority. While they may hunger for quality teaching and seek to grow and learn from others all they can, they are not dependent on others for spiritual food. Practicing the Jesus life requires one to discipline himself to nurture his soul by spending time with God. By engaging with God and his word, believers receive, reflect, and respond to God's

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

leadership. “It’s a rhythm of spiritual practices that helps center your life on Christ.”¹³³

David Putman describes it as a time where a disciple learns to “hear the voice of God and put it into practice.”¹³⁴

Scholars and theologians throughout history have encouraged believers to develop a daily rhythm of spending time with God. Today, many refer to this practice as a quiet time or having devotions or, as described earlier, a “rule of life.” Bible engagement produces an appetite for learning, one that slows a believer down and encourages her to ask question upon question rather than seek easy answers. “Curiosity is the enemy of certainty, and certainty— particularly conviction that other people are different, or sinful, or irreligious— lies behind much of the conflict and genocide that disfigure human history. If I could issue one injunction to humankind it would be: ‘Be curious!’”¹³⁵ Jesus followers are not to ignore their questions or concerns, but must address them and pursue answers to any doubt that aches or lingers.

Healthy engagement looks different for each person. There is no single way to do it. The key is to “find a time, find a place, and make it a habit. That’s all spiritual disciplines are: cultivated habits. Horace Mann once observed: ‘Habit is a cable; we weave a thread of it each day, and at last we cannot break it.’”¹³⁶ Most prioritize reading the Bible, but it’s more than that. It is relationship building—“a relational way of experiencing God’s Word. It’s about not just reading but engaging the Bible—receiving

¹³³ Shigematsu, 39.

¹³⁴ David Putman, interview by author, Syosset, NY, December 9, 2015.

¹³⁵ Fortey, Richard, *The Wood for the Trees* (London, UK: William Collins, 2016), 5.

¹³⁶ Steve Farrar, *Point Man: How a Man Can Lead His Family*, rev. ed. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2003), 140.

Scripture with our minds and our hearts, reflecting on God's story, and responding to His message in a personal way.”¹³⁷

Some push back, claiming they do not have enough time or do not feel the need for such a discipline. Ken Shigematsu asks a more pressing question, “Is it possible to follow the monastic way, enjoying God in every area of my life, while immersed in the busy routines of modern life?”¹³⁸ Steve Jobs reminded graduates—those most vulnerable to getting caught up in the whirl of activity and ignoring time-tested practices in order to pursue personal goals—that healthy disciplines yield long-term benefits: “You can’t connect the dots looking forward. You can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future.”¹³⁹ Those who live the Jesus life make disciple making a priority and take time to engage with God and his word.

Simplify Your Approach

A simplified approach invites followers to identify one next step or key thought from their time with God. Its purpose is for Jesus followers to practice obedience, not merely increase Bible knowledge. “The goal is not that you should become a great Bible scholar. It’s not about mere intellectual assent to a set of doctrines. The goal is that you should be like Jesus—and the Scriptures can help you with that. I don’t need to read the

¹³⁷ Cole and Ross, *Starting Point*, We’ll look at what works.

¹³⁸ Shigematsu, 17.

¹³⁹ Steve Jobs, “You’ve Got to Find What You Love,” (commencement address, Stanford University, Stanford, CA, June 12, 2005), accessed August 5, 2017, <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2005/june15/jobs-061505.html>.

Bible because I'm a great saint. I read the Bible because I'll find God there.”¹⁴⁰ And in finding God, believers are wise to follow God's leadership.

Simplicity provides room for reflection. Reading is not the goal. Reading leads to reflection, which leads to a response. But reflection is difficult. Few people think they have time for it. It is essential, however, for Jesus followers to make time for reflection, as it is the pause that allows God's Spirit to engage their heart, soul, and mind and gives them perspective they might routinely miss. Reading and then pausing is an important discipline. It allows a person to question what she has read and question how she views life and lives. Believers are wise when they read their Bible, pause to ask God what it has to do with their life, and then listen for God's response.

Christian education often fails to stimulate deeper thinking or allow room for questions or doubt. Many Christian workbooks and teaching materials fail to ask open-ended questions and rely on “yes/no” or content-specific responses. While there is a place for a content-based question—to establish the facts of a story, for example—it is important for teachers and disciple makers to lead students to deeper levels of understanding. Harold Stevenson and James Stigler note differences found in the Japanese educational system: “Teachers ask questions for different reasons in the United States and in Japan. In the United States, the purpose of a question is to get an answer. In Japan, teachers pose questions to stimulate thought. A Japanese teacher considers a

¹⁴⁰ Les Sussman, *Praise Him! Christian Music Stars Share Their Favorite Verses from Scripture* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 155-164.

question to be a poor one if it elicits an immediate answer, for it indicates that students were not challenged to think.”¹⁴¹

“A common mistake reporters make is that they get so steeped in the details that they fail to see the message’s core.”¹⁴² Bible readers do the same. They are prone to focus on completing their assigned reading, even when God’s Spirit prompts them to spend extra time on a story or verse or word. A simplified approach may include reading through the Bible, yet not being overly concerned to complete that goal in a year or two. Instead, a healthy reading strategy invites readers to engage with the text with regular reminders to review, reflect, respond, remind, and remember. To review is taking a fresh look at a previous reading, looking for anything that alerts the reader’s attention. To reflect is a reminder to pause, to take an extra moment after the reading and during the day to consider what God said or is saying. To respond is yet another prompt that the goal is action. In what way is God asking the reader to respond? To remind is a nudge for readers to be tuned in to those around them. Perhaps there is a truth or encouragement that God wants the reader to share with someone in their life. And, finally, to remember is a perusal through previous readings and written reflections to discern if there is a particular verse or truth or idea God wants the reader to hold onto. The Jesus life focuses on slowing down and making obedience to God the priority more than reading a set number of chapters or verses.

¹⁴¹ Stevenson and Stigler, 195.

¹⁴² Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* (New York, NY: Random House, 2008), 32.

Unite with Like-Minded People

Practicing the Jesus life is not a solo endeavor. People are better together. People grow stronger when engaged in community life. Church leaders in the United States speak so much of a personal faith in a personal God that they fail to remember God is triune, one who lives in community and, therefore, is a model and reminder that disciples are born and nurtured as a family. Pursuing a relationship with God in isolation leads down a path of self-centeredness, the antithesis of God's design:

The empire of Me is empty—empty of empathy for others and empty of treasures for oneself. Every Me is an integral limb of an organic We rooted in Jesus, from whom we derive our core identity. Our relationships with God and each other are intrinsic to the integrity of our identity as human beings and as collective “bodies” of Christ. Discipleship is a We garden made up of an infinite number of Me individuals. Discipleship is a story lived together, authored by God, and scripted and scribed by people who are all uniquely designed by God.¹⁴³

The church must cast vision for community building and view growth as a partnership between God and a group of people. As a young disciple grows stronger in her community of faith, the group can begin to equip her to take her next steps toward maturing in the faith. Those steps include learning to feed herself on her own, apart from the group.

The natural world models this for us. A mother hen must train or equip her young to survive on their own. This is done in community, but if the goal is not independence—or learning to survive on its own—the chick will die. “The cooped hen may by her encouraging cluck send forth her chickens to the fields she cannot herself explore; but sad

¹⁴³ Sweet, *Me and We*, Introduction.

the fate of the brood if they remain in the coop while she goes abroad to feed.”¹⁴⁴ The church must advocate that faith formation be done in community, yet with the goal that all participants are equipped to feed themselves.

“Christians grow through *relationship*, not religion. We stall when we focus on impersonal formulas and empty habits.”¹⁴⁵ Believers who want to grow their hearts and minds will find success when they allow others into their lives. Expressing vulnerability in what they are learning, or sharing their success or dissatisfaction in applying their learning, will prove beneficial. Some may be tempted to hide their true feelings or experiences but will find that lifestyle shallow. “In a true friendship, you move beyond pretending to be someone you’re not. You take off your mask, and you say to the other person, ‘Here’s who I really am.’ And it’s reciprocal. A true friend accepts you as you are and says in return, ‘Here’s who I really am too —without my mask.’ You are accepted, and you accept that person.”¹⁴⁶ In biblical community, believers see one another as partners and teammates rather than opponents. They seek to encourage one another, despite defeats or temporary setbacks. “We have been so conditioned to compete against our peers that we have no faith we can learn from them.”¹⁴⁷ The apostle Paul reminds the church that God has a purpose for the challenges it faces. It is God “who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we

¹⁴⁴ Gregory, 19.

¹⁴⁵ Cole and Ross, Chapter 2.

¹⁴⁶ Bill Hybels, *Simplify: Ten Practices to Unclutter Your Soul* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2014), Chapter 7, Logos Edition.

¹⁴⁷ Block, 103.

ourselves receive from God” (2 Cor. 1:4). When Jesus followers unite with like-minded people, living the Jesus life not only becomes possible but it also becomes enjoyable.

Stop and Reconnect Throughout the Day

One of the primary, yet often overlooked, practices in living the Jesus life is to develop a lifestyle of hearing from God by stopping to reconnect with God throughout the day. Poet Mary Oliver captures the essence: “How important it is to walk along, not in haste but slowly, looking at everything and calling out *Yes! No!*”¹⁴⁸

The goal is to multiply the moment, extending a God experience throughout the day, rather than limiting it to a one moment in time. The more Jesus followers think about God or pause to be still before God, the less they will focus on themselves or become consumed by their work or tasks. Gayle Haggard described the challenge it was to spend disciplined time with God through various seasons of her life. She expressed her desire to hear from God throughout the day and was pleased how God responded.

For those who think I am being a little simplistic, I admit I am. But I have discovered that the richest, most rewarding wisdom is simple. We just have to do it. And that is where the problem lies. Many times we know what to do; we just don’t do it. We embark on sophisticated detours that take us way off track. After 25 years as a pastor’s wife, I have learned that happiness comes from hearing the voice of the Holy Spirit and receiving His counsel—and then doing what He tells me to do.¹⁴⁹

If Christian disciples are to develop a lifestyle of hearing from God, they must stop and reconnect regularly. God does speak to his followers when they read the Bible, but God also speaks when they drive or walk to class or buy groceries or shovel snow.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Oliver, *White Pine: Poems and Prose Poems* (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 8.

¹⁴⁹ Gayle Haggard, “Walking in Tune with the Holy Spirit” *Discipleship Journal*, May/June 2005.

Beginning to practice the presence of God may require some triggers. Modern technology—phones and watches—provides alarms or apps that can alert users to stop what they are doing and reflect or review or pray or listen. Older technology—index cards, post-its, or key chain fobs—can visually alert believers or remind them to pause. The purpose of a trigger is to establish a new rhythm, producing a greater awareness of God’s work in and around the disciple. “The more our behaviors are repeated and routinized, the more they occur without conscious effort and the less energy they require.”¹⁵⁰

Churches strive to be both deep and wide—provide ministry to people of all spiritual interest levels while further equipping believers to grow in their love, knowledge, and obedience to God. “There is simply no way to shorten the time that depth requires. Any of the values we hold dear wilt under the pressure of time. It is difficult to imagine instant compassion, instant reconciliation, or instant justice. If we yield to the temptation of speed, we short-circuit our values.”¹⁵¹

Mary Oliver’s words ought to be the soul cry for all followers of Jesus: “To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work.”¹⁵² God is speaking, and often it is in a whisper. The more God’s followers stop to reconnect with him, the more familiar God’s voice becomes.

If there is a pattern in Scripture regarding whispers, it is that we serve a communicating God—a God of words. He created with a word, he healed with a word, he encouraged with a word, he rebuked with a word, he guided with a word, he prophesied with a word, he assured with a word, he loved with a word,

¹⁵⁰ Schwartz, 279.

¹⁵¹ Block, 80.

¹⁵² Oliver, 8.

he served with a word and he comforted with a word. Throughout all of history, God has communicated, and he still is at it today. The issue isn't whether or not God is speaking; it's whether we will have ears to hear what he says.¹⁵³

God invites his children to follow him and practicing the Jesus life equips them to do so. But leveraging modern technology will enhance a disciple's efforts.

Practice Two: Use the Bottom Line Bible App

Practicing the Jesus life can be done with a print Bible and committed group of friends who are developing a disciple-making mindset. However, the present-day disciple must become comfortable with modern tools. While the early decades of the twenty-first century will continue to utilize paper, the growth of the digital culture will increase. We are seeing a shift from Gutenberg to Google. The print culture originating from the world of Johannes Gutenberg and his printing press is transitioning to a digital culture searched and dominated by Google. As a result, the wise disciple maker equips herself for success in a mobile environment.

Salt House, a church in Kirkland, Washington, has “developed ‘Text & Txt,’ a small-group practice that takes place entirely over text messaging. Groups commit to reading a biblical text each day and to answering the question, ‘How does this speak to me?’”¹⁵⁴ They prioritize developing relationships and building community outside of their designated meeting time, and they use those growing relationships to foster soul care in themselves and one another.

¹⁵³ Bill Hybels and Wayne Cordeiro, *The Power of a Whisper: Hearing God, Having the Guts to Respond* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), Chapter 2, Logos Edition.

¹⁵⁴ Cara Meredith, “Reaching a New Generation with the Bible,” *CT Pastors*, Spring 2017, accessed September 18, 2017, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2017/bible-engagement/reaching-new-generation-with-bible.html>.

Faith communities are trying it all when it comes to Bible engagement, especially digital tools. Today there are Bible apps, daily reading plans, study resources, podcasts, YouTube channels, plus more digital magazines, blogs, and websites than one can count. While it's certainly true that younger generations seem to salivate toward digital formats like social media, instructing them to download yet another app may not be the answer, at least not initially.¹⁵⁵

Any digital tool is not the answer. The proper digital tool designed for the purpose of making disciples is essential. The Bottom Line Bible app builds upon the healthy “rule of life” foundation illustrated throughout the Bible and practiced historically by those seeking to form their relationship with God.

There are significant differences in the moral behaviors and spiritual maturity of believers who read or listen to the Bible at least four times a week compared to those who read or hear Scripture less often or never at all. In fact, such engagement motivates service for God and impacts the world for Him (through helping in church, loving the unlovely, reaching out to the needy).¹⁵⁶

Engagement is key. The Bottom Line Bible app does more than encourage users to read the Bible. They are to receive God's word, reflect on it, consider how they might apply it, and revisit what they have read numerous times a day. The motivation for doing so is an authentic relationship with God, one where users look forward to hearing from God and following God's leadership.

The way to fix a mixed-up and sin-filled heart is through meaningful connection with God. That relationship goes far beyond a quick ‘quiet time’; it's about finding the joy of a life surrendered to Christ, one that understands the power of obedience without terror of failure. We grow spiritually by realizing, then resembling the character of our forgiving heavenly Father.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Cole and Ross, Chapter 3.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., Chapter 5.

A consistent time with God, seeking direction and listening to him, is crucial in a believer's faith formation.

However, instead of merely providing biblical text or direction for a quiet time, the Bottom Line Bible app seeks to multiply the moments in which a participant engages with God and the Bible. During his time with God, the disciple must seek to identify a key truth or action step—a “sticky moment”—and seek to multiply that moment throughout the day. A “sticky moment” is a truth or verse that will be understood, remembered, or acted upon beyond the initial moment of engagement. It gives participants an action step, providing an opportunity for them to apply or follow the direction they received and make a positive impact on their day. The Bottom Line Bible app provides “sticky moment” opportunities by utilizing ten features, with three distinctive to the app. The goal is that one or more of the ten features resonate with users so they stay engaged with God and their Bible reading throughout the day.

Feature One: Bible Text

This is an obvious feature for a Bible reading app, but in a quest to devise meaningful ways to interact with the text, creators can focus on their book's or device's attributes to such an extent that they unknowingly minimize the value of the biblical text. This is shortsighted. “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible offers more than a platform for study or discussion: it offers life, direction, and hope. “Neglecting God's Word is the

main reason believers become stuck spiritually, get disconnected from God, and are prone to losing ground to all kinds of damaging thoughts and harmful behaviors.”¹⁵⁸

The Bottom Line Bible provides biblical text in a sequential, digestible portion, with additional features designed to allow readers—or listeners—to stay engaged with God and his word throughout the day. German theologian Helmut Thielicke warns against a “grab and go” mentality: finding satisfaction in bite-sized portions of scripture without reflection or engagement.

The Word of God is demanding. It demands a stretch of time in our day; even though it be a very modest one; in which The Word is our only companion. We can’t bite off a simple ‘text for the day’ and swallow it in one lump while we have our hand on the doorknob. Such things are not digested; they are not assimilated into one’s organism. God will not put up with being fobbed off with prayers in telegram [twitter?] style and cut short like a troublesome visitor for whom we open the door just a crack to get rid of him as quickly as possible.¹⁵⁹

The Bottom Line Bible’s intent is that users do not develop a “grab and go” mindset. Instead, the goal is that users multiply the moment that captured their heart or piqued their interest when reading the Bible, prompting them to interact with God and the day’s Bible text numerous times throughout the day.

Feature Two: Image

We are visual creatures. “Human beings prefer to gather and interpret information through sight, which is why visual marketing has become so popular in recent years.”¹⁶⁰ With that understanding, if Bible readers learn to read the Bible’s story as though they

¹⁵⁸ Cole and Ross, Chapter 3.

¹⁵⁹ Leonard Sweet, Facebook post, September 19, 2017.

¹⁶⁰ Jason Demers, “Why Instagram Is the Top Social Platform for Engagement (And How to Use It),” *Forbes*, accessed September 18, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jaysondemers/2017/03/28/why-instagram-is-the-top-social-platform-for-engagement-and-how-to-use-it/>.

were watching a movie, they will not only have greater recall, but they will experience the story, identifying with the characters and their context. The Bottom Line Bible provides an image for each Bible chapter to help the user cement a theme or big idea or feeling from the chapter. “We are incredible at remembering pictures. Hear a piece of information, and three days later you'll remember 10 percent of it. Add a picture and you'll remember 65 percent.”¹⁶¹ If the image brings to mind an earlier Bible reading, it gives the user a chance to stay engaged with God, providing a vehicle to continue hearing from God. “If something is alive, it reproduces. A live image will repeat and reproduce. Memory is the reproduction of images as well. And reproduction is recreation.”¹⁶²

Feature Three: Summary

The Bottom Line Bible summary is a one-or two-word overview of the chapter's content. It is purposefully short in order to make it easier to recall a seminal moment or theme from the chapter.

Feature Four: Big Idea

The big idea is one primary thought or idea that is developed or discovered in the chapter. “Screenwriters call this the ‘controlling idea.’ It has also been called the gist, the take-away, the thesis statement, or the single unifying message.”¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ John Medina, “Brain Rule Rundown: Rule #10: Vision Trumps All Other Senses,” Brain Rules, accessed September 18, 2017, <http://www.brainrules.net/vision>.

¹⁶² Leonard Sweet, *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 161, Kindle Edition.

¹⁶³ Nancy Duarte, *Resonate: Present Visual Stories That Transform Audiences* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), 78.

Feature Five: Key Verse

The key verse is one verse—sometimes two— that births the aforementioned big idea and summary. On a rare occasion a key verse is taken from a different book of the Bible, but that happens only when another verse better summarizes the chapter’s content. For example, Genesis 10 lists Noah’s descendants. The key verse for that chapter is taken from Psalm 103, describing the generational blessing in fearing the Lord. Another goal for this feature is that users have an accessible verse to memorize or on which they can meditate.

Feature Six: If God Wrote You a Letter

The Jesus life is not to be lived alone. Jesus followers are better together, particularly as they listen to and learn from those in their faith community, allowing them to learn from one another’s insights and stories. There is power in story. “In addition to fostering relationships to help younger generations engage the Bible, leaders must understand that Millennials desire to be part of a bigger story. According to research done by Story Collaborative, an inbound marketing group, Millennials not only want stories, they also want to feel involved in the story.”¹⁶⁴

“If God wrote you a letter” (distinctive feature 1) invites the user into the story. It is written to the user from God’s perspective, an adaptation and rephrasing of the biblical text from the target chapter and additional relevant Bible chapters. This idea was wildly successful in Sarah Young’s *Jesus Calling*, selling more than fifteen million copies and appearing on all the bestseller lists. Young is not without her critics, however.

¹⁶⁴ Meredith, “Reaching a New Generation with the Bible.”

In Tim Challies's blog he identifies "10 serious problems with Jesus Calling,"¹⁶⁵ most related to his claim that Young speaks for God, thus declaring the insufficiency of the Bible. However, in her introduction, Young claims "The Bible is, of course, the only inerrant Word of God; my writings must be consistent with that unchanging standard."¹⁶⁶ Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola support Young: "If you look at each chapter closely, however, the sections where Jesus is speaking are drawn straight from Scripture and reworded to have the personalized voice of Christ."¹⁶⁷ And the result? "The immense popularity of this book shows us one thing: God's people are desperate to hear Jesus speak personally to them."¹⁶⁸

This feature is distinctive in that every Bible chapter included in the app has words of comfort and encouragement—and sometimes discipline—that have been shaped from the biblical text and presented in a personal way to the reader. A similar experience is found in Max Lucado's book, *Come Thirsty*. In his chapter "If God Wrote You a Letter," he describes the word of God as a gift with a note that many receive but don't open. He warns, "But don't fail to open them. And most of all, don't fail to read the letter. For buried amid the gifts of daily mercy and unquenchable commitment rests a

¹⁶⁵ Tim Challies, "10 Serious Problems with Jesus Calling," Challies, accessed July 25, 2017, <https://www.challies.com/articles/10-serious-problems-with-jesus-calling/>.

¹⁶⁶ Sarah Young, *Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004), xii.

¹⁶⁷ Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Speaks: Learning to Recognize and Respond to the Lord's Voice* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), Chapter 32, Logos Edition.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

letter, a personal letter. It might read something like this ...”¹⁶⁹ Lucado then summarizes dozens of Bible verses in the form of a loving, inspiring, personal letter from God.

Feature Seven: Next Step

Each Bible chapter in the app includes a next step, a practical way a user can apply the biblical content. Too often, biblical instruction focuses on interpretation, leaving little or no time for application. Yet Jesus teaches, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28). And James commands, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22). While study and reflection are key components to understand the meaning of the Bible, application brings the text to life and gives people a chance to see how God’s word is living and active.

The apostle Paul instructs Timothy on the value of God’s word, concluding with its benefit: “so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17). The Greek words “*artios exērtismenos*” translated “thoroughly equipped” are used only once in the Bible. “The idea in these words is that God wants each believer to be so influenced by the Scriptures that he is ready to live for and serve the Lord effectively, in a Christ-honoring way.”¹⁷⁰

Many statements in Scripture indicate that the Bible is given to us for more than satisfying our curiosity about what God is like, what He has done in the past, or what He will do in the future. Its intended impact on lives is seen in that the Bible convicts (Heb. 4:12–13), regenerates (2 Tim. 3:15; 1 Peter 1:23), nurtures (2:2), cleanses (Ps. 119:9; John 15:3; 17:17; Eph. 5:25–26), counsels and guides (Ps. 119:24, 105), prevents sin (v. 11), renews (vv. 50,

¹⁶⁹ Max Lucado, *Come Thirsty* (Nashville, TN: W Publishing Group, 2004), 152.

¹⁷⁰ Roy B. Zuck, *Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth*, ed. Craig Bubeck, Sr. (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1991), 280.

93, 107, 149, 154, 156), strengthens (v. 28), sustains (vv. 116, 175), gives wisdom (vv. 98, 130, 169), and delivers (v. 170).¹⁷¹

In short, the Bible is not to be read and forgotten. It is to be applied. As a result, the Bottom Line Bible app provides a next step suggestion for its users.

Feature Eight: Media Link

“Words have power. Images have even more power.”¹⁷² The majority of the Bottom Line Bible app features are text-driven except for two: the image and the media link. The media link is the second distinctive feature, as it provides an internet link for immediate access to view a music video, lyric video, film clip, faith story, or teaching illustration for every chapter in the app. (The Bible books Genesis, Proverbs, and Matthew are included in the free version of the app and the entire Bible is available in the full version.) Even the lyric video, while text-driven, is beneficial. It is layered text over a moving image, but it invites the user to participate in worship by singing along or reflecting on the lyrics.

Modern culture is dominated by visual communication. “We live in an image-hungry, image-driven world.”¹⁷³ Marketers understand the value of the medium, as people readily respond to and remember the images they see and experience. These facts help explain why:

- The brain processes visual information 60,000 times faster than text.
- 90 percent of information that comes to the brain is visual.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2007), 1585, Kindle Edition.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 1558.

- Visual aids in the classroom improve learning by up to 400 percent.
- Approximately 65 percent of the population are visual learners.¹⁷⁴

Each media link functions as an independent story, illustrating a truth or theme found in the Bible chapter's text. "Stories constitute some of the richest images because stories paint pictures that come alive in your imagination."¹⁷⁵ The app strives to leverage users' imaginations to promote their engagement with God. When a scene or a lyric from a video comes to mind—a "sticky moment"—the goal is that it prompts users to pause, pray, or act on what they have read.

Feature Nine: Personal Notes

The notes feature allows users to respond to the daily content in a variety of ways. They can disagree with any of the features and write their own summary, big idea or next step, for example. They can reflect on the Bible's text and write their own thoughts as God's Spirit leads. They might visualize a different image that helps them connect with God, or they might think of another song or video clip that better illustrates a "sticky moment" from the day's reading, and they can record that in the notes section. The personal notes feature is a user's ongoing chronicle of his experience with God.

Feature Ten: Reminders

The final feature provides the third distinctive element. Instead of focusing on reading through the Bible or completing a Bible book, the Bottom Line Bible app

¹⁷⁴ Rich Birch, "6 Tips for Making Your Announcements More Visual," Unseminary, accessed September 12, 2017, <http://www.unseminary.com/6-tips-for-making-your-announcements-more-visual/>.

¹⁷⁵ Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks*, 1567.

emphasizes engagement and practice. The app encourages users to pause and reflect and provides two ways to do that.

First, every third day, users will receive one of five instructions to pause and reflect entitled Review, Reflect, Respond, Remind, and Remember.¹⁷⁶ Each title offers several leading questions, encouraging users to examine the previous two days of reading, summaries, notes, and other features. The goal is for the app user is to stay engaged with God and listen to what God is saying, rather than prioritizing completing the reading. The third day practice requires users to slow down.

The second way users are encouraged to pause and reflect is through built-in text reminders. Users can program up to twelve times a day the app sends a message, reminding them to stop and pray. This time can be used to pray, meditate, take action on the day's Next Step, or simply rest in the presence of their loving heavenly father.

Busy but Connected

*Hard work pays off in the future. Laziness pays off now.*¹⁷⁷
—Steven Wright

The process of making disciples is a life-long undertaking. It is hard work. Jesus followers never truly arrive, and so they must prepare for a long journey. “We must guard against ‘instantitis’ in our equipping. Sometimes it takes years of constant watering and fertilizing before we see growth. Equipping is a long-term commitment.”¹⁷⁸ Because of the commitment required, disciples must discipline themselves to persevere. Regardless

¹⁷⁶ See Appendix 1, 90.

¹⁷⁷ Steven Wright, *S Comedy*, accessed October 26, 2017, <http://scomedy.com/quotes/10606..>

¹⁷⁸ Wilkinson, 373.

of best intentions, “As we begin to conform to the will of God in one area of life, He reveals to us our need in another area. That is why we will always be pursuing—as opposed to attaining—holiness in this life.”¹⁷⁹ Ruth Bell Graham understood the metaphor of the journey. She completed her time on earth with a smile and reminder for all as her tombstone etching reads “End of Construction—Thank you for your patience.”¹⁸⁰

Successfully navigating a long journey requires a disciplined body, spirit, and mind. Arnie Cole and Michael Ross provide two equations for life that liberate or enslave a disciple’s mind. Enslavement is the result of a man-made, culture-based, equation:

Legalism + Works = Christianity
 Good Behavior + Performance = Forgiveness
 Rules + Self-Control = Faith¹⁸¹

It is a performance-based equation requiring Jesus followers to work out their own salvation. It is an equation that cannot be solved. There is no rest or end in mind. There is only effort that demands additional effort until a person has conditioned himself to believe he is his own savior.

Cole and Ross offer a second equation. It is God’s equation, one that not only provides an answer, but a solution obtained outside of a believer's effort. The answer is contingent on Christ acting on his followers’ behalf for their benefit.

Christ + Salvation = Christianity
 Love + Grace = Forgiveness
 Surrender + Freedom = Faith¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Bridges, *Holiness*, 9.

¹⁸⁰ Sweet, *Me and We*, The Life, From Number One Leader to Coach Ghost.

¹⁸¹ Cole and Ross, Chapter 5.

¹⁸² Ibid.

Followers of Jesus can have their faith formed in a frantic world when they surrender to God and accept his offer to lead their lives. The more disciple makers instill an appetite for learning and the ability to discern God's voice from the ones posted, tweeted, projected, and amplified, the more disciples will recognize they are God's light for the world. They will embrace the fact that Christ wants to manifest himself through their lives and make connections with those around them, despite their busy schedules. As a result, they will be quick to befriend and serve those who need to see, hear, and experience Jesus's love.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that frightens us. We ask ourselves, "Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous?" Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. —Marianne Williamson (often credited to Nelson Mandela)¹⁸³

Christians are invited to drink deeply of God, his love, and his word. They must not let the pace of the world distract them or accept one of its alternatives. Christ followers have all they need to live the Jesus life, and they will successfully navigate life's complexity by focusing on and obeying what God says in their daily Bible reading.

I imagine God a deep well, and every day He gives us the chance to throw a bucket in, and draw from Him the motivation and energy for love. Sometimes the bucket rattles against the side, and we pull it up too quickly, without any of the overtures His life-giving water promises. It feels empty to us, like the bucket. But when we hear the splash, and feel the pull, something mysterious happens. It's as if we are poring over a letter from someone we can vaguely picture in our mind, but have fallen in love with.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Lynn Stoddard, *Educating for Human Greatness* (Sarasota, FL: Peppertree Press, 2010), 45.

¹⁸⁴ Kevin J. Young, "What Letters Do for Lovers," *To Sir, with Love* Blog, September 20, 2017, accessed September 23, 2017, <https://kevinjyoung.com/2017/09/20/what-letters-do-for-lovers/>.

SECTION FOUR: ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

I created content for an app that encourages Bible readers to stay engaged with their reading with reminders to pause, pray, and reflect throughout the day. The app is a template created by Back to the Bible Ministry (backtothebible.org/back-to-the-bible-custom-apps), allowing me to upload my Bible content. My content provides commentary on each chapter in the Bible books of Genesis, Proverbs, and Matthew, incorporating a variety of learning styles. The goal is that one or more of the ten sections found in each Bible chapter summary will provide a “sticky moment” to foster Bible recall and, thus, encourage users to have ongoing interaction with God and the Bible text.

SECTION FIVE: ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

Goals and Strategies

Dissertation Goals

1. User recognizes the need for regular Bible engagement
2. User understands how the app addresses the need
3. Provide a reading plan that is thorough but not overwhelming
4. Provide a number of ways for the user to engage with the Bible reading
5. Provide reminders for the user to pause, pray, and interact with earlier reading
6. Show the value of using the app with a friend or small group

Beta-version Plan and Assessment

- I led a disciple making group that used the app to assess its strengths, weaknesses, and overall effectiveness.
- I offered a free modified version (Gospels only) in the app store and requested feedback.

Success Measurements

I determined my app successful if four or more of the following occurred:

- app users used the app
- app users enjoyed the app
- app users told others about the app
- app users remembered something from their Bible reading all day long

- app users thought or acted differently because they stayed engaged with their Bible reading throughout the day
- app users sought accountability or offered it to other app users
- app users developed an alternative means of staying engaged with their Bible reading and no longer needed the app

Artifact Maintenance Plan

- Because I am using the app template of a professional app development team (backtothebible.org/back-to-the-bible-custom-apps), they will be responsible for trouble-shooting technical problems that arise.
- I will make edits or changes to the app content, as needed.
- If the company ceases to exist or no longer chooses to update its product, I will have to find a new developer.

Audience

Primary Audience/User

My primary audience is followers of Jesus who understand the value of regular engagement in Bible reading and desire to grow in their faith.

Goals for Audience/User to Do/Think/Experience

Do: Use the app to facilitate their regular Bible reading.

Think: God is alive and wants to spend time with them throughout the day. God also wants the app user to invest in other people to teach them the same truth.

Experience: Joy in engaging the Bible; confidence that they can grow in their faith; peace in knowing they have a way to spend time with God that is manageable, fun, and effective.

Artifact Scope and Content

Scope of Dissertation (Technical and Content Parameters)

My parameters are clear: I can upload content on the backtothebible.org (i.e., host) custom app platform. The host has created a template that can be built out with my content and features push technology, analytics, and multi-language capability. I am limited by the host's platform but their tool is both functional and affordable.

Dissertation Content Organization

Primary content. The app for the dissertations will be available for free and feature commentary on two Bible books: Genesis and Matthew. I will ultimately make available a paid version that includes every book of the Bible.

Track. Each track (i.e., Bible book) entry will consist of one Bible chapter featuring the following:

- a visual image depicting a main idea of the chapter
- a one- or two-word summary of the chapter
- a big idea from the chapter
- a key verse from the chapter
- “If God Wrote You a Letter ...” (what God might say to the reader from the chapter's content)

- a next step for the chapter
- a media link for the chapter (song, video clip, etc.)

Additional content. The user will determine how many times of days a Bible verse will be sent to their app. They can choose between 1-12 times. There are default verses, but users have the opportunity to take a quiz (created by app development team) to determine what verses are sent each day to the user, based on the areas they identify as needs in the quiz.

The user will determine how many times a reminder to pray is sent to their app. They can choose between 1-12 times.

Technical/Functional Requirements

Because I am using the backtothebible.org platform, my only requirement is to upload content. Their interface is similar to typical word processing functionality. I will also utilize the photo editing website pixlr.com to insure images meet the host's minimum requirements.

Standards of Publication

App technical aspects are taken care of by backtothebible.org.

Content Standards

- All content tracks will include no more than one chapter from the Bible per day to maintain a “less is more” mindset to encourage more Bible engagement with fewer verses.

Images

- All images will be royalty free from sites such as pixabay.com.

- All landscape images will be 1280x720px (or be edited to those specs using pixlr.com) to meet app requirements.

Summary

- The chapter summary will be only one or two words.

Big Idea

- A chapter often has several big ideas. The one deemed most relevant for the chapter will be selected and written as a big idea.

Key Verse

- The name of the speaker and recipient(s) will be provided when they are not stated in the verse. The verse context will be provided when this is unclear.

“If God wrote you a letter ...”

- Language and tone will be loving, caring, parental, encouraging, and personal.

Next Step

- All next steps will be specific and measurable.

Media Link

- Embedded videos will come from Vimeo or Youtube. Videos from other websites will be allowed but they will launch outside of the app.

Video Tutorials

- A short instructional video will be posted on the app or creator website.

SECTION SIX: POSTSCRIPT

The Bottom Line Bible: Taste & See app is complete and available in both the iOS and Android app stores.¹⁸⁵ It offers three Bible books: Genesis, Proverbs, and Matthew. Subscribers who choose either book receive one Bible chapter every two days, followed by one of five sets of review questions. The review encourages the user to reflect on the previous two readings and action steps. On the fourth day, that cycle continues until the Bible book is complete.

I am pleased with the app's development and its potential for impact in the local church. While the digital age has spawned a myriad of app options, the Bottom Line Bible app stands alone in its ability to keep people focused with a daily reading plan, offer a variety of ways to interact with and engage the biblical text, and encourage users to review what they read and act on God's leading because of what they read. The Bottom Line Bible's emphasis is to spend more time reflecting and responding to what God is saying and doing. I also believe there is greater value in this content being available as an app, as opposed to a print format, because of its portability and other features, such as reminders, the ability to take notes, and access online resources, to name a few.

The app has proven to be a valuable resource for small groups, and features such as "If God Wrote You a Letter," and the media links are especially appealing. It has helped groups focus on interacting with and applying the text, instead of simply reading it

¹⁸⁵ iOS, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/bottom-line-bible-gospels/id1183503080?mt=8> and Android, <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.gotandem.wlbottomlinebiblefree&hl=en>

for the sake of completing a task. It has also served group leaders and teachers well when needing to teach a lesson or lead a devotional.

There are limitations to the app, however. One is that it only includes three Bible books. A second limitation is the inability to access any chapter at any time. The app delivery system is designed to send out one post a day, so if a person subscribes to the book of Matthew but wants to see the content for chapter 15, he or she must wait approximately three weeks—given the fact that only two Bible chapters are sent every three days. There are workarounds to access the desired content faster, but that is not ideal. A final limitation of the app is that it is not instantly easy to use. There is a learning curve, and because I am working within the boundaries of the app company's template, I am not able to redesign the app. Still, using the template designed by Back to the Bible has been wonderful, as it allows me to focus on content creation rather than learning code or spending an exorbitant amount of money to achieve my goal.

I am happy to report that a full version of the Bottom Line Bible app is currently being developed. It will be available for \$3.99 and offer every book of the Bible, and future updates will include topical reading plans. It is nearly 75 percent complete and will be available by the end of the second quarter of 2018. Additionally, to overcome the challenge of not being able to instantly access a desired chapter, I hope to have all chapters posted and available on a website, but that is a future goal with an undetermined timeline. Finally, I am most excited about some features the app company is currently developing. One is to make the user's experience friendlier and easier to use. A second is to incorporate an interactive community component. This would allow a small group to interact with one another directly through the app instead of leaving the app to text or

utilize another community building app. Back to the Bible hopes to have this update available by the second quarter of 2018.

APPENDIX

1. Review, Reflect, Respond, Remind, and Remember Questions

One of the following five reminders is sent after two Bible chapters are received.

The reminders continue every third day until the end of the Bible book.

Reminder 1: REVIEW the content from the previous two chapters.

Was there a Bible verse that stood out?

Was there a next step you were nudged to take?

Did a question arise that you want to discuss with a friend?

Did you see or experience something you want to share with someone?

Sit still and call on God. Wait and listen.

Or ...

Get up and take action on what God is leading you to do.

Reminder 2: REFLECT on your reading from the previous two chapters.

What is something God has recently done in your life?

Are there ways you are seeing God at work?

Do you have a prayer request that consumes you?

Is there one thing you believe God wants you to do this week?

Reminder 3: RESPOND to God's leading based on your reading
from the previous two chapters.

Is God prompting you to say something?

Is God prompting you to do something?

Does God want you to practice being still this week?

Is there a Bible verse or truth you need to memorize?

Reminder 4: Based on your reading from the previous two chapters,
REMIND someone of God's love this week.

Who in your life needs to hear some encouraging words?

What truth from the Bible can you share with someone who is searching?

Who needs a reminder that God is with them and for them?

Is God nudging you to share with someone? Do that today!

Reminder 5: What do you need to REMEMBER from the previous two chapters?

Is there a verse you need to think about or memorize?

Is there a truth you need to believe?

Is there a next step you have not yet taken?

What's the one thing you think God wants you to remember today?

2. List of "One Another" Biblical Commands

Summary

42 "one another" commands are used 70 times. Some commands a believer is encouraged to do and others a believer is encouraged not to do.

To Do (56)

1. Love 17x
2. Greet 5x
3. Encourage 3x
4. Bear 2x
5. Live in harmony 2x

6. Forgive 2x
7. Value 2x
8. Build up 2x
9. Peace 1x
10. Wash feet 1x
11. Belong 1x
12. Devoted 1x
13. Honor 1x
14. Edify 1x
15. Accept 1x
16. Instruct 1x
17. Wait 1x
18. Care 1x
19. Serve 1x
20. Kind 1x
21. Compassionate 1x
22. Submit 1x
23. Stir up 1x
24. Do good 1x
25. Confess 1x
26. Pray 1x
27. Show hospitality 1x
28. Fellowship 1x
29. Carry burdens 1x

Not To Do (14)

1. Grumble 2x
2. Hurt 1x
3. Lust 1x
4. Pass judgment 1x
5. Deprive 1x
6. Harm 1x
7. Devour 1x
8. Destroy 1x
9. Provoke 1x
10. Envy 1x
11. Lie 1x
12. Hate 1x
13. Speak evil 1x

The “One Anothers” (+)

1. “Love one another” (John 13:34, 35, 15:12, 17, 13:8; Romans 13:8; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Peter 1:22; 4:8; 1 John 3:11; 3:23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 5) +
2. “Greet one another” (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20, 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Thessalonians 5:26; 1 Peter 5:14) +
3. “Encourage one another” (Romans 1:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:18; 5:11) +
4. “Bear with one another in love” (Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:13) +
5. “Live in harmony with one another” (Romans 12:16; 15:5) +
6. “Forgive one another” (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13) +
7. “Value one another” (Philippians 2:3; 1 Peter 5:5) +
8. “Build one another up” (Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11) +
9. “Be at peace with one another” (Mark 9:50) +
10. “Wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14) +
11. “Belong to one another” (Rom 12:5) +
12. “Be devoted to one another” (Romans 12:10a) +
13. “Honor one another” (Romans 12:10b) +
14. “Edify one another” (Romans 14:19) +
15. “Accept one another” (Romans 15:7) +
16. “Instruct one another” (Romans 15:14) +
17. “When you come together to eat, wait for one another” (1 Corinthians 11:33) +
18. “Care for one another” (1 Corinthians 12:25) +
19. “Serve one another in love” (Galatians 5:13) +
20. “Be kind to one another” (Ephesians 4:32) +

21. "Be compassionate to one another" (Ephesians 4:32) +
22. "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21) +
23. "Stir up one another to love and good works" (Hebrews 10:24) +
24. "Seek to do good to one another" (1 Thessalonians 5:15) +
25. "Confess your sins to one another" (James 5:16a) +
26. "Pray for one another" (James 5:16b) +
27. "Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling" (1 Peter 4:9) + (could also include as a "–" regarding 'grumbling'.)
28. "Fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7)
29. "Carry one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2) +

The "One Others" (-)

30. "Do not grumble among yourselves" (John 6:43; James 5:9) –
31. "Why do you want to hurt each other?" (Acts 7:26) –
32. "Lusting for one another" (Rom 1:27) –
33. "Don't pass judgment on one another" (Romans 14:13) –
34. "Don't deprive one another" (1 Corinthians 7:5) –
35. "Do not bite (harm) one another" (Galatians 5:15a) –
36. "Do not devour (utterly destroy) one another" (Galatians 5:15b) –
37. "Do not destroy (consume) one another" (Galatians 5:15c) –
38. "Don't provoke one another" (Galatians 5:26) –
39. "Don't envy one another" (Galatians 5:26) –
40. "Do not lie to one another" (Colossians 3:9) –
41. "Hating one another" (Titus 3:3) –

42. “Do not speak evil (slander) against one another” (James 4:11) –

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