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The Household of God: Building Communities of Shalom

Jodi Gatlin

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD:
BUILDING COMMUNITIES OF SHALOM

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY
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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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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the problem of anxiety, loneliness, and division within the United States. Research shows that while anxiety, loneliness, and division are on the rise, church participation is on the decline. In light of this reality, this paper asks the question, “How can the church be a community so that lonely and anxious people can be seen, known, and belong?”

From Genesis through Revelation, Scripture witnesses to God’s presence in creation, uniting with humanity to expand God’s heaven and earth temple into the rest of creation. Within God’s temple, God’s people are called to love God first, then self and neighbor. Both the second and third century church of Rome, as well as the Methodist movement in the eighteenth century focused on the heaven and earth dwelling place. They did this through a lens of paradise, patience, and practice, with their focus on both vertical and horizontal relationships. develop

In the twenty-first century, neuroscience and psychology have discovered much about the workings of the human brain. The brain is complex set of systems that function best when integrated and working together. Community development research shows that transforming communities are love-based rather than fear-based, and focused on creating spaces that invest in people and possibilities. They are Christ-centered and relationship-based.

This paper argues that in order to address the needs of an anxious and lonely world, the church needs to be a place of shalom. It must join with God, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and in the unity of Christ to love God and one another, and do this through the lens of paradise, practice, and patience.

CHAPTER 1:
A LONELY, ANXIOUS, AND DIVIDED WORLD

Overview

The nation is filled with lonely, anxious, and divided people, as research presented in this chapter will show. Where is the church in the midst of this crisis? This chapter will also look at research that shows evidence of the decline of the evangelical protestant church in America. Dr. Curt Thompson believes, “Our lives will be abundant, joyful, and peaceful only to the degree that we are engaged, known, and understood by one another.”¹ He also states, “It is only when we are known that we are positioned to become conduits of love. And it is love that transforms our minds, makes forgiveness possible, and weaves a community of disparate people into the tapestry of God’s family.”² If Dr. Thompson is correct, how are churches engaging their congregations? Do congregations feel they are known and understood by one another? And if it is love that transforms our minds and “weaves a community of disparate people into the tapestry of God’s family,” how are these same churches cultivating a culture of godly love?

This chapter will begin with a story outlining some challenges one fictional congregation is facing. It will then look at the problem of loneliness, anxiety, and division among Americans, followed by a snapshot of the American church, and a look at six church case studies.

¹ Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Carol Stream, IL: SaltRiver, 2010), iii.

² Thompson, 3.

A Story

Last month Central Church celebrated its 100th anniversary, and it was a time of joy and celebration; however, as Central's leaders looked around, they knew the stability of their church was in jeopardy. The average age of the congregation was getting older every year, while the younger generation seemed to be disappearing. But they loved Central Church and were committed to bringing back her "glory days." It seemed that every board meeting ended with, "remember when we used to...?" or, "I missed the days when we would..." After their centennial celebration they decided it was time to get to work. It was time to turn things around.

Several teams were formed: a marketing/social media committee, a Sunday school revitalization committee, a worship committee, and an evangelization committee. Each team was tasked to develop a list of ideas and plans prior to their next quarterly meeting. What they did not take into consideration was their real problem, their community was hurting.

For instance, Josh and Catherine started attending Central Church a little over a year ago. They were a young couple in their late 20s struggling in their marriage. Bill and Kelly raised both of their children at Central Church, but now that their children were grown, they didn't know anyone, and felt alone. They wanted to be part of a community where they felt they belonged and were known, a place where they could say, "These are my people." Marie and Adam adopted a son last year, and while they understood that adopting a child would be challenging, they were not prepared for how challenging. Marie felt exhausted, alone, and struggled with anxiety most of the time; while Adam was finding it more and more difficult to control his anger.

As Central Church members worked to turn their church around, did they desire to weave their congregation into “the tapestry of God’s family?” “How can the church be a community so that lonely and anxious people can be seen, known, and belong?” This chapter will look at the problem of division, loneliness, and anxiety in America followed by the state of the church in America.

The Problem

Introduction

In his 1957 book *America as Civilization*, educator Max Lerner suggested that the longing for a return to small town America was actually about American’s “quest for community.” He proposed that the real question was whether Americans could “evolve any other integral community to replace it.” He diagnosed America with a *place* problem, and warned, “Unless it is somehow resolved, American life will become more jangled and fragmented than it is, and American personality will continue to be unquiet and unfulfilled.”³ In 1999 sociologist Ray Oldenburg observed that Lerner’s diagnosis had been confirmed. He claimed, “No new form of integral community has been found; the small town has yet to greet its replacement. And Americans are not a contented people.”⁴ In 2000 sociologist Robert Putnam published his groundbreaking book *Bowling Alone*, in which he reported a common theme in every domain they studied, “For the first two-thirds of the twentieth century a powerful tide bore Americans into ever deeper

³ Max Lerner, *America as a Civilization: Vol One The Basic Fram*, eighth ed (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1957), 155.

⁴ Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York, NY: Publishers Group West, 1999), 3.

engagement in the life of their communities.” However, in the last decades of the century, “we have been pulled apart from one another and from our communities.”⁵ In their follow up book, *Better Together*, Putnam and team summarize *Bowling Alone*, writing that since the 1960s Americans’ participation in social and civic activities has declined between 25 to 50 percent, and they report that the situation has not improved.⁶

In his article *Half Your Church is Lonely*, journalist Joshua Pease reflected on Cigna’s 2018 *Loneliness Index*, which reported 50 percent of Americans consider themselves lonely (discussed below). Pease declares, “For those who work in churches though, this research is less shocking...most pastors are fully aware how common a sense of isolation is among their congregants.” He adds that many pastors also experience the loneliness as well.⁷ Pastor and Psychologist Peter Holmes confesses, “To my shame I did not believe that any deeper form of ‘community’ was essential for growing churches...my flawed assumption was that being church automatically created community.”⁸ As Holmes continued to unpack the need for community, he came to realize that individualization and broken people produced “toxic loneliness” as well as a fragmented culture.⁹ Lerner predicted that unless America was able find a way to create integral community, it would become more fragmented and unfulfilled. Forty years later

⁵ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 27.

⁶ Robert D. Putnam, Lewis M. Feldstein, and Don Cohen, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community*, 1. Simon & Schuster paperback ed (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 4.

⁷ Joshua Pease, “Half Your Church Is Lonely,” *Churchleaders.com*, May 8, 2018, <https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/325140-half-of-your-church-struggles-with-christian-loneliness.html>.

⁸ Peter R. Holmes, *Becoming More Human: Exploring the Interface of Spirituality, Discipleship and Therapeutic Faith Community* (Milton Keynes, Bucks, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 63.

⁹ Holmes, 167.

Oldenburg pronounced Lerner’s prediction confirmed. At the same time, Putnam’s research showed that Americans lacked social engagement, and Holmes was discovering that community was not created by simply coming together for church.

The reality is that the world is filled with lonely, anxious, and divided people without the social engagement and community involvement needed to sustain them. These people are either already in the church, or need a church community to offer them hope.

A Snapshot of America

American culture is one of isolation, anxiety, and division—a problem that is more obvious every year. In 2019 The Barna Group published a report that analyzed the effects of tribalization¹⁰ within American religion, arguing that conversations are happening within an increasing context of isolation and alienation. They write, “In an increasingly pluralistic society, [Group solidarity] can also create deep divisions and an ‘us vs. them’ mentality.”¹¹ Thompson claims that it is godly love that transforms our minds and weaves disparate people into the tapestry of God’s family. Instead of godly love, conversations that happen in isolation and anxiety, create images of *others* who are seen as dangerous.¹²

¹⁰ “A strong tendency to want to belong to, and identify with, a group of people who are just like you.” Barna Group, “Faith Leadership in a Divided Culture,” February 11, 2019, 34, <https://www.barna.com/product/faith-leadership-in-a-divided-culture/>.

¹¹ Barna Group, 34–35.

¹² “Absent the community bonds that social capital creates and empathy it fosters, it is all too easy to perceive others as truly other—to view differences as danger, the strange as suspicious, the unknown as a threat.” Barna Group, 34.

“Americans have been lonely for a long time.” According to a 2015 Barna survey, “one in five Americans told Barna they regularly or often feel lonely.”¹³ That loneliness has driven us to live, work, and worship in communities that look, think, and believe as we do, “In a world marked by so much loneliness, it is inevitable that people will seek out communities that look and believe as they do.”¹⁴ It is typical human behavior to divide into *ingroups* and to see the other as the *outgroup*.¹⁵ Gordon Allport, a founding voice in the psychology of discrimination and prejudice, wrote in the 1950s, “It holds that all groups develop a way of living with characteristic codes and beliefs, standards and ‘enemies’ to suit their own adaptive needs.”¹⁶ Social psychologist, Christena Cleveland states, “We can create categories of groups so easily that we often do it without even thinking.”¹⁷ Bill Bishop, in his 2009 book *The Big Sort* has shown that in the twentieth century Americans have sorted into like political groups, “Today we seek our own kind in like-minded churches, like-minded neighborhoods, and like-minded sources of news and entertainment.”¹⁸ Bishop looked at the voting patterns in the 1976 presidential

¹³ Barna Group, 33.

¹⁴ Barna Group, 33.

¹⁵ Our brains are only able to process so much information at one time, however, the amount of information the brain receives every day exceeds that limit. In order to survive, the brain categorizes the information into groups. This categorizing includes the people we encounter. The simplest way we categorize people is into ingroups and outgroups. Christena Cleveland explains, “The people in our ingroup are those who are obviously like us. The people in the outgroup are those who are obviously not at all like us; they are the ‘other.’” The more time we spend in with our ingroup, the more we see the other as different. For more information on categorizing see chapter three of *Disunity in Christ*. Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), 49.

¹⁶ Gordon W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, Unabridged, 25th anniversary ed, (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1979), 39.

¹⁷ Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ*, 46.

¹⁸ Bill Bishop and Robert G. Cushing, *The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of like-Minded America Is Tearing Us Apart*, 1st Mariner Books ed, (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2009), 39.

election between Carter and Ford: “Just over 26 percent of the nation’s voters lived in landslide counties.”¹⁹ In the 2016 election between Clinton and Trump, 60.4 percent of counties delivered a landslide.²⁰ The data consistently shows that our country is dividing more and more into homogeneous neighborhoods. At the same time Americans are feeling increasingly lonely. “In 1980 approximately 20 percent of Americans reported feeling lonely. Today, it is more than double that percentage.”²¹ Even though the nation has relocated themselves more and more to live in and among their ingroup, the level of isolation and anxiety has increased rather than decreased.

Several recent studies shed light on the high level of anxiety and isolation affecting the United States. The 2018 Cigna US Loneliness Index determined that 54 percent of Americans feel like no one knows them and 46 percent feel they are alone all the time.²² According to the 2019 Chapman University survey of American fears, all top ten fears are held by over 50 percent of Americans. The report states,

For the fifth year in a row the top fear of Americans is corrupt government officials. And as in the previous five years, the fear that our government is corrupt far exceeds all others we asked about. More than 3/4 of Americans said they are afraid or very afraid of corrupt governmental officials in 2019. By comparison, the next highest level of fear was nearly 10 points lower at 68% (pollution of oceans, rivers and lakes).²³

¹⁹ Bishop and Cushing, 11.

²⁰ Bill Bishop, “Caught In A Landslide — County-Level Voting Shows Increased ‘Sorting,’” *The Daily Yonder*, November 21, 2016, <https://www.dailyyonder.com/caught-in-a-landslide-county-level-voting-shows-increased-sorting/2016/11/21/16361/>.

²¹ Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*, First ed (New York, NY: Random House, 2017), 54.

²² Cigna. *Cigna U.S. Loneliness Index*. February 2018, <https://www.cigna.com/assets/docs/newsroom/loneliness-survey-2018-full-report.pdf>.

²³ Shreya Sheth, “America’s Top Fears 2019” (Chapman University, August 2019), https://www.chapman.edu/wilkinson/research-centers/babbie-center/_files/americas-top-fears-2019.pdf.

The American Psychology Association’s (APA) 2018 opinion poll found that 40 percent of Americans reported that their anxiety had increased since the previous year.²⁴ In October 2020, several months into the COVID-19 pandemic, after a volatile summer of racial unrest and weeks away from the presidential election, the APA took a poll of the anxiety level among Americans. They discovered that 62 percent of the respondents were more anxious this year than they were at the same time last year. The top issues were, “keeping themselves and their family safe (80%), COVID-19 (75%), their health (73%), gun violence (73%) and the upcoming presidential election (72%).”²⁵ In April, Chapman University did its own study and found that, “61% of respondents are experiencing high levels of stress,” with 45% reporting that they “feel down, depressed or hopeless.”²⁶

The reality is America is more divided than ever, and yet they are also experiencing higher levels of anxiety and loneliness. Barna suggested that loneliness has led Americans to live, work, and worship with people who look, think, and believe as they do (*ingroups*). As we live within these *ingroups* our anxiety grows, but our loneliness does not seem to decrease. The next question to ask is, “what is anxiety and loneliness?”

²⁴ American Psychiatric Association. APA Public Opinion Poll—Annual Meeting 2018, March 2018, <https://www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/apa-public-opinion-poll-annual-meeting-2018>.

²⁵ American Psychiatric Association, “New APA Poll Shows Surge in Anxiety Among Americans Top Causes Are Safety, COVID-19, Health, Gun Violence, and the Upcoming Election,” American Psychiatric Association, October 21, 2020, <https://www.psychiatry.org/newsroom/news-releases/anxiety-poll-2020>.

²⁶ Chapman University, “Chapman University National Covid-19 Mental Health Survey” (Chapman University, June 3, 2020), <https://news.chapman.edu/2020/06/03/pandemic-has-61-in-u-s-feeling-high-levels-of-stress-cu-study-finds/>.

Anxiety and Loneliness

Anxiety, according to the American Psychological Association (APA) is defined as “an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure.”²⁷ However, fear is defined as, “A basic, intense emotion aroused by the detection of imminent threat, involving an immediate alarm reaction that mobilizes the organism by triggering a set of physiological changes.”²⁸ In his book *Anxious*, Joseph LeDoux differentiates between fear as in external threat, and anxiety as more of an internal one:

In fear...the focus is on a specific external threat, one that is present or imminent, whereas in anxiety the threat is typically less identifiable and its occurrence less predictable—it is more internal, and in the mind more of an expectation than a fact, and can also be an imagined possibility with a low likelihood of ever occurring.²⁹

When people experience fear, they know they are in a dangerous situation. When they experience anxiety, they are concerned about unknown threats that may cause harm.³⁰ We need fear to survive; it’s the signal that warns us when danger is near. Laurence Gonzales states, “During a fear reaction, the amygdala, in concert with numerous other structures in the brain and body, help to trigger a staggeringly complex sequence of events, all aimed at producing a behavior to promote survival.”³¹ Anxiety, on the other hand, diminishes

²⁷ 2020 American Psychological Association, “Anxiety,” accessed May 22, 2020, <https://www.apa.org/topics/anxiety/>.

²⁸ 2020 American Psychological Association, “APA Dictionary of Psychology,” accessed May 22, 2020, <https://dictionary.apa.org/fear>.

²⁹ Joseph LeDoux, *Anxious* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2015), 7.

³⁰ LeDoux, 11.

³¹ Laurence Gonzales, *Deep Survival: Who Lives, Who Dies, and Why: True Stories of Miraculous Endurance and Sudden Death*, New edition (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017), 35–36.

our quality of life. When a person's brain is in survival mode, all her or his energy is taken up as she or he fights against unseen dangers, draining the person of any resources for nurture, care, and love.³² As the mind is preoccupied with defending itself, relationship bonds are threatened, leaving loneliness in its wake.

In her article *Loneliness Updated*, Ami Rokach observes that the twenty-first century lifestyle creates isolation while at the same time makes it more difficult to cope with. She explains, "In today's fast paced ever-changing world, when virtual reality sometimes replaces the real one, people have no time or energy for establishing a connection with anything beyond the narrow frame of their hurried lives in a culture that gives little priority to human relationships and that rewards nothing but the individual acquisition of power and money."³³ At the same time, Dr. John Cacioppo reported in 2008 that approximately 20 percent of individuals "feel sufficiently isolated for it to be a major source of unhappiness in their lives."³⁴ *The Encyclopedia of Mental Health* defines loneliness as "the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relationships is significantly deficient in quantity or quality."³⁵

³² "If an organism is stuck in survival mode, its energies are focused on fighting off unseen enemies, which leaves no room for nurture, care, and love. For us humans, it means that as long as the mind is defending itself against invisible assaults, our closest bonds are threatened, along with our ability to imagine, plan, play, learn, and pay attention to other people's needs." Bessel A Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), 76.

³³ Ami Rokach, "Loneliness Updated: An Introduction," *The Journal of Psychology* 146, no. 1–2 (2012): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2012.629501>.

³⁴ John T Cacioppo and William Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2008), chapter 1, Kindle.

³⁵ Howard S. Friedman, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mental Health* (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1998), 571.

Loneliness is not a matter of simply being alone, rather it is a matter of *perception*, psychologists note the difference between the relationships a person desires and their actual social relationships.³⁶ In the article, “Is Loneliness the Same as Being Alone?” the authors highlight the difference between the experience of being alone and actually being alone. “Some individuals may be alone or socially isolated and be quite happy with that situation. In contrast, other individuals may be involved in a large number of interpersonal relationships, yet be dissatisfied with the important aspects of their relationships and experience loneliness.”³⁷ It is possible for one person to experience loneliness in the midst of crowd, while others feel connected even when in rooms alone. Dr. Cacioppo explains that individuals who feel lonely do not spend any more time alone than those who do not; however, “problems arise when feeling lonely makes us less likely to employ the [social] skills we have.”³⁸

Loneliness is a natural part of our existence in small doses; excessive loneliness diminishes our quality of life. According to the 2018 Cigna Loneliness Index mentioned above, “Loneliness has the same impact on mortality as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, making it even more dangerous than obesity.”³⁹ Dr. Leehu Zysberg writes, “[Loneliness] has been traditionally associated with a broad range of adverse psychological outcomes, such as anxiety, depression, increased likelihood of substance abuse, and social deviance,

³⁶ 2020 American Psychological Association, “Loneliness,” accessed May 22, 2020, <https://dictionary.apa.org/loneliness>.

³⁷ Daniel W. Russel et al., “Is Loneliness the Same as Being Alone?,” *The Journal of Psychology* 146, no. 1–2 (2012): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2011.589414>.

³⁸ Cacioppo and Patrick, *Loneliness*, chapter 1, Kindle.

³⁹ Cigna, “Cigna 2018 U.S. Loneliness Index” (Cigna, February 2018), 2, <https://www.cigna.com/assets/docs/newsroom/loneliness-survey-2018-full-report.pdf>.

as well as milder outcomes, such as lower social skills, a more critical view of self, and perfectionism.”⁴⁰

Fear is a natural and necessary emotion; it warns and protects in times of real danger. But anxiety, the anticipation of danger, keeps individuals stuck and decreases both quality of life and the capacity to nurture relationships. Loneliness is an increasing problem in the current society; the culture not only creates isolation, but it also makes isolation difficult to cope with. Like fear, loneliness is a natural part of our existence, but excessive levels decreases both quality of life and the capacity to nurture relationships. Anxiety and loneliness go hand in hand. One leads to the other and makes it more difficult to move into a healthy existence. In the midst of this ever-growing culture of loneliness, division, and anxiety in America, what is the state of the church?

A Snapshot of the American Evangelical/Protestant Church

The 2021 Gallup analysis of church membership⁴¹ in the United States indicates that, for the first time in the 80 years of Gallup’s data collecting, less than 50 percent of Americans say they belong to a church, synagogue, or mosque. “U.S. church membership was 73% when Gallup first measured it in 1937 and remained near 70% for the next six decades, before beginning a steady decline around the turn of the 21st century.” In 2005, the number dropped to 64 percent, and has steadily dropped every five years, coming in at 47 percent in 2020. According to Gallup’s analysis “The decline in church membership is primarily a function of the increasing number of Americans who express no religious

⁴⁰ Lechu Zysberg, “Loneliness and Emotional Intelligence,” *The Journal of Psychology* 146, no. 1–2 (2012): 38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2011.574746>.

⁴¹ Includes all major religions in the U.S.

preference.”⁴² In comparison, the 2007 Pew Research *Religious Landscape Study* reported 51 percent of Americans identified as Protestant.⁴³ Seven years later the same study reported the number was now 47 percent.⁴⁴ In 2019 a smaller yearly survey reported the number down to 43 percent.⁴⁵ In just over ten years the Protestant church decreased by eight percent.

In 2011, Willowcreek published the book *Move*, a report on an internal survey they conducted in 2004. With a congregation of 15,000, Willowcreek felt they were doing well, but what the survey showed was “a lot of dissatisfied people...so dissatisfied that they were ready to leave.”⁴⁶ What they learned was that “church activities do not predict or drive long-term spiritual growth.”⁴⁷

In their book *Churchless* (published in 2014), researchers George Barna and David Kinnamen state, “The number of unchurched adults in the United States has

⁴² Jeffrey M. Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Falls Below Majority for First Time,” Gallup, March 29, 2021, Gallup <https://news.gallup.com/poll/341963/church-membership-falls-below-majority-first-time.aspx>.

⁴³ Protestant includes Evangelical, Mainline, & Historically Black Pew Research Center, “2007 Religious Landscape Lanscape Appendixes,” February 1, 2008, <https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2008/02/report-religious-landscape-study-appendixes.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Protestant includes Evangelical, Mainline, & Historically Black. Pew Research Center, “Religious Landscape Study,” accessed May 22, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

⁴⁵ In this survey Protestant includes Evangelical, Mainline, Historically Black, Jehovah Witness, & Christian Science. Pew Research Center, “Detailed Tables,” accessed April 6, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2019/10/Detailed-Tables-v1-FOR-WEB.pdf>.

⁴⁶ Greg L Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 17.

⁴⁷ Hawkins and Parkinson, 18.

increased by more than 30 percent in the past decade.”⁴⁸ As they looked at the unchurched population, they realized that just like “churched” adults, they were simply trying to thrive,⁴⁹

21 percent are born-again Christians; 21 percent are Pentecostal or charismatic Christians; 23 percent say they are ‘absolutely committed’ to Christianity; 26 percent say they are currently on a quest for spiritual truth; 34 percent describe themselves as ‘deeply spiritual’; 41 percent ‘strongly agree’ that their religious faith is very important in their life today; 51 percent say they are actively seeking something better spiritually than they have experienced to date; 62 percent consider themselves to be Christian; 65 percent define themselves as ‘spiritual’ people.⁵⁰

At the same time Barna and Kinnamen were publishing their research around the “unchurched,” sociologists Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope were conducting research on a population of people they termed the “dechurched.” They discovered that instead of church, people were finding alternative ways of “reaching their goals of community and social engagement.”⁵¹ They found that “many...see leaving the church as the only way to save their faith.”⁵² According to Packard and Hope, the dechurched did not easily give up on the church. “They remark time and again that they worked diligently for reform within the church but felt the church was exclusively focused on its own survival and resistant to change.”⁵³

⁴⁸ George Barna and Barna Group, eds., *Churchless: Understanding Today’s Unchurched and How to Connect with Them: Based on Surveys by Barna Group* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 2014), 33.

⁴⁹ Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope, *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People Are Done with the Church but Not Their Faith* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2015), 36.

⁵⁰ Barna and Barna Group, *Churchless*, 41.

⁵¹ Packard and Hope, *Church Refugees*, 10.

⁵² Packard and Hope, 14.

⁵³ Packard and Hope, 15.

While loneliness, anxiety, and division are increasing in the United States, social engagement and community involvement has decreased significantly. In the midst of this church attendance has dropped, and those who are leaving the church are those who are looking for community and social engagement. What has been the focus of the church over the same period?

The Church Growth Movement

In 1970⁵⁴ Donald McGavran, the father of the “Church Growth Movement” wrote in his book, *Understanding Church Growth*, “Today’s supreme task is the effective multiplication of churches in receptive societies of earth.”⁵⁵ McGavran aimed to connect the Great Commission with strategies that would bring people into the church. In his chapter, “Social Structure and Church Growth” McGavran writes, “People exist not as discrete individuals, but as interconnected members of some society. Innovation and social change, operating in particular structures, play a significant part in determining the direction, speed, and size of the move to the Christian religion.”⁵⁶ From this he concludes, “...when we comprehend the social structure of a particular segment of the total population, we know better how churches are likely to increase and ramify through it.”⁵⁷ One philosophy within the movement is the “homogeneous unit principle.” The homogeneous unit capitalizes on the human penchant to sort themselves into like

⁵⁴ The same time that Putnam argues America’s social engagement and community involvement began to decline (see above).

⁵⁵ Donald A. McGavran and C. Peter Wagner, *Understanding Church Growth*, 3rd ed (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 31.

⁵⁶ McGavran and Wagner, 153.

⁵⁷ McGavran and Wagner, 153.

groupings, “If the option of maintaining a homogeneous unit congregation is chosen, the direct benefit of close intercultural relationships will be sacrificed, but in all probability the evangelistic potential of the congregation will be higher.”⁵⁸ In his book *Your Church Can Grow*, C. Peter Wagner argues that one sign of a healthy and growing church “is that its membership is composed of basically one kind of people.”⁵⁹

In 2020 *Understanding Church Growth* became 50 years old, both the church and the nation are more homogenized than ever while church attendance continues to decline. Gallup’s yearly church attendance⁶⁰ tracking survey shows that in the year 2000, 44 percent of Americans reported attending some kind of church service, in 2010 that number had dropped to 37 percent, and in 2020 it was down to 30 percent. Another question asked had to do with how important religion is their life. In the year 2000, 59 percent of Americans said it was very important; in 2002 (right after the 9/11 attacks) the number jumped to 61 percent. In 2018, 49 percent reported it was very important, while in 2020 (during the pandemic) the number dropped slightly to 48 percent.

A third question that is of interest to this chapter has to do with religious preference. In 1970 (the same year Donald McGavern published his book on Church

⁵⁸ C. Peter Wagner, *Our Kind of People: The Ethical Dimensions of Church Growth in America* (Atlanta, GA: J. Knox Press, 1979), 33.

⁵⁹ C. Peter Wagner and John Wimber, *Your Church Can Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1976), 110.

⁶⁰ This survey tracks weekly church attendance, compared to the Gallup survey mentioned above that tracks church membership. One answer does not suppose the other. The question asked in this survey was, “Did you, yourself, happen to attend church or synagogue, either in-person or remotely, in the last seven days, or not?” Gallup, “Religion,” Gallup, 2019, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>.

growth), 65 percent of Americans indicated protestant as their religious preference. In 2000, this number fell to 52 percent before dropping to 37 percent⁶¹ as of 2020.⁶²

Looking at these numbers, the Church Growth Movement has not worked, and yet, as will be shown in the case studies below, churches continue to feel pressure from their denominations to focus on church growth as their main priority.

Beyond the Church Growth Movement

Lesslie Newbigin wrote a response to McGavran in his book, *The Open Secret*: “We do not find Paul concerning himself with the size of the churches or with questions about their growth. His primary concern is with their faithfulness, with the integrity of their witness...In no sense does the triumph of God’s reign seem to depend upon the growth of the church.”⁶³ Newbigin questions the validity of the church’s witness to the “crucified and risen Jesus” when it is “chiefly concerned with its own self-aggrandizement.”⁶⁴ McGavran intended to “make disciples of all people and all nations.”⁶⁵ The intent is good, but the results tell another story. The churches became focused on the wrong thing, “The problem is when we focus on numbers, our hearts are

⁶¹ Gallup, 2000.

⁶² Of possible interest, in 2019 it was at 35%, so it jumped up 2% in 2020.

⁶³ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, Rev. ed (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995), 125.

⁶⁴ Newbigin, 127.

⁶⁵ Matthew 28:16-20

turned away from the radical requirements of the kingdom of God. Focusing on numbers doesn't lead us to a discipleship that results in growing personal holiness."⁶⁶

During the first three centuries of the church it did grow. "By the time of Constantine's accession, the church not only had substantial numbers...they extended across huge geographical distances and demanded the attention of the imperial authorities."⁶⁷ The growth of the church during this time is astonishing when we consider they had to exist underground, always remain cautious, and often faced severe punishment for their faith. This reality was such a concern that their worship services were usually held in private, quietly, behind locked doors. "By the end of the second century, most of them had instituted...the 'discipline of the secret,' which barred outsiders from entering 'private' Christian worship services and ordered believers not to talk to outsiders about what went on behind closed doors."⁶⁸ Even more illuminating, "They knew that worship services were to glorify God and edify the faithful, not to evangelize outsiders."⁶⁹

Rather than focusing on church growth, the early church focused on the way they lived. "This, at heart, meant embodying the Christian good news, bearing it in their bodies and actions, living the message visibly and faithfully so that outsiders would see

⁶⁶ Wes Roberts and Glenn Marshall, *Reclaiming God's Original Intent for the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 40.

⁶⁷ Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 8.

⁶⁸ Kreider, 11.

⁶⁹ Kreider, 11.

what the Christians were about and...would be attracted to join them.”⁷⁰ To see how this is experienced within the church, the next section presents six church case studies.

Case studies

To find out what pastors are experiencing within their ministry, six interviews were conducted, with six different churches.⁷¹ While all six churches were Protestant, they came from different denominations, located in different cities, and varied in demographics. Three interviews were with lead pastors, three with associate or assistant pastors. Three interviews were with male pastors, three with female pastors. The table below presents basic information on the six churches.

Table 1 Six Church Case Study

Church	Pastor	Position	Age of Church	Average Attendance	Age Group ⁷²	Economics ⁷³	Education
New Life	Jonathan	Lead Pastor	10 yrs	60	YA/YF	Lower to Middle	College
Living Hope	Rachel	Lead Pastor	40 yrs	50	EN	Middle	College
River Valley	Susan	Lead Pastor	20 yrs	50	EN	Middle to Upper	College
Reformed	Mick	Assistant Pastor	100+ yrs	50	EN	Middle	College
Pathway	Luci	Associate Pastor	4 yrs	300	YA/YF	Middle to Upper	College
Heritage	Barbara	Associate Pastor	100+ yrs	300	OA/YF	Middle to Upper	College

⁷⁰ Kreider, 13.

⁷¹ Names of pastors and churches are fictional to ensure promised anonymity.

⁷² YA (Young Adult): 20-30 w/out family; YF (Young Family): 20-30 w/ family; EN (Empty Nest) 50+ family moved out; OA (Older Adult): 60+

⁷³ Lower: \$48,500; Middle: \$48,500-\$145,500; Upper: \$145,500 or more. Based on Pew Research: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/23/are-you-in-the-american-middle-class/>

In 2011, Reformed Church welcomed Bethlehem Church, a small congregation which could no longer sustain itself, into their community. They are now facing their own sustainability challenges, as attendance steadily shrinks. They have not been successful at bringing in young families, so as they look forward, they are uncertain of their future. Mike explains that the Sunday morning congregation is committed to practicing their values: “We seek a deepening of our life with God as we discover the Holy Spirit within us. We desire a spiritual renewal which empowers us to serve in the name of Jesus Christ.”

Mike and his wife Lisa have been leading a group of about 30 young adults who come for a weekly Sunday night spaghetti dinner. Mike says this young group will not come on Sunday morning for a variety of reasons, but mostly because they want Sunday mornings to sleep. By hosting the dinner in the evening, Mike and Lisa are meeting the young adults on their schedule, and around food. Reformed Church has an older, dwindling congregation who meet on Sunday morning, and a young, vibrant group meeting on Sunday night. What is keeping these two groups from interacting with one another?

In 2006, Jonathan and his wife began meeting with a small group of individuals in their home. Jonathan says, “we realized that each one of us, in one way or another, experienced dissatisfaction with or hurt in the church. At the same time, we longed to be a part of God’s mission of love to the world.” They decided to join a Covenant denomination and became New Life Church (NLC) in 2011. In 2017 they were given the building of a church that had recently closed its doors. New Life Church is an ethnically

diverse congregation of young families but regret their inability to connect with the older generation.

Because of their own experience in other church organizations, NLC has made hospitality central to their identity. Jonathan says his greatest challenge is the expectation the denomination has for their church to be growing faster than they are. He wants New Life to focus on growing healthy, to maintain their commitment to spiritual health and hospitality practices. But that is a slow process. His anxiety comes from denominational expectations: “They gave us this building, and they are expecting a return on their investment.”

Living Hope Fellowship has a complicated history. They had to close their doors four years ago. They were running at about 300 in attendance when the lead pastor’s authoritarian leadership style divided the congregation. This same pastor also mismanaged the church finances; by the time the problem was discovered the building had to be sold in order to pay the bills. A handful of members wanted to relaunch the church, so Rachel asked the denomination to allow her to lead the group. Without a building of their own they decided to rent another church building, and now meet on Saturday evenings. Although they have tried, they have been unable to bring in young families or establish a children’s ministry. The denomination allowed Rachel to lead this small remnant, with the understanding their numbers would increase. She feels isolated from the denomination and carries persistent anxiety that they will tell them they are not a viable church.

River Valley Fellowship are “people who just love people.” They spend lots of face-to-face time on Sundays in small groups and eating meals together. They serve

together in multiple community outreach programs. Once a month they have a game night at the church, with lots of food. Yet they feel anxious about their future. River Valley's denomination has shown a propensity to hand small churches like theirs over to the one mega-church in the denomination, to recreate it into a "seeker friendly" model. Her concern is that the people of the church will be pushed aside (isolated) in favor of a corporate mega-church style. At one point in our conversation, Susan admitted that she experiences personal isolation from the denomination.

Within months of their launch, Pathway Church became a young family church with more than 60 children. They modeled their new church on the current church growth principles. They have a heavy focus on the Sunday worship service production. This service is always well planned, practiced, and professionally done. It is where the bulk of Pathways' resources are focused. The power to make decisions is held by a small number of people, who isolate themselves from the rest of the church. Luci, who is the associate pastor, says everyone in the children's department feels isolated from the rest of the church. It is obvious that they are left out of the conversations. "If you do not fit into the box the ruling few has established, then you are left out and are anxious/confused about what your purpose is in the body."

Heritage Church actually has two congregations. One comprised of the *baby boomer*⁷⁴ generation (who also happen to be people of means) and one comprised of young families (who are dealing with the ongoing challenges of raising a family). The "baby boomer" generation does not interact with young families unless they happen to be related. Heritage Church has recently combined their traditional worship service and

⁷⁴ Those born between 1946 and 1964

contemporary worship service into one service. The move is an attempt to bring the two congregations together. But the older congregation considers the church to be theirs, and they see the younger families as the guests.

Barbara sees that her most significant challenge is the expectation from the denomination and the older congregation for institutional preservation: “It has become more about the institution and less about the kingdom of God.” The city around them is a changing environment, but the institution wants to remain the same. She feels a level of anxiety about dealing with a congregation that does not want to change, while the neighborhood around them changes. How can the anxiety of the older generation be recognized, named, and then addressed? How can the young families find the support they need as they raise their children?

Reflecting on these six examples raises several questions. “What should the priority of the church be?” Four of these churches struggle to meet the growth expectations of their denomination. “To whom should the church cater?” “What should a church focus on when its congregation is aging?” “Is it essential for a church to be multi-generational?” Heritage church has a Baby Boomer congregation that by all accounts pays for the church, and they do not want the institution to change. “How does the church honor its heritage, while engaging with ever-changing neighborhood demographics?” “When should a church consider rethinking its model?” Pathway Church is meeting the growth expectations of its denomination; in fact, they have quickly become the pride and joy of the denomination. But internally, the isolation and anxiety are causing greater and greater division. New Life Church appears to be the healthiest church, but that has come

at the expense of growth. The question this paper will focus on is, “How can the church be a community so that lonely and anxious people can be seen, known, and belong?”

Paper Outline

Two realities have been outlined in this chapter: Americans are lonely/isolated, anxious, and divided, and the church reflects this reality, while at the same time struggling to remain sustainable. Psychology shows that humans need to be known and understood by others, and that it is love that creates community. And yet sociology reveals the absence of social engagement and community involvement in both the nation and the church

Considering the above reality, this paper will ask the question, “How can the church be a community so that lonely and anxious people can be seen, known, and belong?” To answer this question, chapter two will look to Scripture for a biblical and theological answer. Chapter three will look at two specific church events for a historic perspective. Since the issue of isolation, anxiety, and division are foundationally emotional problems, chapter four will look at the discipline of neurology and psychology for a deeper understanding of how to address these problems at the emotional level. Finally, chapter five will look at the elements of community to understand community development. Chapter six will bring all these pieces together to offer a possible vision to address the problem of isolation, anxiety, and division within Christian congregations.

Conclusion

Lerner predicted and Oldenburg confirmed that America’s inability to create integral community has caused it to become more fragmented and unfulfilled. Putnam

showed that America has lost its social engagement and community involvement, and Holmes discovered that simply having church does not create a community. Pease echoed what many pastors know, we are a nation of lonely people. Barna and Bright demonstrated that America is becoming more and more tribalized, while at the same time Cigna's loneliness index pointed out the increasing problem of loneliness in the nation. At the same time, Chapman University and the APA indicated the level of anxiety in the nation continues to rise, especially in 2020 as the pandemic, racial tensions, and election uncertainties loomed large. Psychology tells us that the divisions (ingroup verses outgroups) lead to greater anxiety, while anxiety leads to greater loneliness, and all of them reduce our ability to focus our attention and energy on developing the relationships necessary for community building.

For the most part, since the middle of the twentieth century, the Protestant church has been focused on a church growth model, a model that embraced humanity's propensity toward ingroups with Wagner's homogeneous until model. However, instead of seeing churches grow, the data shows that churches have lost significant numbers. Of the six churches interviewed, only two have congregations over 100, and both are divided internally. Three of the churches are struggling to sustain their ministry as their congregation grows older and smaller. One church is succeeding in creating a community of spiritually healthy disciples, but they still face pressure from the denomination to grow faster.

In order to discover how the church might build a community to address the needs of lonely and anxious people, the following chapter will look at Scripture to help understand the answer.

CHAPTER 2:
A BIBLICAL VIEW ON THE DWELLING PLACE OF GOD

Overview

“How can the church be a community so that lonely and anxious people can be seen, known, and belong?” By tracing God’s activity through both the Old and New Testaments, this chapter will argue that the church is the dwelling place of God—the garden-temple where all the faithful saints are united with Christ—who, through the Holy Spirit, joins God in expanding the garden-temple into the broken world and who brings wholeness (shalom) to those who enter in. As N.T. Wright suggests, this dwelling place of God is meant, “to bring the life of heaven to birth in actual, physical, earthly reality...Jesus’s resurrection is the beginning of God’s new project not to snatch people away from earth to heaven but to colonize earth with the life of heaven.”¹

God’s Old Testament Dwelling

The Heavens and Earth

Genesis 1 tells the story of El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים) creating the heavens and the earth. With El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים) speaking creation into existence, “Let there be...and there was...and it was good.” For five days El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים) speaks creation into existence. And then on the fifth day, El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים) creates two image-bearers, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the

¹ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 1st ed (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2014), 293.

fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”² Humans alone are created in the image of God. Old Testament scholar John Walton states, “Among the many things that the image of God may signify and imply, one of them, and probably the main one, is that people are delegated a godlike role (function) in the world where he places them.”³ In the Ancient Near East images of the gods or kings acted as their representatives among the people.⁴ El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים) has given this function to humanity, they are to reflect God into the world, they are to be God’s representatives in the world.⁵

On the final day of creation El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים) rests. Walton explains how seeing this day through the lens of the Ancient Near East gives greater understanding. “In the ancient world rest is what results when a crisis has been resolved or when stability has been achieved, when things have ‘settled down.’ Consequently, normal routines can be established and enjoyed.”⁶ As the creation story comes to completion, El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים) has spoken creation into existence. The image-bearers have been put in place to represent and project El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים) into creation, and now El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים) takes up residence.

² Genesis 1:26 (NRSV). Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical references will be from the NRSV.

³ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 68–69.

⁴ Gordon J. Wenham et al., *Genesis 1 - 15*, Word Biblical Commentary, [General ed.: David A. Hubbard; Glenn W. Barker. Old Testament ed.: John D. W. Watts. New Testament ed.: Ralph P. Martin]; Vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, Publ, 1987), 31.

⁵ “The image functions to mirror God to the world, to be God as God would be to the nonhuman, to be an extension of God’s own dominion.” Terrance E. Fretheim, *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Leander E Keck, vol. 1, *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 38.

⁶ Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 73.

Looking through the Ancient Near East lens, El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים) was creating a dwelling place. The second narrative of Genesis describes the temple El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים) will place into this dwelling place. G. K. Beale explains, “The Genesis portrayal of humans being created in the image of God and being placed in the sanctuary of Eden is even generally in line with the Ancient Near Eastern practice in which images of the god were placed in a garden-like temple.”⁷ What does that temple look like?

The Temple

As discussed above, Genesis 1:1-2:3 El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים) utters creation into existence. Now, in Genesis 2, YHWH El’ohim (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים) *plants* a garden and *forms* a human being from the ground; the text explains that YHWH El’ohim (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים) had not yet caused the plant life to spring up, because there was no rain and there was no one to care for them. The Hebrew verb יָצַר (yāṣar), translated as *formed*, means “to fashion, form, frame.”⁸ Jewish Biblical Scholar Nahum Sarna explains, “The verb...yasar (2:7, 8) is the same from which the Hebrew word for ‘potter’ is drawn. Most significantly, the terms for ‘creator’ and ‘potter’ may be expressed in Hebrew by one and the same word (yoser).”⁹ The word translated as *dust* is the Hebrew word עָפָר (‘āpār), meaning “dust, earth, ground, ashes, mortar.”¹⁰ According to biblical scholar Dr. Ziony Zevit, “It refers to something people can handle, wrap their fingers around, squeeze, and shape, like a mud

⁷ G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 89.

⁸ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), 396.

⁹ Nahum M Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1995), 16.

¹⁰ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 687.

ball.”¹¹ These two words form a picture of YHWH El’ohim (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים) sitting at a potter’s wheel personally shaping the first human, then leaning over and blowing the first breath of life into this new earthling.¹² This is an intimate scene as YHWH El’ohim (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים), the God of the universe gives birth to this human.

There is a close connection between the human and the earth from which YHWH (יְהוָה) shapes the earthling. This human is necessary before the earth can bring forth plants, and the earth is necessary for the human to be shaped. After forming the human, YHWH El’ohim (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים) plants a garden in Eden in the east and places the human there. At the very core of creation is relationship—relationship between the human and the creator, as well as between the human and the creation. Old Testament scholar Daniel Hays explains, “God does not create the garden of Eden merely to give Adam and Eve a nice place to live, but he creates it as a special place where they can have a relationship with him and live a wonderful life blessed by his presence.”¹³ The Garden is the place where YHWH (יְהוָה) and the one made in YHWH’s image dwell together. The garden temple is where heaven and earth dwell together.

¹¹ Ziony Zevit, *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 80.

¹² W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis*, 1st ed, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 35; A literal translation Genesis 2:7a reads: YHWH El’ohim (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים) formed (וַיִּצְרֵם) the earthling (הָאָדָם, הָאָדָם) from the earth (הָאָדָם מֵאֲדָמָה). Adam is not a personal name here, nor does it express gender, the earthling who is created is neither male nor female at this point of the story. Towner states that the Lord has made “‘humankind,’ from adamah, ‘the dust of the ground.’ It (not yet ‘he’ because the rib is still within it; ‘he’ and ‘she’ are only implicit now) can be called the ‘earth creature.’” Tribble contends that this first “earth creature” does not have sexuality and is not the “first man;” and Walton argues that the first human is an archetype of all humanity. Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Overtures to Biblical Theology 2 (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 80; John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2015), 61.

¹³ J. Daniel Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle: A Study of God’s Dwelling Places from Genesis to Revelation*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016.), 21.

After crafting the human, and planting the garden, Genesis 2:15 reports that YHWH El'ohim (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים) had the human till and keep the garden. The word translated as *till* in Hebrew is עָבַד ('ābad) meaning “to work, serve”¹⁴ The words translated as *keep it* in Hebrew is שָׁמַר (šāmar), meaning “to keep, guard, observe, give heed.”¹⁵ Hays states, “The only other places in the Old Testament where these same two Hebrew verbs are used together are in reference to the Levites (priests) guarding and ministering in the sanctuary.”¹⁶ It is therefore reasonable to assume that tilling and keeping included guarding. Beale argues that this tilling and keeping also meant expanding into the rest of creation,

They were to extend the smaller livable area of the garden by transforming the outer chaotic region into a habitable territory. In actuality, Adam, as God’s vice-regent, and his progeny were to put ‘the finishing touches’ on the world God created in Genesis 1 by making it a livable place for humans.¹⁷

The task of humanity was to expand the heaven and earth mingling temple, to create a place for the rest of creation to find rest.¹⁸

The relationship between YHWH (יהוה) and the human is not sufficient. YHWH (יהוה) declares that it is not good that the human is alone and declares, “I will make the human a partner” (2.18). YHWH (יהוה) took some more dirt and this time shaped “every

¹⁴ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 639.

¹⁵ Harris, Archer, and Waltke, 939.

¹⁶ Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 22.

¹⁷ Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 81–82.

¹⁸ “There may also be significance that the word used for God ‘putting’ Adam ‘into the garden’ in Genesis 2:15 is not the usual Hebrew word for ‘put’ (s’ûm) but is the word typically translated as ‘to rest’ (nûah). The selection of a word with overtones of ‘rest’ may indicate that Adam was to begin to reflect the sovereign rest of God discussed above and that he would achieve a consummate ‘rest’ after he had faithfully performed his task of ‘taking care of and guarding’ the garden.” Beale, 70.

animal of the field and every bird of the air” (2.19). However, among these animals the human did not find a partner. At this point YHWH (יהוה) caused the human to go to sleep, took a rib from the human’s side and formed another human. YHWH (יהוה) then presented this new human.¹⁹ “This at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (2.23). “And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed” (2.25). There are now three relationships: the vertical relationship between humanity and YHWH (יהוה); the horizontal relationship between humanity, and the relationship between humanity and creation. This paper will focus on the vertical and horizontal relationships.

The Tabernacle

In the third chapter of Genesis, Adam and Eve are kicked out of the garden and forced to live outside the dwelling place of YHWH (יהוה). While YHWH (יהוה) continued to be present in creation,²⁰ the heaven and earth sanctuary was shattered. YHWH (יהוה)

¹⁹ When studying Genesis, the question of male and female hierarchy has become an important discussion. As discussed above, the first human created was not male or female, it was an archetype of all humanity. YHWH then decides to make a suitable partner (ezer kenegdo עֶזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ) for the earth creature. Ezer kenegdo is often translated as a suitable helper, suggesting that the one who is made for the earth creature is subordinate to the first human. This however is not the case. The word ezer is used 21 times in the Old Testament, twice in Genesis two, three times in reference to military aid for Israel, the remaining 16 refer to God’s help. James Strong, James Strong, and James Strong, *Strong’s New Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Iowa Falls, IA: World Bible Publishers, 1994), 641. Phillip Payne explains, “The noun used here throughout the OT does not suggest ‘helper’ as in ‘servant,’ but ‘help, savior, rescuer, protector’ as in, ‘God is our help.’ In no other occurrence in the OT does this noun refer to an inferior, but always to a superior or an equal.” Philip Barton Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2009), 32. The second word, kenegdo is one who is complimentary. Wenham et al., *Genesis 1 - 15*, 68. Alice Mathews describes, “When God created the woman...he called her an ezer kenegdo, a particular kind of helper to the man, in a vein similar to God’s help to his people. An ezer helper is not a subordinate to the one being helped. Instead, an ezer helper brings aid that the recipient badly needs but cannot provide for himself.” Alice Mathews, *Gender Roles and the People of God: Rethinking What We Were Taught about Men and Women in the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 50. Taken altogether, there is not a hierarchy established between the two humans, rather they are partners coming together in a mutual relationship.

²⁰ In Genesis 4 after Cain kills his brother, YHWH has a conversation with Cain. In Genesis 11 YHWH came down to investigate what was going with the tower the humans were building. And in Genesis 12 YHWH starts a new journey with Abram.

begins the process of restoring the heaven earth sanctuary through the family of Abraham and Sarah.²¹ As the book of Exodus begins this family has been fruitful and multiplied into a small nation and forced into slave labor in Egypt. Through the leadership of Moses, YHWH (יהוה) rescues the family and takes them back to their home in Canaan. On the way they stop at Mt. Sinai where YHWH (יהוה) gives instructions to Moses on how this new nation is to live; they are to be, “A priestly kingdom and a holy nation.”²²

Before they leave Mt. Sinai, YHWH (יהוה) communicates detailed instructions for the building of a tabernacle, a new dwelling place for YHWH (יהוה).²³ Peter Enns states, “The building of the tabernacle is more than simply a matter of building a worship site in the desert. It is a piece of heaven on earth.”²⁴ The tabernacle is built in a similar seven-stage pattern as the creation of Genesis 1;²⁵ upon its completion YHWH (יהוה) enters and dwells in it: “Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the

²¹ Genesis 12-50

²² Exodus 19:6

²³ Exodus 25:8-9: And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them. In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

²⁴ “Commentators for centuries have noticed that the phrase ‘the LORD said to Moses’ occurs seven times in chapters 25–31. The first six concern the building of the tabernacle and its furnishings (25:1; 30:11, 17, 22, 34; 31:1), while the final introduces the Sabbath command (31:12). It seems clear that the purpose of this arrangement is to aid the reader in making the connection between the building of the tabernacle and the seven days of creation, both of which involve six creative acts culminating in a seventh-day rest.” Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), Exodus 25:1–31:18; 35:1–40:33, Kindle.

²⁵ Enns, *Exodus* 25:1–31:18; 35:1–40:33, Kindle.

cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.”²⁶ This same pattern is repeated when Solomon builds the temple:

When Solomon had ended his prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. The priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD filled the LORD’s house. When all the people of Israel saw the fire come down and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed down on the pavement with their faces to the ground and worshiped and gave thanks to the LORD.²⁷

The point to be made here is that the temple YHWH El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים יְהוָה) established in Genesis 1 and 2 is recreated in the tabernacle in the wilderness and then in the temple in Jerusalem. Wright states, “the Temple was a microcosm of the whole creation.”²⁸ Once again heaven and earth are mingling together; and it was the job of the Israelites to expand that space into the rest of the world. Unfortunately, like Adam and Eve, Israel was unfaithful and were kicked out of their garden-temple too. The 10th chapter of Ezekiel describes a chariot, powered by cherubim, transporting the presence of YHWH out of the temple,

Then the glory of the LORD went out from the threshold of the house and stopped above the cherubim. The cherubim lifted up their wings and rose up from the earth in my sight as they went out with the wheels beside them. They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the house of the LORD; and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.²⁹

Old Testament scholar Daniel Block explains, “The chariot not only serves as a vehicle to proclaim Yahweh’s glory and his sovereignty but also provides the means whereby he

²⁶ Exodus 40:34-35

²⁷ 1 Chronicles 7:1-3

²⁸ N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*. Vol. 4, Book 2 = Vol. 4, Pt. 3/4: Paul and the Faithfulness of God (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 101.

²⁹ Ezekiel 10:18-19

will abandon his temple, by which he declares the termination of his special relationship with Jerusalem and with his covenant people.”³⁰ The garden-temple is no longer the place where heaven and earth intermingle. That mingling will have to wait until the New Testament when the one and only creator of heaven and earth comes to dwell as the incarnate Christ (John 1:14).³¹

God’s New Testament Dwelling

The Gospel of Matthew opens with the words “the book of the generations of Jesus the Christ” (βίβλος γένεσις Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ). The Greek words βίβλος γένεσις (the book of the generations) are the same words used in Genesis 2:4 and 5:1 in the Greek Old Testament.³² Genesis 2:4 records, “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created,” while Genesis 5:1 records, “This is the list of the descendants³³ of Adam.” New Testament scholar Grant Osborne explains, “The phrase in 1:1a is taken from Genesis 2:4; 5:1, where it introduces genealogies or historical narrative and hints

³⁰ Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 123.

³¹ Hayes explains, “At the time of Jesus, God had not yet returned to dwell in the temple. That is, there was no ‘focused’ indwelling presence of God in Herod’s Jerusalem temple until Jesus himself walked in the gates!” Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 10.

³² The Greek Old Testament is the Septuagint, often abbreviated as LXX. It is commonly accepted that Septuagint was created in Egypt for Greek speaking Jews sometime after the Exile. “The Septuagint was the primary form of the Bible for Hellenized Jewish communities and thus was that used by most early Christians. When the Bible is quoted in the New Testament, it is almost always from the Septuagint version.” Bruce M. Metzger, Michael David Coogan, and Oxford University Press, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 686–87.

³³ Or “the book of the generations of...”

here that Jesus fulfills these events and brings a new beginning or new creation.”³⁴

Following Matthew’s genealogy, the text describes Jesus’s birth in verse 18: “Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.” Just as the first Adam received life from the Spirit, so too does Jesus. As the chapter continues Joseph is told that the child will be called “Emmanuel,” which means “God is with us.”³⁵ In like manner, Matthew ends his Gospel with Jesus stating, “And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”³⁶ It was the priestly task of the first two humans to expand the heaven and earth mingling temple and to create a place for the rest of creation to find rest. Matthew now presents Jesus as the new Adam, the final priest who will establish the heaven and earth dwelling with God’s presence now defined by the person of Jesus Christ.

The three synoptic Gospels describe Jesus’s baptism as the inaugurating event of his ministry. After Jesus’s baptism they describe a dove descending upon Jesus and a voice from heaven declaring, “This is my son, the beloved, with you I am well pleased.”³⁷ Immediately following this event they tell of the Spirit driving Jesus into the wilderness where he fasts for 40 days. Just as the Israelites had been led by the Spirit of God through the Red Sea into the wilderness,³⁸ where due to their faithlessness they will wander for 40

³⁴ Grant R. Osborne and Clinton E. Arnold, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series on the New Testament, v. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), chapter 1, Kindle.

³⁵ Matthew 1:20-24

³⁶ Matthew 28:20

³⁷ Mark 1:11 & Luke 3:22. Matthew 3:17 states “This is my beloved son.”

³⁸ See Exodus 14

years, Jesus has now come up out of the Jordan river and is led by Spirit into the wilderness, where his faithfulness is proven.³⁹ Jesus is fulfilling the role of the Israelite nation and as his ministry moves forward, he shows that he is fulfilling the role of the temple as well.

After Jesus's time in the wilderness Luke's Gospel records, "Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee." While in Galilee Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth where he read from the scroll of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me."⁴⁰ At the completion of the tabernacle and the temple the glory of the Lord had filled the buildings. Now Jesus, coming out of the wilderness, has faithfully completed Israel's mission and is filled with the Spirit of the Lord, just as the tabernacle/temple had been. Beale argues, "On [Jesus], not on the Temple, rests the 'Shekinah glory' in an even greater way than previously in the temple... he is also now, instead of the temple, the unique place on earth where God's revelatory presence is located." Jesus is now the place where heaven and earth dwell together.⁴¹

³⁹ "A closer, specific parallel would be Israel's emergence from the water of the sea and its wanderings in the wilderness. Deuteronomy interprets the events: "Remember the long way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness . . . testing [ekpeirasē] you to know what was in your heart (Deut. 8:2 LXX)." Charles H Talbert, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 60.

⁴⁰ Luke 4:14-18

⁴¹ According to Hannah Stettler, Jesus identifies himself with God's glory in the temple in Matthew 23 and Luke 13. In these texts Jesus laments over Jerusalem bemoaning "I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings..." Stettler explains the image of the hen is understood when compared to the wings of the cherubs above the ark of the covenant as the dwelling place of God. She states, "Jesus thus identifies with the divine shekinah dwelling in the Temple at Jerusalem." Hanna Stettler, "Sanctification in the Jesus Tradition," *Biblica* 85, no. 2 (2004): 156, <http://www.jstor.org/georgefox.idm.oclc.org/stable/42614507>.

In the Gospel of John, after turning the tables over in the temple, Jesus states, “tear down this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Gospel then clarifies, “He was speaking of the temple of his body.”⁴² In Jesus, the one who was fully human and fully God, heaven and earth once again intermingled. The temple was now located in this incarnate one. Before his death Jesus gives a new command, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”⁴³ A few chapters later Jesus prays for his disciples, “I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”⁴⁴ Once again the image-bearers are asked to till and keep the garden-temple, the image-bearers are to reflect the love of Christ and expand the garden-temple into the world. Writer Lois Tverberg suggests, “Through Jesus’ death and resurrection he was building a ‘house’ of a different type. He was bringing together a ‘house’ of a family of believers who would become that place where God’s Spirit dwells.”⁴⁵ The book of Acts is where the family “acts” out this garden-temple expansion, beginning in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth.⁴⁶

⁴² John 2:19; 21.

⁴³ John 13:34 & 35

⁴⁴ John 17:20 & 21

⁴⁵ Lois Tverberg, *Reading the Bible with Rabbi Jesus: How a Jewish Perspective Can Transform Your Understanding*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), chapter 4, Kindle.

⁴⁶ Acts 1:8b

Theologian Willie James Jennings begins his commentary on Acts with the declaration, “The revolution has begun!”⁴⁷ He explains, “The faith that is being born at this moment is a faith of the body, of this life, of this time and this place. Jesus is present, here, now. Jesus inaugurates a new way of speaking about God and about life. This is truly the God of the living, the God who overcomes death.”⁴⁸ Jesus’s resurrection means that this mingling of heaven/earth is bodily present, tangible. And it is in the unity of Jesus’s followers that it will take place.

It is this moment that the disciples ask, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?” Based on their understanding of Scripture, the disciples are waiting for the restoration of Israel.⁴⁹ Jennings believes it is a question about power. “The disciples ask the nationalist question: When will we rule our land, and become self-determining, and if need be impose our will on others?”⁵⁰ But Jesus replies, “It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority.” Jesus’s response is to realign their focus. “God’s kingdom will be restored to God’s people as promised, not at an apocalyptic coming from heaven but rather through the church’s Spirit-led mission on earth.”⁵¹

This refocusing requires them to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit empowers them so they can be his witnesses. Jesus is taken into heaven, and the disciples head to

⁴⁷ Willie James Jennings, *Acts*, First edition, *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 15.

⁴⁸ Jennings, 17.

⁴⁹ See Isaiah 32:14-20

⁵⁰ Jennings, 19.

⁵¹ Anthony B. Robinson and Robert W. Wall, *Called to Be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2006), 34.

Jerusalem. Luke tells us, “All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain woman, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers...the crowd numbered about 120 persons.”⁵² It is the willingness to wait and their devotion to prayer that ushers in the restoration of Israel, “This prayerful waiting on the Lord not only characterizes the church of Acts; it also underscores the implicit importance of Pentecost, when God will deliver the Holy Spirit to them as promised.”⁵³

The New Temple

When the Israelites finished assembling the tabernacle in the wilderness the presence of the Lord filled it. When Solomon completed the temple in Jerusalem the Lord’s presence moved from the tabernacle to the temple. Then, when the Israelites were unfaithful, the presence of the Lord left. The presence of the Lord had been absent until Jesus’s ministry. Again, Tverberg reflects, “The people of the early church would have recalled other scenes of God’s Spirit entering his temple, as it did in Solomon’s day. But now, instead of dwelling in houses made by human hands, the Spirit of God had moved into a new temple, the body of believers.”⁵⁴ This new community is now the garden-temple where the Lord’s presence resides. New Testament scholar Eckhard J. Schnabel states, “The events of Pentecost belong to the fulfillment and to the renewal of God’s covenant with Israel in which the Spirit will have a major role.”⁵⁵ The Holy Spirit, the

⁵² See Acts 1:6-15 for full text.

⁵³ Robinson and Wall, *Called to Be Church*, 37.

⁵⁴ Tverberg, *Reading the Bible with Rabbi Jesus*, chapter 4, Kindle.

⁵⁵ Eckhard J Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), chapter 3, Kindle.

presence that filled the tabernacle and then the temple in the Old Testament, has now filled this new community.

Now filled with the Spirit, the disciples become witnesses among the Jews in Jerusalem, telling all what Jesus did and taught. Luke tells us that when the people heard this, “They were cut to the heart” and then they asked, “What should we do?” Peter responds, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”⁵⁶ The disciples were witnessing to the “chosen” people, the Israelites. However, their status as Israelites was not enough. They must repent of their current way of life and enter into the new life of Jesus through the waters of baptism. Jennings states,

Here in Israel, God will seek after the elect,⁵⁷ all of them. God will stand over against religious faith, as neither its friend nor its enemy, but as God. Here is the point of offense: all religious faith believes it already has God in its sight. It knows and seeks after; it tirelessly devotes time, energy, and resources to the Holy.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Acts 2:37-38

⁵⁷ In the opening section, *The Heavens and Earth*, it was explained that humans alone were created in the image of God and placed in the world with the vocation to reflect God into the world. Next, it was shown that the first humans were placed into the garden to till and keep it and expanded it into the world around it. In Exodus 19:5 & 6 YHWH declares, “Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” Throughout the Old Testament YHWH has chosen one group as representatives in the world in order to reflect and expand YHWH’s heaven and earth dwelling. In the New Testament Jesus enters the world as the heaven and earth dwelling and representative, the only way to God (John 14:6). Lesslie Newbigin writes, “It is the universality of God’s saving love which is the ground of his choosing and calling a community to be the messengers of his truth and bearers of his love for all peoples...we have to remember that neither truth nor love can be communicated except as they are embodied in a community which reasons and loves.” God consistently elects one group to represent, through relationship, God’s love into the world. In Genesis 1, all of humanity was chosen over the rest of creation. In Exodus Israel was chosen over the rest of humanity, in the New Testament it is Christ and his body the church, who are chosen. At all times it is for the purpose of expanding the love of God. To learn more of this, read “The Logic of Election” in Newbigin’s book *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Geneva [SZ]: W.B. Eerdmans ; WCC Publications, 1989), 85.

⁵⁸ Jennings, *Acts*, 37.

The beginning point for the disciples was to put aside their focus on the nationalistic restoration of Israel and wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit's arrival. The beginning point for the Israelites was putting aside their nationalistic focus (repent) and receive the Holy Spirit. This needs to be the beginning point for the shalom community as well.

Luke reports, "All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need."⁵⁹ Again, Jennings explains, "Now love of neighbor will take on pneumatological dimensions. It will be love that builds directly out of the resurrected body of Jesus."⁶⁰ This new community is now living in a new heaven/earth reality. It changes their priorities. Luke tells us, "Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people."⁶¹ This new community was beginning to live out shalom. They reflected the garden-temple of Genesis. They were intermingling, both vertical and horizontal relationships were being restored. In essence, they were naked and unashamed. Their focus was not on "saving souls" their focus was on living together as the dwelling place of God and the way they loved one another told the world they were Jesus's disciples.

As this garden-temple continued to expand into the world, Saul, a devout Pharisaic Jew who gave his time, energy, and resources to stopping this movement, encountered Christ on his way to Damascus. This dramatic event changed his life and

⁵⁹ Acts 44-45

⁶⁰ Jennings, *Acts*, 34.

⁶¹ Acts 46-47

focus and led to the founding of many churches as he traveled to “the ends of the earth.”⁶² One of those churches was in Ephesus. Paul’s letter to the Ephesian church instructs them how to be a community of shalom.

Paul addresses his letter “to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus.”⁶³ This address indicates two characteristics of the church. First, the word *saints*, ἅγιος (*hagios*) in Greek, meaning “persons who belong to God, and as such constitute a religious entity.”⁶⁴ Theologian Stephen Fowl explains, “The allusions here go back to Exodus 19:6...where the Lord speaks of setting Israel apart as a ‘kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ Further, in Leviticus the Lord repeatedly calls Israel to a divine holiness.”⁶⁵ Being saints does not have to do with a moral standard that they live by it has to do with their purpose. They are set apart, to do the work of God. Second, it is addressed to those who are *faithful in Christ* (πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ). Theologian Klyne Snodgrass states, “Paul is not merely saying these people believed in Christ; rather, they were in Christ positionally.”⁶⁶ He explains, “This language expresses the oneness and the identity that a believer shares with Christ,”⁶⁷ while Theologian Charles Talbert argues,

⁶² You can read about this story in Acts 9-28

⁶³ Ephesians 1:1

⁶⁴ J. P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed, vol. Volume 1 (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989), 124.

⁶⁵ Stephen E. Fowl, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, First edition, The New Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 33.

⁶⁶ Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 36.

⁶⁷ Snodgrass, 38.

“faithful in dependence on (by the power of) Jesus.”⁶⁸ The bottom line is that the loyal⁶⁹ Ephesians are not acting in their own will or agenda, they are unified and reliant on Christ. They are giving up their nationalist identities and embracing their new status as “faithful saints.”

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells the faithful saints who are in Christ that before the foundation of the world God chose them “to be holy and blameless before him in love” (1.4). Paul’s declaration echoes the creation story of Genesis 1 and 2: Adam and Eve were created and placed in the temple/garden to be holy and blameless before YHWH in love. Paul tells the faithful saints that they have been redeemed through the blood of Christ according to the grace God lavished upon them (1.7 & 8), and it has been God’s plan to gather up all things in heaven and on earth in Christ (1.10). God’s plan to *gather up* is the translation of the Greek word ἀνακεφαλαιόω (anakephalioo) which means, “to bring everything together in terms of some unifying principle or person.”⁷⁰ In other words, in Christ it is God’s plan to unify heaven and earth. Theologian Mark Roberts explains, “In Ephesians 1:10, the uniting of all things in Christ includes the sort of relational reconciliation found in 2 Corinthians 5. But it reaches much further, encompassing not just human beings but ‘all things.’”⁷¹ The garden-temple task is still in play, and it will be accomplished through Christ who is bringing all things together (God, humans, and creation).

⁶⁸ Charles H Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 45.

⁶⁹ Talbert also suggests that faithful = loyal. Talbert, 44.

⁷⁰ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Volume 1:613.

⁷¹ Mark D Roberts, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2016), 30.

Paul praises the faithful saints for their “love toward all the saints” (1.15). He prays for God to give them “a spirit of wisdom and revelation” so that they “may know what is the hope to which he has called” them as well as “the immeasurable greatness” of Christ’s power (1:17-19). These are two more characteristics of this faithful community. Their faith in the Lord Jesus has shaped the way they live their lives, and this is evident in their love toward all the saints. They are living out Christ’s John 13 commandment to “love one another.” But Paul wants them to go even deeper, he wants them to understand all that God has called them to be. Roberts elaborates, “In Scripture, knowing God is never just a matter of intellectual understanding. It is also deeply personal, relational, and experienced by a community. It includes experience, emotions, and intimate communication as well as right thinking.”⁷² This is a vertical and horizontal relationship project that includes relationship with God and with one another (back to the original garden-temple again).

Finally, Paul explains that God has placed Christ above all “rule and authority and power and dominion” in every time and realm, making Christ the head the church, “which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all” (1.20-23). In the Old Testament God’s presence filled the tabernacle and the temple, and Snodgrass believes that the concept of Christ’s fullness here needs be read through this lens. “‘Fullness,’ in other words, refers to God’s making his presence and power felt. Whereas in the Old Testament he filled the temple, now he fills Christ, and Christ in turn fills his own so that the church partakes of the divine fullness.”⁷³ It is the garden-temple where the community

⁷² Roberts, 45.

⁷³ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 80.

of faithful saints are gathered together in Christ's heaven⁷⁴ and earth project, which is evident in their relationships both vertical and horizontal. Next, Paul describes how God is building this garden-temple.

Paul starts with a history lesson, "You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient" (2.1-2). This reaches back to Genesis 3, after Adam and Eve gave up their authority in the original garden-temple they were dead and the powers against God ruled them. Fowl states, "The picture painted in 2:2 is of people who are in the thrall of forces opposed to God. Satan has captivated them; they are under Satan's dominion."⁷⁵

Apart from Christ everyone is dead. "All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else." Humanity, created to be God's image-bearers, have failed at their task. However, because of the love of God, "rich in mercy," the body of Christ has been "made alive together with Christ." In fact, the body has been raised with Christ and seated with him in the "heavenly places" (2:3-10). Paul stresses that we are God's "poem,"⁷⁶ and "created in Christ" for the good works prepared beforehand to be our way of life."⁷⁷ Once again heaven and earth are mingling together, and God's

⁷⁴ See footnote above regarding Hannah Stettler's explanation of Jesus gathering Jerusalem like a mother hen.

⁷⁵ Fowl, *Ephesians*, 70.

⁷⁶ The Greek word ποιήμα (poiēma), translated in the English as "made," is related to the English word *poem*. See the *Oxford English Dictionary* <https://www-oed-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/146514?redirectedFrom=poem#eid>

⁷⁷ See Ephesians 2:1-10

image-bearers have been placed back into the garden-temple.⁷⁸ Lynn Cohick points out, “The final verse (2:10) in this section directs the believer’s vision from the heavenly realm into the world and offers the second ramification concerning our salvation in Christ. The believers have a purpose, divinely given and divinely empowered: to function as God’s agents of goodness in the world.”⁷⁹

Paul now describes this new temple. First it is not a temple for Jews or Gentiles, rather it is for all because Christ is “our peace,” and “in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” Christ has “abolished the law” so that “he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two” (2:11-15). The word *peace* needs to be defined. The Greek word εἰρήνη (eirene), “Is not the narrower one of ‘peace’ but the wider one of ‘well-being.’”⁸⁰ Snodgrass writes, “Peace is not merely the cessation of hostility; it is a comprehensive term for salvation and life with God. The background to this use is the Old Testament concept of shalom⁸¹, which covers wholeness, physical well-being, prosperity, security, good relations, and integrity.”⁸² When Paul says Christ is our peace, he is stating that in Christ

⁷⁸ The Greek word ποίημα (poiēma) is used here and in the LXX to talk about God’s creative activity, “God created heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1ff.). He created humanity (1:27). He is ho poiēsas (Prov. 14:31). He is the Creator of the chosen people (Is. 43:1). poiēsis denotes either his creating (Ps. 19:2) or his creation (Sir. 16:26).” Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, eds, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 895.

⁷⁹ Lynn H. Cohick, *Ephesians: A New Covenant Commentary*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), Ephesians 2, Kindle.

⁸⁰ Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 207.

⁸¹ Bible scholar Walter Bruggeman explains shalom, “It bears tremendous freight - the freight of a dream of God that resists all our tendencies to division, hostility, fear, drivenness, and misery. Shalom is the substance of the biblical vision of one community embracing all creation. It refers to all those resources and factors that make communal harmony joyous and effective.” Walter Brueggemann, *Peace, Understanding Biblical Themes* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 14.

⁸² Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 130.

all the faithful are made whole and thus united together. This new garden-temple is made of all those faithful saints who are in Christ, no matter their ethnicity, gender, or social status. Rather all are “citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.”⁸³ Again, Cohick expounds, “The relationship believers have with God in Christ is evidenced by living the new creation life here and now. No new creation, no reconciliation. God is intent on redeeming and reconciling all creation, including his image bearers (humans) who by faith are in Christ.”⁸⁴

This household, made up of the faithful saints, is now the dwelling place of God, and “in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.”⁸⁵ There it is. The faithful saints, the image-bearers are now themselves the temple. In their unity, in their wholeness they come together as the garden-temple. N.T. Wright explains, “The point about the single Jew-plus-Gentile family is that this people, this family, this church, is the place where God dwells by the Spirit.”⁸⁶ The good news of the gospel cannot be reduced down to the salvation of an individual soul. It is much bigger than that. Cohick writes,

Christ’s purpose is to make something new from what were once two. This new thing is his body, the church, which now has access in Christ to God the Father through the Spirit. The cross is not only the place where believers’ sins are

⁸³ Ephesians 2:14-19

⁸⁴ Cohick, *Ephesians*, Ephesians 2, Kindle.

⁸⁵ 2:21-22

⁸⁶ N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan & Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 172.

forgiven, but also the place where something new is created. The new creation is not simply a new individual, but a new entity—Christ’s body, the church.⁸⁷

It is about the new garden-temple where all of the faithful saints united in Christ, who through the Holy Spirit join God in expanding the garden-temple into the broken world and bring wholeness (peace) to all those who join the faithful. Again, Wright argues, “For [Paul], the church is constituted, and lives its life in public, in such a way as to confront the rulers of the world with the news that there is ‘another king named Jesus.’”⁸⁸

For Paul, the church is where heaven and earth mingle together again, where God dwells. Just as the original humans were placed in the garden-temple for the purpose of expanding God’s dwelling, and to do so through the mechanism of relationships, now, in Christ, the faithful saints are the new garden-temple with the purpose of expanding God’s dwelling through the mechanism of relationships.

The New Testament comes to a close in the book of *Revelation*. The final two chapters describe the fulfilled garden-temple, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them.”⁸⁹ The intermingling of heaven and earth that existed in the original garden-temple is now everlasting. “In this eschatological reality, the boundary between heaven and earth...is permanently removed. Eschatological life is marked by God’s perpetual perceptible presence—a state of permanent incarnation, so to speak.”⁹⁰ This fulfilled

⁸⁷ Cohick, *Ephesians*, Ephesians 2, Kindle.

⁸⁸ Wright, *Justification*, 173.

⁸⁹ 21:3

⁹⁰ Michael J Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), chapter 9, Kindle

garden-temple is the completion of what has been started and experienced since the original garden-temple. Eugene Peterson writes, “The vision of heaven is an affirmation of correspondence: that which we have begun to experience corresponds to what we will completely experience. The vision of heaven is not the promise of anything *other* than what we have already received by faith; it does, though, promise *more*, namely, its completion.”⁹¹

Because of God’s presence the temple is no longer needed, “I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need for sun or moon on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.”⁹² What YHWH El’ohim (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים) began in Genesis, has found its fulfillment in Revelation. Rather than a new temple, God and Christ are the temple, and their glory fills it. Not only is the vertical relationship forever transformed, but the horizontal one is as well, “On either side of the river is the tree of life...and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.”⁹³ “The final culmination...where the Father, the Lamb, and God’s people dwell together in close relationship in the new heavens and the new earth, where everything has been restored and made perfect.”⁹⁴ Michael Gorman expresses, “Revelation is, like the rest of the Bible, about the creation of a people, a people living in harmony with God, one another, and the entire creation.”⁹⁵

⁹¹ Eugene H Peterson, *Reversed Thunder: The Revelation of John and the Praying Imagination* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 172.

⁹² Revelation 21:22-23

⁹³ Rev 22:2

⁹⁴ Hays, *The Temple and the Tabernacle*, 184.

⁹⁵ Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly*, chapter 9, Kindle.

Conclusion

From Genesis to Revelation, the call has been to relationships, both vertical and horizontal, and it is in those relationships where God dwells. YHWH began by planting a garden-temple in which to dwell with the two humans, who were instructed to expand it. YHWH then gave birth to a chosen people and instructed them to build a temple, where God would dwell, and they were to live in such a way that it would expand into the rest of creation. In the New Testament Jesus told his disciples that their love for one another and their unity would show the world that he was God's son. While the church of Acts grew, its devotion was to life together and evangelism happened as an outgrowth of its life together. In Ephesians Paul taught the faithful saints that as members of God's household, united in Christ, they would overcome the powers of this world. This all lines up with Dr. Thompson's claim that, "It is only when we are known that we are positioned to become conduits of love. And it is love that transforms our minds, makes forgiveness possible, and weaves a community of disparate people into the tapestry of God's family."⁹⁶ The next chapter will take a look at the post New Testament church.

⁹⁶ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 3.

CHAPTER 3:
PARADISE, PATIENCE, & PRACTICE, A HISTORICAL VIEW

Overview

From the creation account in Genesis to the faithful saints in Ephesus the message was the same: the intersection of heaven and earth, the temple, the household of God was the place of new creation, the place of transformation. It is a place of both vertical and horizontal relationships, where love of God and love of neighbor are lived out. It is the place where the faithful saints united in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, join God to expand the garden-temple into the broken world and bring wholeness (shalom) to those who join the faithful. According to historian Diana Butler Bass, “Christianity seems to have succeeded because it transformed the lives of people in a chaotic world.”¹ What has that looked like historically? How did they build a community of shalom?

The history of the church is rich and extensive, with numerous people and multiple movements to study.² However, to answer the question this paper will look at

¹ Diana Butler Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity: The Other Side of the Story* 1st HarperCollins Pbk ed (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 26.

² The Middle Ages was a time when “Christianity blended traditions rather fluidly.” It was a “confluence of diversity and local custom.” It was a time of architecture, art, and asceticism. Theology was expressed and communicated through cathedrals and icons. (cf part II of Bass). Bass, 89; While others turned away from the comforts of the world and embraced their callings, people like Benedict, his rule and his role in founding monasticism; Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity. Volume 1: The Early Church to the Reformation*, Rev. and updated [ed.], 2nd ed (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2010), 278 (See also Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages*, The Crossroad Spiritual Legacy Series (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1992); George G. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West—Again* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000); or mystics such as Julian of Norwich who enclosed herself in a small cell connected to the parish and lived her life as an anchoress, praying for all who came to her door. Julian, Elizabeth Spearing and A. C. Spearing, *Revelations of Divine Love (Short Text and Long Text)*, Penguin Classics (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1998). At this time there were also the scholarly theologians Thomas Aquinas and Anselm. Thomas and Ralph McInerny, *Selected Writings*,

two specific movements, the second and third century church of Rome and the eighteenth-century Methodist movement.³

The Church in Rome

The World of the Early Church

The world of Rome was highly religious, with multitudes of gods, all who needed to be appeased for the peace and prosperity of the empire.⁴ Each culture Rome conquered added more gods to their pantheon, leaving a confusing horde and creating an opportunity for Caesar to become the supreme deity.⁵ The worship of the emperor was “a means of unity and a test of loyalty.”⁶ Historian Justo L. González explains, “When Christians refused to burn incense before the emperor’s image, they did so as a witness to their faith; but the authorities condemned them as disloyal and seditious people.”⁷

Within this world, Christians faced the possibility of martyrdom. Christianity, which was seen as a threat to the state, “was dealt with as a matter of routine by the

Penguin Classics (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1998); Anselm, Brian Davies, and G. R. Evans, *The Major Works*, Oxford World’s Classics (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008); These people and many more offer exciting opportunities to explore how God has been at work throughout history.

³ The early church was chosen due to its proximity to the New Testament church, John Wesley and the Methodist movement was chosen because of the author’s Methodist roots.

⁴ According to Stark, “The precise pantheon of major gods differed somewhat from one city to another, but everywhere urbanites were confronted with a vast array. In most cities there were temples or shrines for a mass of other.” Rodney Stark, *Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome*, 1st ed (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 32.

⁵ Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua’s Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1997), 15.

⁶ González, *The Story of Christianity*. Volume 1, 22.

⁷ González, 22.

middle of the second century.”⁸ In a letter to the emperor Trajan, Pliny, the governor of a Roman province in Asia Minor, explains his procedures for handling those who have been accused of being a Christian, “I asked them whether they were Christian. If they admitted it, I asked a second and third time, threatening them with execution.” If they were willing to renounce Christ and worship the emperor, Pliny released them. Trajan’s response to Pliny affirmed his policies, “If brought before you and found guilty, they must be punished.”⁹ Christians who faced this *punishment* did not resist it,¹⁰ “early Christian communities trained for their own, *quasi-eucharistic* sacrifice of martyrdom and expected it.” They considered martyrdom a public act and form of liturgy. Their bodies became the word they spoke as witnesses to Christ.¹¹ The world of Rome was filled with worship, but it was worship of the empire. It was a world that gladly welcomed new gods into their pantheon, as long as everyone also worshiped the Roman emperor. The church navigated these challenges through *paradise, practice, and patience*, while focused on vertical and horizontal relationships.

⁸ N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, 1st North American ed (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 348.

⁹ Pliny the Younger, *Complete Letters*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: OUP Oxford, 2006), 279.

¹⁰ On his way to his execution, Ignatius of Antioch wrote to the church in Rome, “I am writing to all the Churches to tell them all that I am, with all my heart, to die for God-if only you do not prevent it. I beseech you not to indulge your benevolence at the wrong time. Please let me be thrown to the wild beasts; through them I can reach God. I am God's wheat; I am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts that I may end as the pure bread of Christ.” The Apostolic Fathers, Gerald G. Walsh, ed. *Fathers of the Church*; v. 1. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 109.

¹¹ Robin Darling Young, *In Procession Before the World : Martyrdom As Public Liturgy in Early Christianity* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001), 3,13.

Paradise

In his treatises *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus of Lyons writes, “For the Church has been planted as a garden (*paradisus*) in this world...Into this paradise the Lord has introduced those who obey His call, ‘summing up in Himself all things which are in heaven, and which are on earth.’”¹² For Irenaeus the focus was on the hope of paradise, which was found in the Body of Christ.¹³ And like Paul, Irenaeus knew that the foundation of that hope was in the combination of both the vertical and horizontal relationships. Bass writes, “In his mind the love of God was bound up with the world that God had made; there existed an intimate relationship between matter and spirit, especially demonstrated in the Christian idea that Jesus was born as a human being.” She states, “Irenaeus’s vision is one of cosmic unity, in which heaven and earth, spirit and matter, divine and mundane, intertwined in the beauty of universal love.”¹⁴

As the bishop of Lyons, Irenaeus was first and foremost a pastor, and his theology grew out of his pastor’s heart.¹⁵ According to González, Irenaeus saw God as a loving shepherd who created out of love. As the pinnacle of creation, “God placed the first couple in Eden.” Not as mature beings but “like children” who would “grow in

¹² Paul A Böer, ed., *Against Heresies St. Irenaeus of Lyons* (Edmond, OK: Veritatis Splendor Publications, 2012), 471–72.

¹³ Ephesians 1.20-23 states that the Church is Christ’s body. See also the discussion in chapter two about the New Temple.

¹⁴ Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity*, 37–38.

¹⁵ See González, *The Story of Christianity*. Volume 1, 84.

communion with the divine.”¹⁶ Of Irenaeus’s theology¹⁷ González states, “The situation in paradise, as described in Genesis, was not the goal of creation, but its beginning. From this perspective, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is not merely a response to sin. On the contrary, God’s initial purpose included being united with humankind.”¹⁸

Irenaeus focused on the spiritual journey here and now, amid all the challenges of this world. Rowan Greer argues, “By being caught up into Christ’s story Irenaeus gains hope and freedom for the present. Moreover, to be caught up in Christ’s story is to find oneself in a drama that goes beyond the Incarnation to involve the whole of God’s purpose in Creation.”¹⁹ González suggests that the focal point of history, for Irenaeus, is the incarnation; “from the beginning the union of the human with the divine was the goal of history.”²⁰ Irenaeus looked at the difficulties facing the church, and taught the church to focus on life in the paradise found in the Body of Christ. He taught them to focus on the love and grace found in the incarnation and encouraged them to find hope in their identity in Christ.²¹

¹⁶ González, 84–85.

¹⁷ To read about this piece of his theology, see *Against Heresies* Book 3.XVI.8; Book 4.XX.2 & 4.XXXVIII.1

¹⁸ González, *The Story of Christianity*, Volume 1, 85.

¹⁹ Rowan A. Greer, *Broken Lights and Mended Lives: Theology and Common Life in the Early Church* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1986), 41.

²⁰ González, *The Story of Christianity*, Volume 1, 86.

²¹ Böer, *Against Heresies St. Irenaeus of Lyons*, 353.

In January of 363, CE Gregory of Nyssa preached his sermon *In diem luminum* (On the Baptism of Christ); it was “principally addressed to those who have just received baptism, but also those who are not yet baptized.”²² In this sermon Gregory states,

You have sprinkled us with pure water and cleansed us from our stains... All is turned to joy for us who were the heirs of sin. And paradise is trodden under foot of men—even heaven itself. The whole creation in the world and above the world, which once warred with itself, is bound together in the harmony of love. And we men join our voices with the angels, singing with them God’s praises.²³

Greer argues, “The Savior is the New Man, but our attention is shifted away from the old paradise to the new one of heaven itself. The promise of Creation is fulfilled in the total ‘harmony of love.’”²⁴ Greer suggests that for Irenaeus the incarnation was the culmination of the Old Testament, while for Nyssa it’s about how the Incarnation provides for the present reality of the Christian life.²⁵ For Nyssa, the hope for life in this world now is found in the mingling of heaven and earth in the incarnation of Christ and the harmony of love as lived out in the body of Christ.

Both Irenaeus and Nyssa taught that transformation happens on the journey in the world now; it is the product of God’s love and it is worked out where heaven and earth meet, the paradise found in the church. It was a message of hope in the chaotic world of Rome. However, that hope was worked out in the way the Christians lived their lives, the practices that shaped their communities.

²² Lucas F Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero, *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 229, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004169654.i-814>.

²³ Quoted by Greer. Greer, *Broken Lights and Mended Lives*, 41.

²⁴ Greer, 45.

²⁵ Greer, 42.

Practice

In his book *Cities of God*, Rodney Stark argues “the power of Christianity” was in a faith that delivered an answer to “life’s miseries here and now!” He offers this insight,

The truly revolutionary aspect of Christianity lay in moral imperatives such as “Love one’s neighbor as oneself,” “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” and “When you did it to the least of my brethren, you did it to me.” These were not just slogans. Members did nurse the sick, even during epidemics; they did support orphans, widows, the elderly, and the poor; they did concern themselves with the lot of slaves. In short, Christians created “a miniature welfare state in an empire which for the most part lacked social services.”²⁶

The paradise offered was not empty words, it was action. Two documents from the second century give witness to these practices: an anonymously written document known now as the *Didache*, and an excerpt from Tertullian’s *Apology*.

The *Didache* was a handbook for Christian communities and was a way for families to adapt the teachings of Jesus into their daily lives.²⁷ It offered a choice between a path of life or one of death. On the path towards life, “First: you will love the God who made you; second: you will love your neighbor as yourself.”²⁸ On this path your words are backed up by action, and your plan will not be motivated by evil.²⁹ On this path you will not turn away from the one in need, even if the one in need is your enemy. You will

²⁶ Stark, *Cities of God*, 30–31.

²⁷ Aaron Milavec, ed., *The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 6.

²⁸ Milavec, 34.

²⁹ Milavec, 36.

partner with your brother or sister, as you love not only in word, but deed as well, praying for those who persecute you, and loving those you hate you.³⁰

Alan Kreider argues that the *Didache* teaches the community that their lives must “mingle” with two things. First their lives “are shaped by their choice between the two ways in all aspects of daily life.” And “to live the way of life means to live the teachings of Jesus!” He suggests that “The *Didache* gives weight to this mingling by insisting that these themes must be embodied and practiced.”³¹ Much as Irenaeus taught that the Christian life must be “caught up in the story of Christ,” the *Didache* teaches that the Christian life must be caught up in the practice of the story of Christ.

Tertullian became a Christian in Rome when he was about 40 years old.³² “He was moved to embrace the Christian faith by observing the perseverance of the Christians in the persecutions and the heroic courage of the martyrs.”³³ In his work *Apology*, Tertullian hoped to show the true condition of the Christian.³⁴

In Chapter 31 of *Apology*, Tertullian outlines certain Christian practices, “We assemble for the consideration of the Holy Scriptures...we nourish our faith with holy conversation...Each man deposits a small amount on a certain day of the month or whenever he wishes, and only on condition that he is willing and able to do so.”³⁵ He also

³⁰ Milavec, 34.

³¹ Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 140.

³² González, *The Story of Christianity*, Volume 1, 88.

³³ Tertullian et al., *Apologetical Works and Minucius Felix Octavius* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), viii.

³⁴ Tertullian et al., 4.

³⁵ Tertullian et al., 98.

explains their outward focused practices, “The money therefrom is spent...for the support and burial of the poor, for children who are without their parents and means of subsistence, for aged men who are confined to the house; likewise, for shipwrecked sailors, and for any in the mines, on islands or in prisons.”³⁶ The community of Christians gather for common worship, for mutual encouragement, and to give support to the poor in the community. These practices are even known to those outside the community: “The practice of such a special love brands us in the eyes of some. ‘See,’ they say, ‘how they love one another’; ‘and how ready they are to die for each other.’”³⁷ Christianity in the Roman world was embodied and practiced, within a community of believers. It was taught and developed through a slow, intentional process that took place over years. It was a process that took patience.

Patience

Patience was at the core of the church. They understood the seriousness of the Christian life as they embarked on “a process of spiritual formation and discipline that took time, a way of life that had to be learned in community. Many early Christian communities frowned upon instantaneous conversion.”³⁸ Another document from the early church, *The Apostolic Tradition* describes the process,

Those who come to the church in order to become Christians are to be examined with all rigor for what motive have they abandoned their religion, for fear lest they enter out of mockery. If he comes with a true faith, he is to be received with

³⁶ Tertullian et al., 99.

³⁷ Tertullian et al., 99.

³⁸ Bass, *A People's History of Christianity*, 29.

joy, questioned about his occupation, and instructed in the Scriptures, so that he may renounce Satan and all his service.³⁹

As the result of the persecution experienced throughout Rome, most churches closed their doors to outsiders. *The Disciplina Arcani* (discipline of the secret) prevented outsiders from entering Christian worship services,⁴⁰ and by the third century most communities placed individuals at the doors to monitor those who attended.⁴¹ “Fear motivated this closing—fear of people who might disrupt their gathering or spy on them.”⁴²

The early church did not have an organized pattern for evangelization. Rather, the movement spread through their relationships.⁴³ When a non-Christian took notice of the embodied practices of the Christian and expressed an interest in attending a Christian community, the Christian brought the individual to *The First Scrutiny* and sponsored the new applicant.⁴⁴ In this first meeting the church leaders would ask the sponsor to “bear witness” to the candidate’s lifestyle.⁴⁵ The leaders wanted to know if the candidate was

³⁹ Paul F. Bradshaw et al., *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary*, Hermeneia--a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 83.

⁴⁰ Edward Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: Baptismal Homilies of the Fourth Century*. (Slough: St. Paul Publications, 1981), 50–51; F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3rd ed. rev (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁴¹ “Christians kept a low profile. The leaders of a modest third-century church were advised to post a lookout on the door to check visiting strangers, while a Church order of conduct...advised that potential converts should bring a good reference.” Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 315; See also Yarnold, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation*, 51–52.

⁴² Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 11.

⁴³ Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 315–16.

⁴⁴ “As far as they can, Christians previously examine the souls of those who want to hear them and test them individually beforehand; when before entering the community, the hearers seem to have devoted themselves sufficiently to the desire to live a good life, then they introduce them.” Origen and Henry Chadwick, *Contra Celsum* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 163.

⁴⁵ Bradshaw et al., *The Apostolic Tradition*, 83.

teachable; “they were convinced that the candidates’ behavior was the most reliable predictor of whether they would be able to learn the Christians’ habitus.”⁴⁶ Once admitted, they would then enter into a period of instruction, and this process would continue to be reliant upon the Christian friend/sponsor who supported the new *catechuminate*. According to the *Apostolic Tradition* this stage would take about three years.⁴⁷

The church in Rome was focused on developing a rhythm and pattern to their community that could not be developed quickly; it required time and patience. It was centered on loving God and loving neighbor. They understood that this could not merely be words, it had to be embodied and practiced. The authenticity of their witness and practice took precedent over numbers or haste. Bass writes, “Throughout the first five centuries people understood Christianity primarily as a way of life in the present, not as a doctrinal system, esoteric belief, or promise of eternal salvation. By followers enacting Jesus’s teachings, Christianity changed and improved the lives of its adherents and served as a practical spiritual pathway.”⁴⁸ What was the church spending its time and resources on in the first centuries? They were creating communities centered around the love of God and neighbor, communities that embodied and modeled that love. They were communities where people were known, where love was transforming minds, making

⁴⁶ Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 150.

⁴⁷ “Let the one coming to be catechized be instructed for three years...” Bradshaw et al., *The Apostolic Tradition*, 97.

⁴⁸ Bass, *A People’s History of Christianity*, 27.

forgiveness possible, and weaving “a community of disparate people into the tapestry of God’s family.”⁴⁹

In the fourth century, Constantine became emperor of Rome and converted to Christianity⁵⁰ (although he continued his pagan practices as well),⁵¹ and slowly the relationship between the church and Rome began to take on a new shape.⁵² As this new relationship developed, some in the Church considered it a blessing while others saw it as a loss. Over the next century the church gained more power as it intertwined with state, while others continued to push against the relationship until it reached its climax at the Reformation, under the leadership of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin (to name just a few).⁵³ In eighteenth century England John Wesley helped to lead another movement. It is there this paper now turns.

John Wesley and the Methodist Movement

The World of the Methodists

The Methodist movement embodied paradise, practice, and patience as they became a community of shalom. “The mark of the people called Methodists was that they loved God and neighbor, which was simply the mark of a true Christian who had the faith

⁴⁹ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 3.

⁵⁰ Mary Beard, John A. North, and S. R. F. Price, *Religions of Rome* (Cambridge; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 365.

⁵¹ González, *The Story of Christianity*, Volume 1, 138.

⁵² “Christianity increasingly became the base-line, while it was the traditional cults that now became the option, the matter of choice.” Beard, North, and Price, *Religions of Rome*, 375.

⁵³ See footnote above regarding the Middle Ages, to read more about the Reformation see González, *The Story of Christianity*.

of a child of God”⁵⁴ In his 1741 sermon *Almost Christian*, Wesley explores the difference between righteousness through good works and salvation by faith alone. Wesleyan scholar Albert Outler writes, “His view of the true Christian was consistently tied to a theology of grace through faith and grounded in an ethic of love.”⁵⁵ Wesley stated that the “all together Christian” first and foremost loves God. “Such a love of God is this as engrosses the whole heart, as takes up all the affections, as fills the entire capacity of the soul, and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties.” The second aspect of an “all together Christian” is love of neighbor, “For thus said our Lord in the following words: ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.’”⁵⁶

Wesley’s “vision of the Christian life was one of personal encounter with Christ and shared experience within the household of faith.”⁵⁷ It was a life that was focused on vertical and horizontal relationships; just like the Scriptures, and the early church, so it was for Wesley. Within the people known as Methodists, each person was both seen and known. The Methodist movement was born, nurtured, and developed from Wesley’s own personal spiritual journey which he then applied to his leadership style and ministry philosophy. It was a movement that embraced paradise and practice while learning patience.

⁵⁴ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 322.

⁵⁵ John Wesley, Albert Cook Outler, and Richard P. Heitzenrater, *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 61.

⁵⁶ Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, 65.

⁵⁷ Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision: An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), chapter 3, Kindle.

In the following pages this will be shown through the lens of *The Man*, *The People*, and finally, *The Organization*.

The Man

Wesley was born in Epworth, United Kingdom, in 1703. His parents, Samuel and Susanna, both came from strong Puritan heritages. Going against their upbringing, they both left the “Dissenting Church”⁵⁸ and joined the Anglican church. Stephen Tomkins states, “Samuel and Susanna, reacting against their upbringing were to be lifelong Tories.”⁵⁹ The tension between these two religious/political views would have a profound influence on Wesley’s life. Wesley’s drive to live a holy life combined with his lack of confidence in his salvation were at the root of his struggle to come to terms with the tension between works and grace. Richard P. Heitzenrater writes, “Catechized by his priestly father and tutored by his pietist mother,” put him in “a position that avoided too much stress on outward works on the one hand, or on a faith without works on the other.”⁶⁰ When he was 22, Wesley recorded in his journal, “I began to see that true religion was seated in the heart and that God’s law extended to all our thoughts as well as

⁵⁸ From the moment the church and the state became intertwined there have been those who “dissented” and did not conform to the official state church doctrines. In England the dissenting church gained momentum as the Anglican church took shape. During the seventeenth century the Act of Uniformity removed dissenting clergy from their livings within the Established church; while the Conventicle Act made it illegal to meet for non-state sanctioned religious gatherings, dissenters were fined or imprisoned where they often died. John Coffey, ed., *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions, Volume 1: The Post-Reformation Era, c.1559-c.1689*, 1st ed (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021).

⁵⁹ Stephen Tomkins, *John Wesley: A Biography* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2003), 9.

⁶⁰ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 72.

words and actions.”⁶¹ Kenneth Collins suggests, “Wesley understood, for the first time, that the end or goal of religion was holiness... That religion encompassed not merely external exercises but also inward devotion and dedication to God.”⁶²

On October 14, 1735, Wesley set off on a mission trip to the American colony of Georgia. This trip proved to be life altering. His first crisis was coming face-to-face with death. Amid one harrowing sea storm after another Wesley came to realize that he was afraid to die and in the face of death he was not certain of his salvation. On January 17, 1736, he writes, “About eleven I lay down in the great cabin, and in a short time fell asleep, though very uncertain whether I should wake alive, and much ashamed of my unwillingness to die.”⁶³

Upon his arrival in Georgia, he met Moravian pastor August Spangenberg who asked Wesley if he knew Jesus. Wesley responded, “I know he is the Savior of the world.” Spangenberg continued, “True, but do you know he has saved you?” Wesley answered, “I hope he has died to save me.” Spangenberg specified, “Do you know yourself?” Wesley asserted, “I do.” However, in his journal Wesley admitted, “But I fear they were vain words.”⁶⁴ Wesley returned to England less than two years later, still struggling with a lack of assurance.⁶⁵ As he arrived home he wrote, “What have I learned myself in the meantime? Why (what I the least of all suspected), that I who went to

⁶¹ John Wesley, Richard P. Heitzenrater, and W. Reginald Ward, *Journal and Diaries I*, The Works of John Wesley, v. 18 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1988), 243.

⁶² Kenneth J. Collins, *A Real Christian: The Life of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 24.

⁶³ Wesley, Heitzenrater, and Ward, *Journal and Diaries I*, 141.

⁶⁴ Wesley, Heitzenrater, and Ward, 145–46.

⁶⁵ Wesley, Heitzenrater, and Ward, 207.

America to convert others, was never myself converted to God.”⁶⁶ In England Wesley was introduced to the Moravian missionary Peter Böhler.

Böhler taught that salvation was an instantaneous event, something Wesley struggled to understand, struggled to achieve, and then struggled to hold on to.⁶⁷ It was on May 24, 1738, that Wesley finally had his heart warmed. “I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.”⁶⁸ Although Wesley’s heart had been warmed, he still struggled for the instant change and lasting joy. He writes on May 26, two days later, “My soul continued in peace, but yet in heaviness, because of manifold temptations.”⁶⁹ On May 28, he confesses, “I waked in peace, but not in joy.”⁷⁰ On Tuesday, June 6, Wesley received a letter which “threw” him “into much perplexity.” He writes, “It was asserted therein that no doubting could consist with the least degree of true faith; that whoever at any time felt any doubt or fear was not *weak in faith*, but had *no faith* at all...”⁷¹ Wesley’s struggle is now between his own experience and the teaching of the Moravians; while he is experiencing peace, the joy is missing, and doubts continue to plague him. Maddox observes,

⁶⁶ Wesley, Heitzenrater, and Ward, 215–16.

⁶⁷ To see Wesley’s struggle to understand and obtain it, see his journal entries from February 18–May 24, 1738. To see his struggle to hold on to it, see his journal entries from May 25, 1738–November 1739. Wesley, Heitzenrater, and Ward, *Journal and Diaries I*; John Wesley, Richard P. Heitzenrater, and W. Reginald Ward, *Journal and Diaries II*, The Works of John Wesley, v. 19 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990).

⁶⁸ Wesley, Heitzenrater, and Ward, *Journal and Diaries I*, 249–50.

⁶⁹ Wesley, Heitzenrater, and Ward, 251.

⁷⁰ Wesley, Heitzenrater, and Ward, 252.

⁷¹ Wesley, Heitzenrater, and Ward, 254.

When he found himself trusting in God’s pardon that night at Aldersgate, he emerged from the event with “great expectations” that he would now have continual peace and certainty. These expectations were quickly shattered. Wesley’s lack of constant joy, peace, and certainty following Aldersgate left him with a quandary—if faith inherently included these, then he had no faith! On the other hand, he found himself unable to believe that he did not have at least a “degree” of faith.⁷²

At this point Wesley decided to spend time with the Moravians in Germany. The German Moravians taught that assurance is distinct from justification, and joy does not always come with the peace. One individual shared how assurance for him was “by degrees; not in one moment, or one hour.”⁷³ In Germany, Wesley discovered those who shared his own experience.

Through his own experience Wesley was working out what became a uniquely Wesleyan distinction between justifying faith and sanctifying faith. Maddox explains it, “Wesley was distinguishing between saving faith and the full assurance of that faith. He was talking of degrees of faith, as well as degrees of assurance. In short, he was allowing that someone could be truly Christian (albeit, imperfect) who was not yet fully Christian.”⁷⁴ In his 1746 sermon *Justification by Faith*, Wesley defined his “first fully positive exposition of his new soteriology—faith alone.”⁷⁵ Wesley posited that justification is not the actual act of being made “just and righteous,” he argued that was sanctification. Rather, justification “implies what God *does for us* through his Son;

⁷² Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1994), 125.

⁷³ Wesley encountered this teaching first from Count Zinzendorf, and then heard the testimony from multiple individuals who recounted experiences similar to Wesley’s, and affirming the lapse of time between their moment of justification and their complete assurance. Wesley, Heitzenrater, and Ward, *Journal and Diaries I*, 261–91.

⁷⁴ Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, 125.

⁷⁵ Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, *John Wesley’s Sermons*, 111.

[sanctification] is what he *works in us* by his Spirit.”⁷⁶ Years later, when Wesley reflected on this part of his journey, he had a different perspective. Collins notes, “The retrospective in 1774 reveals that Wesley’s spiritual condition at the beginning of 1738 was not as ‘dark’ or as ‘despairing’ as he had initially supposed. Wesley had, after all, a measure of both faith and grace. But was it sanctifying grace and faith that he had?”⁷⁷

Wesley’s struggle with faith, assurance, justification, and sanctification shows a man of observation, not only of his own experiences, but others as well. He took in what he read from across the world as well as across the centuries, and then in prayer, study, and community, worked out his faith in fear and trembling. Wesley then took this experience and used it to lead others. Wesleyan scholar Albert Outler describes Wesley as a “*folk-theologian*” who was also a “creative theologian practically involved in the application of his doctrine in the renewal of the church.” Outler admits that none of Wesley’s views were original, rather, “it is their sum and balance that is unique, that gives him a distinctive theological stance.”⁷⁸ Wesley used what he learned from his own experience as he led the people called Methodists.

The People

The world of the eighteenth century was on the edge of change. Both France and the American colonies fought revolutions, at the same time the industrial revolution was

⁷⁶ Wesley, Outler, and Heitzenrater, 114.

⁷⁷ Collins, *A Real Christian*, 55.

⁷⁸ Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), 119.

about to rattle the world. It was the age of the factory,⁷⁹ and those who owned them enjoyed a growing economy. However, as Michael Henderson observes, “Beneath the belching smokestacks of their factories and in the smoky shadows of their grimy mills a vast horde of impoverished workers eked out a miserable living.”⁸⁰ The culture robbed children of their childhood and their education, as many went to work in the mines, the mills, or the brickyard as young as four or five years old.⁸¹ The most pervasive of the vices was alcoholism, something that affected the whole family, “This epidemic of drunkenness eroded what little decency was left among the working people, leaving them adrift in hopeless despair.”⁸² It is these people who influenced Wesley next, and it is Wesley who would bring them hope, and introduce them to paradise.

In March 1739, Wesley accepted an invitation from George Whitfield to join him in Bristol. Whitefield had begun preaching to the mining community of Kingswood located just northeast of Bristol. Tomkins describes the community as “underclass with the worst living conditions in Briton, abhorred by locals as animals and beyond the pale of the established Church.”⁸³ Wesley writes, “Sat. 31. In the evening I reached Bristol and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this *strange way* of preaching in the fields, of which he set an example on Sunday...I should have thought the

⁷⁹ “During the industrial revolution, Europe experienced a shift from traditional, labor-intensive economy based on agriculture...to a more capital-intensive economy based on manufacturing by machines...and industrial factories.” William J. Duiker and Jackson J. Spielvogel, *World History*, 3rd ed (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2001), 589.

⁸⁰ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*, (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 2016), 7.

⁸¹ Henderson, 9.

⁸² Henderson, 9.

⁸³ Tomkins, *John Wesley*, 68.

saving of souls *almost a sin* if it had not been done *in a church*.”⁸⁴ By the simple fact of necessity, Wesley relented and took up his position as field preacher. Heitzenrater stipulates, “Contrary to some impressions, most of the occasions when persons ‘received’ remission of sins or were ‘comforted’ were those small group meetings, not the large open-air preaching services.”⁸⁵

Wesley’s schedule was filled as he ministered throughout Bristol, from the poor houses to the societies, to field preaching.⁸⁶ Wesley was now coming into his own, finding his way both as a man and a preacher. Collins observes, “Field preaching without Aldersgate, and its larger theological context, would have been empty, a proclamation of precept, rule and resolution, the confounding of sanctification with justification; Aldersgate without field preaching, on the other hand, would have been pointless, even self-indulgent.”⁸⁷ Bristol gave Wesley the opportunity to put into practice what he had himself been learning as he began organizing the movement into a people called Methodists. Wesley adjusted and learned along the way, taking every opportunity afforded him and addressing every situation that arose.

In a letter to Nathanael Price on December 6, 1739, Wesley writes of the Kingswood community, “Few persons have lived long in the west of England, who have not heard of the colliers of Kingswood: A people famous from the beginning hitherto, for neither fearing God, nor regarding man; so ignorant of the things of God, that they could

⁸⁴ Wesley, Heitzenrater, and Ward, *Journal and Diaries II*, 46.

⁸⁵ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 100.

⁸⁶ See Wesley’s journal entries for April 2-May 8, 1739 Wesley, Heitzenrater, and Ward, *Journal and Diaries II*, 46–56.

⁸⁷ Collins, *A Real Christian*, 70.

only be compared to the beasts that perish; and therefore utterly without desire of instruction, as well as without the means of it.”⁸⁸ Wesley looked at these people and had compassion. Henderson states, “Other contemporary reformers looked upon these decadent neighborhoods and threw up their hands in despair. Wesley looked at the same miserable conditions and saw a situation which was ripe for evangelism.”⁸⁹ But Wesley was not only concerned for their souls, he also understood the importance of attending to their minds and bodies too. John Tyson intimates that Wesley’s approach to Christianity was to “make a real difference in the lives of people who live in the real world. To use a popular expression, this is not merely to go about trying to ‘save souls,’ as though people’s bodies did not matter.”⁹⁰ The Methodist established practical spaces⁹¹ that provided schooling, a medical clinic, a worship center, and lodging for those in need.

In a letter dated December 6, 1739, Wesley explains the work that had been accomplished among the mining families in Kingswood,

Kingswood does not now, as a year ago, resound with cursing and blasphemy. It is no longer the seat of drunkenness, uncleanness, and all idle diversions that lead thereto. It is no longer filled with wars and fighting, with clamor and bitterness, with strife and envying. Peace and love are now there: The people in general are become mild, gentle, and easy to be entreated.⁹²

⁸⁸ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Letters*, Third, vol. Volume 13 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 156.

⁸⁹ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 18.

⁹⁰ John R. Tyson, *The Way of the Wesleys: A Short Introduction* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 2014), 141.

⁹¹ Most notably The New Room of Bristol, built in 1739; The Foundary of London, built in 1740; and The Orphan-House of Newcastle, built in 1742.

⁹² Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Letters*, Volume 13:156.

Wesley also discussed the planned school, “That their children also might know the things that make for their peace, it was proposed, some months since, to build a school in Kingswood.” The school would include a large room for teaching, with four small rooms “for the schoolmasters (and hereafter, if it should please God, some poor children) to lodge in it.”⁹³ Wesley duplicated this school both in the London and Newcastle buildings.

Wesley was concerned about the mind and the body. Newton Malony writes, “Wesley became a leader in promoting both emotional and physical healing in Great Britain.” In 1747 Wesley wrote the book, *Primitive Physick: Or an easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases*. Malony explains, “In this book he advocated a number of surprisingly modern practices for healthy living and sickness prevention along with recommending a variety of simple cures for over 250 illnesses.”⁹⁴

Wesley’s concern did not stop with book writing. Wesley asked for volunteers to call on those members who were ill. He reports that many showed up the next morning, and from them he chose 64 individuals “whom I judged to be of the most tender, loving spirit.” Wesley divided the town into 23 areas and assigned two individuals to each area. He instructed them to visit every sick person three times a week, “To inquire into the state of their souls, and to advise them as occasion may require. To inquire into their disorders and procure advice for them. To relieve them if they are in want. To do anything for them, which he (or she) can do.”⁹⁵ Wesley also instructed each center to

⁹³ Wesley, Volume 13:157.

⁹⁴ H. Newton Malony, *The Amazing John Wesley: An Unusual Look at an Uncommon Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 61.

⁹⁵ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Addresses, Essays, and Letters*, Third, vol. Volume 8 (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book Room, 1872), 256.

keep a supply of medicine in stock for treating the sick.⁹⁶ These efforts did not ease Wesley of his burden, “but I was still in pain for many of the poor that were sick; there was so great expense, and so little profit.” He decided to personally treat those who were dealing with chronic illness, “I gave notice of this to the society; telling them, that all who were ill of chronical distempers might, if they pleased, come to me at such a time, and I would give them the best advice I could, and the best medicines I had.”⁹⁷ Every Friday Wesley held clinic hours, and welcomed anyone who came. He reported that in the first five months medicines were given to above five hundred persons and 71 of those who took the medication and followed the prescribed regimen “were entirely cured of distempers long thought to be incurable.”⁹⁸

Wesley was also concerned about the poor, elderly women he had taken notice of. “I had for some years observed many who, although not sick, were not able to provide for themselves, and had none who took care to provide for them: These were chiefly feeble, aged widows.” Wesley talked with the society, and it was decided that the most efficient way to address the problem was to provide a house for them to live in. “In this (commonly called The Poor House) we have now nine widows, one blind woman, two poor children, two upper-servants, a maid and a man.”⁹⁹

Just like the church of the first centuries, Wesley understood that love of God and love of neighbor was lived out, not simply talked about. Wesley also understood that love

⁹⁶ “Wesley asked the preachers to keep ‘a little stock of medicines’ at the preaching-houses in London, Bristol, and Newcastle, to support the remedies prescribed in Wesley’s recently published *Collection of Receipts*.” Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 154.

⁹⁷ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Addresses, Essays, and Letters*, Volume 8:263–64.

⁹⁸ Wesley, Volume 8:263–65.

⁹⁹ Wesley, Volume 8:265.

was wholistic, it cared for the mind and the body as well as the soul. Finally, Wesley understood that community was essential for lasting change. He did not simply meet the needs of the individual; he organized the movement into a people called Methodists.

The Organization

On May 9, 1739, Wesley reports that they took possession of a piece of land outside Bristol in order to build a place large enough to hold the societies and their activities.¹⁰⁰ The following November Wesley purchased property in London for their societies and activities.¹⁰¹ In general, England's religious societies "had been bold to speak out against injustice and immorality, but they had no effective means of addressing those problems directly."¹⁰² Wesley wanted to build something that would make an impact and put words into practice. It was this passion that led to the organization of the United Societies.

In his essay *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies* Wesley describes their beginning,

In the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to me in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did two or three more the next day) that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come; which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work, I appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday, in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them, (for their number increased daily,) I gave those advices, from time to time, which I judged most needful for them; and we always concluded our meeting with prayer suited

¹⁰⁰ Wesley, Heitzenrater, and Ward, *Journal and Diaries II*, 56.

¹⁰¹ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Addresses, Essays, and Letters*, Volume 8:37.

¹⁰² Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 63.

to their several necessities. This was the rise of the United Society, first in London, and then in other places.¹⁰³

Wesley defined the United Society as a group of individuals who were seeking godliness, united in prayer, reading Scriptures together, and watching “over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation”¹⁰⁴

The class meeting was added next, something Henderson claims was “the primary means of bringing millions of England’s most desperate people into the liberating discipline of the Christian faith.”¹⁰⁵ The class meeting addressed the need to connect with each member of the society. At first each leader was assigned 11 members to visit weekly.¹⁰⁶ It didn’t take long for the leaders to be overwhelmed by this task; it was also evident that face-to face-meetings would have greater benefit, “it was agreed, that those of each class should meet all together. And by this means, a more full inquiry was made into the behaviour of every person...And after an hour or two spent in this labour of love, they concluded with prayer and thanksgiving”¹⁰⁷

In order to ensure the society was not infected with troublesome individuals Wesley developed a monitoring system, “I found it required still greater care to separate the precious from the vile. In order to accomplish this, I determined, at least once in three months, to talk with every member myself, and to inquire at their own mouths, as well as of their Leaders and neighbours, whether they grew in grace and in the knowledge of our

¹⁰³ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Addresses, Essays, and Letters*, Volume 8:269.

¹⁰⁴ Wesley, Volume 8:269.

¹⁰⁵ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 17.

¹⁰⁶ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Addresses, Essays, and Letters*, Volume 8:252–53.

¹⁰⁷ Wesley, Volume 8:253–54.

Lord Jesus Christ.” After meeting with each individual Wesley would provide them with a ticket, “To each of those of whose seriousness and good conversation I found no reason to doubt, I gave a testimony under my own hand, by writing their name on a ticket prepared for that purpose.”¹⁰⁸ Henderson explains the purpose,

The focus is not on agreement with the leaders’ doctrine or even on moral perfection, but on the willingness to cooperate with the group guidelines for participation. Members of the Society could be in disagreement with the leadership and also be struggling with serious moral problems and still be welcome participants. But, they could not remain in the Society if their behavior threatened the cohesion of the group or blocked its normal function.¹⁰⁹

The ticket was good for three months and provided the bearer with a type of credentials and distinguished who were members of the society.”¹¹⁰

As individuals were transformed through their relationship with Christ, they needed a deeper level of community. Wesley recognized the need for groups that allowed for more vulnerable spaces. “These wanted some means of closer union; they wanted to pour out their hearts without reserve, particularly with regard to the sin which did still easily beset them, and the temptations which were most apt to prevail over them.”

Wesley divided them into small *bands*, “Putting the married or single men, and married or single women, together.” The rules for the group were simple. They were to meet at least once a week, pray for one another, be punctual, begin with a song or a prayer, to speak “freely and plainly, the true state of our soul, with the faults we have committed in

¹⁰⁸ Wesley, Volume 8:256.

¹⁰⁹ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 68.

¹¹⁰ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Addresses, Essays, and Letters*, Volume 8:257.

thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting.”¹¹¹ The basic organization of the *People Called Methodists* was now in place.

Heitzenrater argues, “The Wesleyan heritage takes its vital energy from the dynamic imagery of the spiritual pilgrimage. It is the story of a people struggling together to understand God and themselves as they move from birth to death, from new birth to eternal life, from fear to joy, from doubt to confidence.”¹¹² Wesley understood the need to bring the individual experience into a community setting and to focus on all of God’s creation¹¹³

Wesley worked to create a community that enabled individual transformation, that established both vertical and horizontal relationships. In short, the Methodist were a people who knew and were known, where love was transforming minds, making forgiveness possible, and weaving “a community of disparate people into the tapestry of God’s family.”¹¹⁴

Conclusion

Both the church of Rome and the Methodist movement reacted to the needs of the people within the environment and culture of their time. Both focused on individual spiritual formation while understanding that the community of believers was the place of transformation. They focused on loving God and neighbor in word as well as deed, and

¹¹¹ Wesley, Volume 8:258.

¹¹² Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 321.

¹¹³ Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision*, Kindle Locations 406-407.

¹¹⁴ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 3.

their practices were the evidence of that love. Neither were concerned about numbers; instead, both established mechanisms of accountability that slowed the process down. Rather than focusing on numbers, both focused on caring for the sick, the elderly, the widow, the orphan the poor. Both the church of Rome and the Methodist movement recognized the need to address the physical as well as spiritual needs of the individual. In the twenty-first century United States culture where anxiety and loneliness are so prevalent, what are the elements needed to address the whole person? The next chapter will explore this question.

CHAPTER 4:
THE WONDERFULLY CREATED BRAIN

Overview

This paper began with the initial statement, “Our lives will be abundant, joyful, and peaceful only to the degree that we are engaged, known, and understood by one another,”¹ and was combined with the problem, “American culture is one of isolation, anxiety, and division; a problem that is more obvious every year.” This led to the question, “How can the church be a community so that lonely and anxious people can be seen, known, and belong?” From a theological perspective it was argued that the church is the garden-temple where all the faithful saints united with Christ, and through the Holy Spirit join God to expand the garden-temple into the broken world and bring shalom to all who enter in.² From an historical point of view, it was suggested that the church was a community of believers who focused on loving God and loving neighbor. They did this by reacting to the needs of the people in their culture through a community of transformation that focused on spiritual formation.³

This chapter will explore the field of neuroscience and psychology in order to understand how God has created the human brain to function best in loving relationships. To make this claim this chapter will look at the structure of the brain, the way memory

¹ Thompson, iii.

² See chapter 2

³ See chapter 3

works, the effect of emotions; and finally, it will explore how the human brain is an open circuit that needs others to complete it.

The Brain

The brain is a complex set of systems; according to the “triune brain” scientific model the brain is built in three sections, from bottom up.⁴ The brain is a network of interconnected parts, each with a specialized purpose.⁵ When each part is doing its job and working with the other systems, it is integrated, and anxiety is reduced.⁶

The Triune Brain

The oldest part of our brain, sometimes called the *reptilian brain*, comprises basic survival skills and is always active. This part of our brain begins developing in utero and handles the very basic needs of human life.⁷ If the reptilian brain ceases to function, the body ceases to function. Sitting on top of the reptilian brain is the limbic brain, emotion central, which begins to develop soon after birth. “It is the seat of the emotions, the

⁴ Gretchen Reevy, Yvette Malamud Ozer, and Yuri Ito, *Encyclopedia of Emotion* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2010), 571.

⁵ Eric R. Kandel, *In Search of Memory: The Emergence of a New Science of Mind* (New York, nY: Norton, 2007), 123.

⁶ Daniel Siegal argues, “Healthy living involves the integration of energy and information within the nervous system and between people. Integration is the organizing principle that links the ways energy and information flow is shared (relationships), is shaped (the mechanisms of the embodied nervous system or, termed simply, the brain), and is regulated (the mind).” Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, 2nd ed (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2012), 8.

⁷ Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love* (New York, NY: Random House, 2000), 22.

monitor of danger, the judge of what is pleasurable or scary, the arbiter of what is or is not important for survival purposes. It is also a central command post for coping with the challenges of living within our complex social networks.”⁸ Within the limbic brain is the amygdala, which arouses our fight, flight, or freeze response to perceived danger. The amygdala produces the emotions of anger, fear, and pleasure, or the memories of anger, fear, or pleasure.⁹

At the very top of the brain is the neocortex. “Speaking, writing, planning, and reasoning all originate in the neocortex. As does the experience of our senses, what we know as awareness, and our conscious motor control, what we know as will.”¹⁰ The front part of the neocortex, located right behind the forehead, is the prefrontal cortex. It receives information from the other areas of the brain, deciphers it, and then sends it throughout the body.

The will, located in the neocortex, allows us to think, reason, and choose.¹¹ Our emotions, located in the limbic system, operates in a different way. Within the limbic brain our emotions cannot be *willed* to behave in any certain way, “Emotions are things that happen to us rather than things we will to occur...we have little direct control over

⁸ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 56.

⁹ John Medina, *Brain Rules: 12 Principles for Surviving and Thriving at Work, Home, and School*. (Seattle, WA: Pear Press Perseus Distribution, 2010), 40–41.

¹⁰ Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 27.

¹¹ “A person cannot direct his emotional life in the way he bids his motor system to reach for a cup. He cannot will himself to want the right thing, or to love the right person, or to be happy after a disappointment, or even to be happy in happy times.” Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, 33.

our emotional reactions.”¹² Dealing with emotions will take a more nuanced approach than simply deciding to change them, or as so often happens, ignore them.

The Hemispheres

The brain has a right and a left hemisphere. The brain develops from the bottom up, and then from right to left. The right hemisphere begins developing in the womb and sustains a growth spurt until the age of two. The right hemisphere is nonverbal, emotional and instinctual, it is tactile, visual and spatial. The right hemisphere “allows us to recognize faces and read facial expressions, and it connects us to other people.”¹³ The right brain is the “relational” brain, processing relational information quickly.¹⁴ The left hemisphere begins its growth spurt at the age of two and is dominated by the right hemisphere until the age of three.¹⁵ It carries the ability to talk and to think logically and sequentially, the left hemisphere “analyzes problems using conscious processing.”¹⁶ While the right brain is focused on the emotional, relational pieces, the left brain is focused on the verbal, logical pieces.¹⁷

¹² Joseph E. LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 19.

¹³ Norman Doidge, *The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 226; Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 44.

¹⁴ “This right-sided master system impacts our emotions and relationships faster than we have time to think about consciously. From bottom to top, the right brain is designed to seek, build, and thrive on joyful relationships.” Marcus Warner and E. James Wilder, *Rare Leadership: 4 Uncommon Habits for Increasing Trust, Joy, and Engagement in the People You Lead* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016), 65–66.

¹⁵ Doidge, *The Brain That Changes Itself*, 226.

¹⁶ Doidge, 226.

¹⁷ James Iaccino writes that some have noted that the left brain “is more representative of the logical, rational type of thinking exercised in Western societies.” While the right brain “is more applicable

The bottom up, right to left brain functions best when all parts are integrated and working together. In his groundbreaking book *The Developing Mind*, Dr. Daniel Siegel states, “The brain, as a whole, functions as an interconnected and integrating system of subsystems.”¹⁸ An integrated mind is one that is differentiated and unified. Each portion of the brain must function as it was designed, doing what it was designed to do. An integrated mind is one in which each part is doing its part and adding to the whole, not one in which some parts are working harder in order to compensate for the areas that are not functioning correctly.¹⁹ Finally, an integrated mind allows the person to be flexible and adaptive, allowing the individual to control how they react in any given situation.²⁰

The sections of the triune brain each have a different task. The neocortex is the only section that can intentionally direct behavior. The reptilian and limbic sections play a large role in our daily well-being and our ability to interact socially, and yet they cannot be “willed” to act in any certain way. These three brains with two hemispheres work best when they are integrated and working together, if they cannot be willed, how can the mind be integrated? In order to begin to understand that it is necessary to look at how memory works.

to the intuitive, mystical thinking of cultures and religions in the East.” Marco Iacoboni, “Face to Face: The Neural Basis of Social Mirroring and Empathy,” *Psychiatric Annals* 37, no. 4 (April 1, 2007): 29, <https://doi.org/10.3928/00485713-20070401-05>.

¹⁸ Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 19.

¹⁹ Dr. Siegel stipulates, “It’s crucial to keep in mind that integration is not becoming blended or ‘all one,’ but rather involves the maintenance of differences while facilitating connection.” Siegel, 19.

²⁰ Dr. Leaf explains, “An important property of these brain networks is called anti-correlation, which means we switch back and forth between the various networks. For example, when we have flexible and creative thinking, we are able to shift between thoughts and capture and control thoughts.” Dr. Caroline Leaf, *Switch On Your Brain* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 82.

Memory

The Hebbian Principle

The *Hebbian principle* states that “neurons that fire together, wire together,”²¹ and is foundational to the function of memory.²² Dr. Thompson states, “When we ‘remember’ something, we are firing neurons that have been fired before... The more we activate the neurons that correlate with a particular experience, the more likely we will be to ‘recall’ or enact that same experience.”²³ When a person does, sees, or experiences something, he or she is *encoding* a neural pathway in her or his brain, thus programing a memory. If the activity is done one time, it will have an unstable pathway, but every time an activity or experience is repeated, the pathway is strengthened.²⁴

As the activities and experiences are recalled, they are retrieved from different parts of the brain.²⁵ The two hemispheres record and retrieve memory in different ways with the left recording logical, verbal, and factual events and the right brain recording

²¹ See original Hebb explanation in the section titled Mode of Perceptual Integration: the Cell-Assembly D. O Hebb, *The Organization of Behavior: A Neuropsychological Theory*, 2012, 69–70.

²² Mary B. Howes and Geoffrey O’Shea, *Human Memory: A Constructivist View* (London; Waltham, MA; San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2014), 4.

²³ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 66.

²⁴ See Kandel’s exploration of how Pavlov’s classical conditioning protocols influenced his biological protocols “to determine whether different patterns of stimuli” would result in “different forms of synaptic plasticity.” His experiments showed that synaptic strength is not fixed, “it can be altered in different ways by different patterns of activity.” See chapters 10 and 11 of *In Search of Memory for further study*. Kandel, *In Search of Memory*, 150, 171.

²⁵ Antonio R. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness*, 1st ed (New York, NY: Harcourt Brace, 1999), 220.

abstract, intuitive, emotional memories.²⁶ There is not one specific area of the brain where memories are stored, and there is not one method for recalling those memories.

Explicit/Implicit Memory

One type of memory is *explicit* memory. This kind of memory is what is generally thought of as *remembering*. There are two types of explicit memory, factual and autobiographical. Factual memory helps you remember your name, phone number, and the city you were born in. Autobiographical memory “occurs when you activate conscious awareness of something you experienced in the past, such as what you ate for breakfast this morning or the trip you took to the Grand Canyon last summer.”²⁷ Activating explicit memory takes a conscious effort to “remember.”

A second type of memory is *implicit* memory. Implicit memory is *invisible* memory,²⁸ Sven Å. Christianson and Elisabeth Engelberg explain, “Implicit memory consists of learned behaviors and responses, does not operate at a conscious level, and is expressed through behaviors and actions.”²⁹ Unlike explicit memory, implicit memory is present at birth, “The structures generating explicit memories are immature at birth, and

²⁶ James F. Iaccino, *Left Brain--Right Brain Differences: Inquiries, Evidence, and New Approaches* (Hillsdale, NJ: L. Erlbaum Associates, 1993), 29–32.

²⁷ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 73.

²⁸ Karl Lehman, *Outsmarting Yourself: Catching Your Past Invading the Present and What to Do about It* (Libertyville, IL: This is JOY! Books, 2014), 18.

²⁹ Nobuo Ohta, Amy Siegenthaler, and Bob Uttl, *Memory and Emotion: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub, 2008), 73.

they require years of neurodevelopment to become fully functional. Implicit memory needs no warm-up; it is operational before a baby is born.”³⁰

Malleable Memories

Memory is not something that happens in the past, it is not something that is “stored up.” Rather, memory occurs when the neurological patterns are activated in the present, “Explicit memories, regardless of their emotional implications, are not carbon copies of the experiences that created them. They are reconstructions at the time of recall, and the state of the brain at the time of recall can influence the way in which the withdrawn memory is remembered.”³¹ This means that when you recall a moment from your past, the current circumstances will shape how those neurological pathways are fired. For example, Hannah and her cousins prepared and sang a hymn for their grandfather’s memorial service. Another cousin performed a solo of the hymn *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*. Hannah loved this second hymn so much that as the neural pathways fired, they merged the two events into one, so that she remembered all the cousins singing the hymn *Great Is Thy Faithfulness*. For many years whenever Hannah would sing or hear this hymn she would “remember” singing *Great Is Thy Faithfulness* with her cousins at her grandfather’s memorial service. Many years later Hannah found a program from her grandfather’s service and was shocked to discover that she had not actually sung *Great Is Thy Faithfulness* with her cousins. The fact that our memories are not “concrete”

³⁰ Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 113.

³¹ LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, 210.

can be unsettling; the good news is that while you can't change the past, you can change your memory of it and experience healing in the present.

Unprocessed Memory

“Our memory processes serve us best when we can easily recall the joyful events of our lives and dilute the emotional impact of traumatic events and disappointments. But sometimes, horrific memories persist and damage people’s lives.”³² When we experience any type of an unresolved remarkable event, from a seemingly benign event such as a moment of embarrassment as a young child, to life changing traumatic event such as a violent assault, implicit memory is encoded. This happens when our mind and body are unable to process the event so that our conscious mind does not record the event as autobiographical. Dr. Van der Kolk explains, “Traumatic memories are fundamentally different from the stories we tell about the past. They are dissociated: The different sensations that entered the brain at the time of the trauma are not properly assembled into a story, a piece of autobiography.”³³ We are unaware of these invisible, *unprocessed* memories; however, when an event happens later on that “re-fires” these same neurons, the unprocessed memory will come forward, but it will be invisible to our conscious mind. Dr. Karl Lehman explains, “When something in the present triggers a traumatic memory, the unresolved content from the trauma, such as the distorted beliefs and emotions associated with the original painful experience, will come forward as ‘invisible’

³² Kandel, *In Search of Memory*, 10.

³³ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 194.

implicit memory *that feels true and valid* in the present.”³⁴ Since it is *invisible*, we will not be aware that the memory is affecting our present actions. For example, you may have grown up in a home with a parent who was easily upset. One weekend while playing with your friends you accidentally break a window. This accident results in a big family blow up, the first thing you feel is fear as you listen to the outburst from your parent; next you feel anger at the outburst, and finally embarrassment as your friends witness the outburst. Because this is an unresolved, unprocessed event, your mind encodes the memory of those emotions in your implicit memory. Fifteen years later you and your new spouse are settling into life together, when one day you accidentally break the mirror in the bathroom. Without knowing why, you lash out at your spouse as you are overcome with fear, anger, and embarrassment. These emotions feel very true, very real, and very present; you are oblivious to the implicit memory firing in your brain. The good news is that with the help of a therapist, friend, or pastor, who responds with empathy and comfort you can change the memory of the feeling. Dr Thompson explains, “You will not have changed the facts of your past, but you will change your memory of it. You will also change your future because now that you have experienced a different reaction...you can anticipate a different response.”³⁵

Memories are previously fired neural pathways firing again, in the present. They are affected by—and they affect—our behavior in the present. The emotions attached to these memories will inform the way an individual interacts with God and others. The ability to pay attention to our memories, with the help of others, enables the processing of

³⁴ Lehman, *Outsmarting Yourself*, 20.

³⁵ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 78.

those emotions so that the mind becomes more integrated, allowing individuals to live with less anxiety and improved relationships. Because emotions play such a big role in memories, this chapter will now focus on emotions.

Emotions

Ready, Set, Emotions!

What are they? Depending on what scientific lens one looks through, the definition of emotions can range broadly. What we can say for certain is that emotions are complex and complicated. Mark Williams states, “On one important level, our emotions are vital messengers. They evolved as signals to help us meet our basic needs for self-preservation and safety and to survive individually and as a species.”³⁶ Dr. Damasio posits, “The term *emotion* should be rightfully used to designate a collection of responses triggered from parts of the brain to the body, and from parts of the brain to other parts of the brain, using both neural and humoral routes.”³⁷ Dr. Siegel explains, “Emotion in all its myriad manifestations reveals the interplay of the internal and the interpersonal.”³⁸ Emotions communicate and prepare our bodies to take action when needed, action that is intended to keep us alive, but sometimes they work against us. Dr. LeDoux teaches,

³⁶ J. Mark G. Williams, John D. Teasdale, Zindel V. Segal, and Jon Kabat-Zinn., *The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2007), 32.

³⁷ Antonio R Damasio, “Emotion in the Perspective of an Integrated Nervous System | Published on the World Wide Web on 27 January 1998.1,” *Brain Research Reviews* 26, no. 2–3 (May 1998): 84, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0165-0173\(97\)00064-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0165-0173(97)00064-7).

³⁸ Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 149.

Our emotions can also get us into trouble. When fear becomes anxiety, desire gives way to greed, or annoyance turns to anger, anger to hatred, friendship to envy, love to obsession, or pleasure to addiction, our emotions start working against us. Mental health is maintained by emotional hygiene, and mental problems, to a large extent, reflect a breakdown of emotional order. Emotions can have both useful and pathological consequences.³⁹

Emotions prepare the individual to act when needed, but they can also cause problems when not processed properly.

The Emotional/Social Processing System

The system in our brain that handles emotions and social interactions is one of the most complex systems in our brain. While this system is complex, it does have an organizational structure. Just like the development of our brain, the emotional system moves from bottom to top, and then right to left. Dr. Lehman explains, “this emotional/social processing system is composed of many different parts, such as the basal ganglia, the thalamus, the amygdala, the cingulate cortex, the right-sided prefrontal cortex, and the left sided prefrontal cortex.”⁴⁰ As discussed earlier, what happens in the lower parts of our brains is involuntary, we cannot force them to behave in a certain way. The emotional process begins in the basal ganglia/thalamus (reptile brain) and then moves to the amygdala (limbic brain), it is unconscious and involuntary. It is not until it moves to the cingulate cortex and prefrontal cortex (neocortex brain) that we are able to have a conscious and voluntary response.⁴¹

³⁹ LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain*, 19–20.

⁴⁰ Karl Lehman, “Brain Science, Emotional Trauma, and The God Who Is With Us ~ Part II: The Processing Pathway for Painful Experiences and the Definition of Psychological Trauma” (K.D. Lehman, M.D., 2011), 6, http://www.kclehman.com/index.php?view=new_BrainScienceSeminarDocuments2007-2008.

⁴¹ Lehman, 7.

Emotions keep us alive and keep us connected. The reptilian brain is always on, always scanning the landscape, both internally and externally.⁴² While sleeping at night it scans for noises that are out of the ordinary⁴³ so that when the building fire alarm sounds, the reptilian brain sends signals to the amygdala, the emotion of fear is triggered, and the individual jumps out of bed ready to run out of the building. Before the individual is consciously aware of the alarm sounding, the brain has already prepared the rest of the body to respond.⁴⁴ Fortunately the emotional process does not stop there. As it moves into the right prefrontal cortex the individual is able to calm the brain down and, “discern ‘How do I handle this situation? How can I navigate this situation *in a way that I will be satisfied with after it’s over?*’”⁴⁵ The individual is now able to investigate if there is a fire or if it is a false alarm and can go back to bed. (It also enables the person to discern the need for clothing before running onto the street.) Once the correct action has been discerned and taken, the logical left prefrontal cortex (which “helps us interpret the meaning of our experiences”⁴⁶) is then able to make sense out of the experience and bring it to a resolution. When emotions are not able to integrate and the brain does not fully

⁴² Leaf, *Switch On Your Brain*, 80–81.

⁴³ Ordinary sounds would be those sounds your brain has heard over and over, creating a solid neural pathways of encoded memory. Unexpected sounds are those without a well-defined neural pathways.

⁴⁴ “This initial orienting response activates a cognitive alerting mechanism of ‘Pay attention now!’ that does not require conscious awareness and does not initially have a positive or negative tone. Very rapidly (within microseconds), the brain processes the representations of the body and the external world generated with this initial orienting process. As this occurs, processes that can be called ‘elaborative appraisal’ and ‘arousal’ begin and direct the flow of energy through the system.” Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 149.

⁴⁵ Lehman, “Brain Science, Emotional Trauma, and The God Who Is With Us ~ Part II: The Processing Pathway for Painful Experiences and the Definition of Psychological Trauma,” 9.

⁴⁶ Lehman, 9.

process the experience from bottom to top and left to right, they can become unresolved remarkable experiences, hidden within implicit memory. Emotions move us to action. They start as unconscious, involuntary messages at the base of our brain, and quickly process from the bottom to the top, from the right to the left, where they become conscious and voluntary, and hopefully properly processed and integrated.

Emotions keep us alive and moving, but they can get us into trouble and keep us stuck when not processed properly. In 2 Corinthians 10:5 Paul says, “we take every thought captive to obey Christ.” How does one take every thought captive when some of them are invisible? Neuroscientist Dr. Andrew Newberg tells us, “Our frontal lobes provide us with a logical concept of a rational, deliberate, and loving God, while our limbic system creates an emotionally meaningful experience of God. If either part of the brain malfunctions, unusual thoughts and perceptions can occur.”⁴⁷ The human brain is a complicated, complex systems, built from bottom to top and right to left. It works best when all parts are doing their job and communicating well with other parts. When it is not working well, we are left with anxiety, loneliness, and broken social systems. But Dr. Newberg has good news:

The first step begins with a desire—the *conscious* wish to change. Once that decision is made, you must train yourself to remain focused on your goal...Focused attention begins to build new neuronal circuits, that once established, will automatically activate those parts of the brain that involve motivational activity. And the more that activity is repeated the stronger those neural circuits become.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Andrew B Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books Trade Paperbacks, 2010), 49.

⁴⁸ Newberg and Waldman, 33.

This is the Hebbian principle at work. By training our conscious mind to focus on the right things, our unconscious mind is able to be transformed, and our whole mind integrated. The next step is to understand how attention, attachment, and attunement help to integrate the brain.

An Open Circuit

The Biology of Love

In their book, *A General Theory of Love*, Dr. Lewis and team explain that the human body is biologically wired for love. The body is an “open-loop” system that needs another human being to regulate it. The system of a second human sends “regulatory information” that, “can alter hormone levels, cardiovascular function, sleep rhythms, immune function, and more.”⁴⁹ We are not complete without another person, “Together they create a stable, properly balanced pair of organisms. And the two trade their complementary data through the open channel their limbic connection provides.”⁵⁰ According to Neurotheologian Dr. Jim Wilder, the way the brain is configured it cannot directly perceive its own identity, “I don’t know who I am other than the way you see and treat me.” He explains that the neurons in our brain are waiting for someone “to see in me what I don’t know is there.”⁵¹ When YHWH stated that it was not good for the human to be alone, it was because humanity was created to depend on one another for emotional,

⁴⁹ Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon. *A General Theory of Love*. 1st Vintage ed. (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2001), 85.

⁵⁰ Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, 85.

⁵¹ James Wilder, “The Life Model and Transformation” (Transform 18, San Antonio, TX, April 26, 2018), <https://joystream.lifemodelworks.org/the-life-model-and-transformation/>.

psychological, spiritual, and biological well-being. This open-circuit system that makes up every human is explained through attachment theory, focused attention, and relational attunement.

Attachment

Attachment, a secure emotional bond between two people, begins developing at birth between an infant and the primary caregiver, and establishes a pattern for future relationships for that infant. This bond is the primary task for the infant during the first year of life.⁵² British psychiatrist John Bowlby⁵³ describes attachment bonds as “falling in love” with another individual, maintaining the bond with that person, and then grieving over her or his loss.⁵⁴ Schore asserts, “Regulated interactions with a familiar, predictable primary caregiver create not only a sense of safety, but also a positively charged curiosity that fuels the burgeoning self’s exploration of novel socioemotional and physical environments.”⁵⁵

Following Dr. Bowlby’s work on attachment theory, Dr. Mary Ainsworth focused her work on discovering attachment patterns. In her landmark *Strange Situation* study Dr. Ainsworth and colleagues determined that attachment was best understood as a “secure

⁵² Allan N. Schore, *Affect Regulation & the Repair of the Self*, 1st ed, Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2003), 37.

⁵³ Bowlby is considered the father of Attachment Theory

⁵⁴ John Bowlby, *The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds*, Routledge Classics (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 155.

⁵⁵ Schore, *Affect Regulation & the Repair of the Self*, 40.

base relationship.”⁵⁶ The idea of the secure base relationship is that a well-attached infant will use the caregiver as a secure base from which to explore the world. The infant is able to freely move away from the caregiver, while maintaining an awareness of where they are, occasionally interacting with them from across the room, and returning to the caregiver from time to time to make contact and then continuing with their exploration. The importance of the secure base is explained by Matthew J. Dykas and Jude Cassidy, “Access to a secure base is developmentally significant because one of the infant’s core developmental tasks involves mastering the environment.”⁵⁷ The task of learning to explore and interact with the environment is an important developmental skill that prepares the infant to participate in their world as an adult.

Infant attachment experiences establish neuropathways that form a mental model for future use. The experience is recorded in implicit memory, the Hebbian principle⁵⁸ once again is at work, creating scripts that establish the way the infant will process her or his environment throughout their lifespan. Dykas and Cassidy illustrate this, “Secure base scripts can be viewed as the building blocks of the emergent experienced-based mental structures.” These structures become the mental model that “assist individuals in gathering and interpreting information related to an array of social agents.”⁵⁹ Each

⁵⁶ Mary D. Salter Ainsworth et al., *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation*, Classic Edition, Psychology Press and Routledge Classic Editions (New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), xii.

⁵⁷ Matthew J. Dykas and Jude Cassidy, “Attachment and the Processing of Social Information across the Life Span: Theory and Evidence.,” *Psychological Bulletin* 137, no. 1 (January 2011): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021367>.

⁵⁸ What fires together, wires together

⁵⁹ Dykas and Cassidy, “Attachment and the Processing of Social Information across the Life Span,” 19–20.

individual develops a secure-based script from her or his own personal experience of either secure or insecure attachment experiences. These scripts follow the person into adulthood and shape how the individual processes, interprets, and reacts to her or his social environment. “The attachment behavioral system enables the individual to respond flexibly to environmental changes while attempting to attain a goal.”⁶⁰ If the individual has a secure script she or he is able to move through an uncertain or unknown situation with greater flexibility; without a secure script it becomes more difficult and clouded by greater biases.⁶¹

The ability for an individual to navigate through the world is informed and influenced by her or his attachment experience as a child and based on her or his available attachment relationships at the time. In the absence of a secure base script and attachment relationships, individuals are left to find other methods of coping. There are two basic attachment patterns that emerge for adults without a secure base script. Attachment avoidance “reflects the extent to which a person distrusts relationship partners’ goodwill and strives to maintain behavioral independence and emotional distance from partners.” The second, attachment anxiety, “reflects the degree to which a person worries that a partner will not be available in times of need. The two dimensions can be measured with reliable and valid self-report scales.”⁶² Avoidant adults tend to rely

⁶⁰ Jude Cassidy and Phillip R. Shaver, eds., *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research, and Clinical Applications*, Third edition (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2016), 5.

⁶¹ Dykas and Cassidy, “Attachment and the Processing of Social Information across the Life Span,” 23.

⁶² Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver, “Attachment Theory and Emotions in Close Relationships: Exploring the Attachment-Related Dynamics of Emotional Reactions to Relational Events.,” *Personal Relationships* 12, no. 2 (June 2005): 150.

on themselves rather than seeking support, while anxious adults tend to exaggerate their fears and anxieties and present themselves as vulnerable and needy.⁶³ For these individuals, their insecure scripts make it very difficult to process and integrate their worlds.

Doctors Warner and Wilder connect attachment to joy.⁶⁴ They explain, “The attachment center is all about relationships. Its greatest pleasure is joyful attachment. Its greatest pain is relational loss.”⁶⁵ Dr. Lehman states, “When our attachment/bonds are joy based, we want to be near people we are near to.” He suggests that we experience intense joy when we see the people we are securely attached to.⁶⁶ In his seminar *Attachment Gone Right*, Dr. Wilder teaches that Adam and Eve’s mistake was becoming attached to the wrong thing, finding joy in the wrong relationship.⁶⁷ Dr. Wilder explains, “[Attachment] determines what and who is personal to me. It also determines my personal reality.”⁶⁸ In his book *You are What You Love*, James K.A. Smith reflects, “To be human is to have a heart. You can’t not love. So the question isn’t whether you will love something as ultimate; the question is what you will love as ultimate. And you are

⁶³ Cassidy and Shaver, *Handbook of Attachment*, 513.

⁶⁴ “We are defining joy as the biological, psychological, and spiritual experience produced when you are in attuned relational connection with another person, and you can perceive from the expression on the person’s face that she is glad to be with you.” Lehman, “Brain Science, Emotional Trauma, and The God Who Is With Us ~ Part II: The Processing Pathway for Painful Experiences and the Definition of Psychological Trauma,” 32.

⁶⁵ Warner and Wilder, *Rare Leadership*, 66.

⁶⁶ Lehman, “Brain Science, Emotional Trauma, and The God Who Is With Us ~ Part II: The Processing Pathway for Painful Experiences and the Definition of Psychological Trauma,” 27.

⁶⁷ James Wilder. “Attachment Gone Right.” Transform 2019, Green Wood, CO, April 3-5, 2019. Accessed October 2, 2019. <https://joystream.lifemodelworks.org/attachment-gone-right/>.

⁶⁸ James E. Wilder, Anna Kang, John Loppnow, and Sungshim Loppnow. *Living From The Heart Jesus Gave You: 15th Anniversary Study Edition* (East Peoria, IL: Shepherd's House, Inc, 2016), 174.

what you love.”⁶⁹ Adam and Eve were created to be attached first and foremost to YHWH, and second to other humans. In choosing to partake of the forbidden fruit they changed their attachment. Again, Dr. Wilder states, “You are changed by who you love.”⁷⁰ Who we love makes a difference. When Adam and Eve changed their first love, they changed their reality. This changed how they knew and understood themselves and each other. When an individual is not securely attached to a healthy base their reality is out of balance, and they are not able to process their social world properly. Smith adds that we learn our loves and desires, and we realign our love and desires by imitation and practice. He states, “We learn to love not primarily by acquiring information about what we should love but rather through practices that form the habits of how we love.”⁷¹

A Case Study. Camille was the eighth child born in her family and spent much of her childhood alone. Her father was absent and abusive, her mother was emotionally unavailable and an alcoholic. She had her first sexual encounter at the age of eight, with another girl the same age. At school Camille often engaged in sexual activity with other individuals her age. She did not fit in with most of her peers at school and was often mocked and bullied. Sex and drugs were her coping mechanism. As a young adult Camille entered one volatile relationship after another. After years of debilitating panic attacks, she decided it was time to get help and reached out to Dr. MacDonald. Dr. MacDonald helped Camille create an internal safe space as a means to begin calming the panic attacks, and she also connected Camille with pastor Christine. Pastor Christine

⁶⁹ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 11.

⁷⁰ Wilder, “Attachment Gone Right.”

⁷¹ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 21.

began with imaginative prayer exercises, building on the internal safe space she had already created. In that safe space Camille invited Christ to come and sit with her, and she began learning to feel secure with Christ. To build on this experience she began to imagine YHWH sitting at a potter's wheel forming and shaping her (during this exercise Camille was working with a ball of clay in her hands), and then she imagined Christ holding her as a small child, loving and caring for her. Camille practiced this exercise regularly. She also began attending a small house church where the members of the community welcomed her and created a space where she felt welcome and secure (and most importantly, not judged). As Christ and her community became her secure base, she was able to move out and explore her world more and more.

In order to address the needs of anxious, lonely, or traumatized individuals, the church needs to have an understanding of how attachment behaviors affect the ability of those individuals to process and integrate the world. How can the church come alongside these individuals and help them discover a secure-base attachment? How can the church become a place where, as Smith suggests, love is imitated and practiced? As Dr. Wilder proposes, attachment to YHWH is the crucial element. Can the church be a place where people learn to be joyfully attached to God? Can it be a place where God becomes the most important secure base for them? Can interpersonal relationships within the church help to write new secure base scripts? For this to happen it is necessary to next look at attunement and attention.

Attunement

The ability to connect with another human being is foundational to humanity's existence. Dr. Lehman stipulates, "Our minds and spirits have been created to desire

relationship and to function best in relationship.”⁷² When two individuals are attuned to one another they are able to share their neurological, emotional, and spiritual resources.⁷³ Doctors Lewis, Amini, and Lannon state, “The timeworn mechanisms of emotion allow two human beings to receive the contents of each other’s minds. Emotion is the messenger of love; it is the vehicle that carries every signal from one brimming heart to another.”⁷⁴ The ability to connect emotionally with another human brain is called *attunement* and occurs when one person “feels felt” by another.⁷⁵ Dr. Lehman explains “you are successfully *receiving* my attunement if you *feel* seen, heard, and understood, if you *feel* that I am *with* you in your experience, and if you *feel* that I care about you and that I am glad to be with you.”⁷⁶

Human beings are biologically wired for attunement. In the mid 1990s, while studying the neural activity of monkeys, scientist discovered what has become known as the mirror neuron circuit.⁷⁷ Dr. Siegel describes, “Mirror neurons link perception and motor action directly and interact intimately with these related areas to create a functional circuit that can create behavioral imitation, affective and somatic resonance, and the attunement of intentional states.”⁷⁸ As person A interacts with person B their body

⁷² Lehman, *Outsmarting Yourself*, 109.

⁷³ Lehman, 110.

⁷⁴ Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 37.

⁷⁵ Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 94.

⁷⁶ Lehman, *Outsmarting Yourself*, 104.

⁷⁷ Giacomo Rizzolatti and Leonardo Fogassi, “The Mirror Mechanism: Recent Findings and Perspectives,” *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 369, no. 1644 (June 5, 2014): 20130420, <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2013.0420>.

⁷⁸ Siegel, *The Developing Mind*, 168.

language communicates how comfortable or anxious they are with the other. The mirror neurons set to work, making adjustments as needed.

When person A feels safe with person B they will relax, and if the relationship is a healthy one, person A will feel nourished, supported and restored as they look into the eyes of person B.⁷⁹ When the relational circuits in our brains are “functioning as designed,” person A is biologically wired to feel relationally connected to person B. Dr. Lehman explains, “We will both *want* to offer attunement and *be able* to offer attunement, we will be flexible and creative even when unexpected circumstances require that we change our plans at the last minute.”⁸⁰ However, if those circuits are turned off, or not functioning as designed, for either person A or person B, making that connection will be difficult.

Attunement is best offered from one integrated individual to another. Before the discovery of mirror neurons and the fuller understanding of attunement, Psychologist Carl Rogers was already teaching the concept to therapists. Dr. Rogers referred to *congruence* as the key for interpersonal connection;⁸¹ he taught that in order for therapists to help their clients, they themselves must be integrated. Rogers used a hypothetical therapist (Smith) and client (Jones), “To the degree that Jones experiences Smith as congruent or integrated in this relationship; experiences Smith as having positive regard for him; experiences Smith as being empathically understanding; to that degree the

⁷⁹ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 78.

⁸⁰ Lehman, *Outsmarting Yourself*, 109.

⁸¹ To explain congruence Dr. Rogers describes a congruent therapist, “The feelings the therapist is experiencing are available to him, available to his awareness, and he is able to live these feeling’s, be them, and able to communicate them if appropriate.” Carl Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist’s View of Psychotherapy* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 61.

conditions of a therapeutic relationship are established.”⁸² Dr. Rodgers argued that a congruent therapist was able to connect with the client, the client in turn was better able to listen without defense, resulting in a reciprocal relationship between therapist and client. Rogers stated,

Smith and Jones have to some degree become reciprocally therapeutic for each other. This means that to some degree the process of therapy occurs in each and that the outcomes of therapy will to that same degree occur in each; change in personality in the direction of greater unity and integration; less conflict and more energy utilizable for effective living; change in behavior in the direction of greater maturity.⁸³

In a therapy session, the attuned therapist is able to create the space for the client to be seen, felt, and known. What the therapist does for the client, the faithful saints of Christ can do in the garden-temple. Dr. Van der Kolk states, “Being able to feel safe with other people is probably the single most important aspect of mental health; safe connections are fundamental to meaningful and satisfying livings.” He argues, “being truly heard and seen by the people around us, feeling that we are held in someone else’s mind and heart. For our physiology to calm down, heal, and grow we need a visceral feeling of safety. No doctor can write a prescription for friendship and love.”⁸⁴

A Case Study. Camille had been working through the traumatic memories of a particularly violent relationship. The memories had kept her trapped in fear for years, and she was ready to be set free. She had begun to process the memories with Dr. MacDonald, and she had scheduled a time of healing prayer with Pastor Christine, but the fear was beginning to overwhelm her. Sunday morning, she drove to church, the fear

⁸² Rogers, 343.

⁸³ Rogers, 344.

⁸⁴ Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*, 79.

growing worse with each mile she traveled. She arrived and parked her car but could not get out. She texted Pastor Christine that she was not going to be able to make it. While Camille sat in her car crying, Martina arrived (feeling frustrated that she was running late). As Martina started toward the church, she noticed Camille sitting in her car crying. As she sat with Camille, creating a safe and loving connection with her, their relational circuits were connected, and Martina was able to share her neurological, emotional, and spiritual resources with Camille. The two women walked arm in arm into church together. Once inside the rest of the group surrounded Camille, encouraged her, and prayed with her. Within minutes, the overwhelming fear that had held her in bondage for so long disappeared and did not return again. The group had combined their resources, created a secure environment, and connected with Camille so that she was felt, seen, and loved. This allowed Camille to calm down, once she had calmed down, they were able to pray and invite the Holy Spirit to facilitate the healing that was needed.

Focused Attention

What are you paying attention to? What we pay attention to shapes how we think and process reality. Dr. Thompson states, “Attention can be considered the ignition key of the mind.”⁸⁵ The textbook definition of attention is “the focusing of mental resources.”⁸⁶ The focusing of mental attention then enables the creation of new neural firing patterns.⁸⁷ According to Dr. Sharon Begley “the brain can change as a result of the

⁸⁵ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 51.

⁸⁶ John W. Santrock, *A Topical Approach to Lifespan Development*, 6th ed (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 214.

⁸⁷ Leaf, *Switch On Your Brain*, 46–49.

thoughts we have thought.”⁸⁸ Therefore, Dr. Thompson suggests that an important practice is to reflect on the question, “How well am I paying attention to what I am paying attention to?”⁸⁹ How an individual focuses their thoughts and attention will shape and influence integration and overall well-being.⁹⁰ Paul taught this concept to the Philippians,

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

⁹ Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.⁹¹

Paul wants the Philippians to pay attention to how they are using their mental energy.

They are to rejoice, be thankful, give their anxieties to God, and focus on things that are worthy of praise. By paying attention to what they are paying attention to they will find the peace of God.

“Paying close attention is essential to long-term plastic change.”⁹² By consciously focusing the mind on a difficult task, humans are able to create new neuro pathways that enable them to adjust who they are attached to, and how they are relationally attuning to

⁸⁸ Sharon Begley, *Train Your Mind, Change Your Brain: How a New Science Reveals Our Extraordinary Potential to Transform Ourselves* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 2007), 9.

⁸⁹ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 53.

⁹⁰ What we focus our thoughts is important. Dr. Leaf warns, “if you have a toxic thought, the resulting proteins look different and act differently than if you had a healthy thought.” Leaf, *Switch On Your Brain*, 48.

⁹¹ Philippians 4:4–9, NRSV.

⁹² Doidge, *The Brain That Changes Itself*, 68.

others. The challenge is to enable the brain to become aware of what it is paying attention to. Dr. Mark Williams, in his book *The Mindful Way Through Depression*, explains, “Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally to things as they are.”⁹³ Dr. Newberg assures, “Daily meditation enhances our ability to focus our attention on virtually any goal we wish to achieve.”⁹⁴ Meditation and mindfulness increase the ability to pay attention and increases awareness. “Focused attention begins to build new neuronal circuits...And the more that activity is repeated, the stronger those neural circuits become.”⁹⁵

A Case Study. Camille came in for a session with pastor Christine. She battled negative thoughts and emotions that often left her engaging in self-harming activities. While Camille met with Dr. MacDonald to develop a safety plan and learn how to regulate her emotions, pastor Christine began working with her on focused attention meditations. Using the passage from Philippians, Pastor Christine had Camille spend 18 minutes each day focusing on:

1. Thanksgiving
2. Anxieties
3. What is good and praiseworthy

In order to engage both the right and left hemispheres, and to foster integration, Camille recorded each meditation in her journal. Beginning with thanksgiving Camille took time to focus her attention on all that she was thankful for, allowing herself to feel the

⁹³ Williams, Teasdale, Segal, Zindel, Kabat-Zinn, *The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2007), 48.

⁹⁴ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 32.

⁹⁵ Newberg and Waldman, 33.

thanksgiving deeply, she became aware of where she felt the thanksgiving in her body.⁹⁶ Camille then expressed her thanksgiving to Christ. Next, she focused on what she felt anxious about. This focused attention allowed the anxieties to move into her conscious mind where she became aware of them. She then confessed her anxieties to Christ and asked Christ to take them, once again she wrote them down in her journal. Finally, she focused on what was good and praiseworthy. This included a focused awareness of Christ's love. This step focused on who God is and how much God loves her. As Camille practiced this focused attention meditation, she experienced peace.

Human beings are open circuits, biologically wired to need other human beings. Without other human relationships a person is unable to grow, heal, and integrate. This begins at the moment of birth as infants develop their first attachments to their primary caregivers. These relationships shape how the infants will understand themselves, and the world in which they live. When humans are securely attached to other people, they are able to explore their world with flexibility. Attachment requires positive attunement with another human, and when a person feels she or he is known, seen, and understood, that person is able to emotionally connect to other people. In order for successful attunement, the individual needs to be able to focus and pay attention to what he or she is feeling, take steps to process those feelings, and then honestly be present with others. Secure attachment, positive attunement, and focused attention are needed to establish relationships, and relationships are needed for humans to be abundant, joyful, and peaceful.

⁹⁶ In an interview with Dr. MacDonald on January 31, 2020 she explained that being aware of where in your body you feel an emotion keeps you in the present and therefore keeps your attention focused.

Principles

God has wonderfully created the human brain; it is created to help humanity to not only survive but thrive in loving relationships. To address the problem of loneliness and anxiety, it is essential to consider the biology and systems of the brain. Because the brain functions best when it is integrated, the church needs to create space that enables individuals to become aware of the places of unprocessed and invisible emotions. The church needs to create space where people are able to model and practice secure attachment, positive attunement, and focused attention. If the church is going to address the lonely and anxious world, it must create space that allows for deep, sometimes painful exploration of the invisible and painful emotional memories that people hold.

Conclusion

The bottom-up, right-to-left brain functions best when all parts are integrated and working together. An integrated mind is the result of all the various systems of the brain functioning as they were designed to and working in unity with the other systems. An integrated mind is flexible and adaptive, allowing an individual to be healthy and to experience God's shalom. The events of life are recorded in the neuro pathways of the brain, creating both explicit and implicit memories. When these events are unprocessed, they become stuck, and cause the disintegration of the mind. These memories affect the way emotions motivate the person, creating a less flexible and adaptive individual. This individual is then hindered in the way she or he interacts with the other people in her or his life and the way she or he makes sense of her or his reality.

Using focused attention, the individual is able to become aware of her or his emotions and painful memories, and with the help of others, is able to change the neuro pathways, and find integration once again. The integrated individual is once again able to emotionally attune to others and find secure attachments both with God and other individuals. Understanding how God designed the brain enables the church to develop a community that addresses the anxious and lonely individual. The next chapter will focus on the elements of such a community.

CHAPTER 5: ELEMENTS OF COMMUNITY

Overview

Starting with the statement, “Our lives will be abundant, joyful, and peaceful only to the degree that we are engaged, known, and understood by one another,”¹ and adding to that the problem, “American culture is one of isolation, anxiety, and division; a problem that is more obvious every year;” led to the question, “How can the church be a community so that lonely and anxious people can be seen, known, and belong?” Looking at neuroscience it was determined that an integrated individual is able to emotionally attune to others and find secure attachments with both God and others. The task ahead is to discover the elements of a healthy community.

Community Defined

Human beings were made for living in community, and it is in community that we flourish and become most fully human”² writes professor of ethics and society Christine Pohl. But what is community? What are the elements that make a community of shalom? This chapter will explore these questions. Psychiatrist Scott Peck argues that it is only possible to define that which is smaller than us, and therefore a true definition of community must be multifaceted. He contends that in order to use the word

¹ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, iii.

² Christine D. Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2012), 3.

meaningfully, “we must restrict it to a group of individuals who have learned how to communicate honestly with each other, whose relationships go deeper than their masks of composure, and who have developed some significant commitment to ‘rejoice together,’ ‘mourn together,’ and to ‘delight in each other, make others’ conditions our own.’”³

Community development advisor Charles Vogl defines community as, “a group of individuals who share a mutual concern for one another’s welfare.”⁴ Through the lens of Bishop Desmond Tutu’s *Ubuntu theology*, Michael Battle describes the intersectionality of personhood and community, “You cannot know you are unique or beautiful or intelligent without the reference point of a community in which such attributes become intelligible. We need to become communal selves.”⁵ John McKnight, co-founder of *Asset Based Community Development Institute*, defines community broadly as something that “occurs outside systems and institutions.” He writes, “It also refers to an aggregation of people or neighborhoods that have something in common. It is both a place and an experience of connectedness.”

Taken all together, it could be said that community is a multifaceted place and experience, in which people communicate honestly with one another as they share in their mutual joys, sorrows, and welfare. Community is an experience and place where people are connected and discover who they are in reference to the others in the group. This

³ M. Scott Peck, *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*, 2nd Touchstone ed. (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 59–60.

⁴ Charles H. Vogl, *The Art of Community: Seven Principles for Belonging* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, a BK Currents book, 2016), 9.

⁵ Michael Battle, *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me* (New York: Seabury Books, 2009), chapter 1, Kindle.

chapter will argue that the elements of community can be defined through the three lenses of paradise, practice, and patience.

The Community Dance

A community of shalom is a multifaceted dance. It focuses on both the individual and the group; it is both closed and welcoming; it is love based, not fear based; it is possibility focused, not blaming or fault finding. It does not avoid conflict but works toward conflict resolution. It is not run by authoritarian leadership, but works together as a group to make decisions, deal with conflict, and create both a place and an experience of belonging.

The Individual & The Community

It is generally agreed upon when talking about community in the Western world that *individualism* has made honest community difficult to achieve.⁶ Pohl writes, “Despite the fact that many of us claim to be dissatisfied with individualism, we cherish our capacity to make individual choices and to seek opportunities for personal growth.”⁷ While people desire community, they resist the commitment, push back against the

⁶ Scott Peck argues that individualism prevents us from honest communication with others, which prevents community. Peck, *The Different Drum*, 4; In his book *The Great Good Place*, sociologist Ray Oldenburg mourns the loss of the public gathering place, where he believes authentic community is established. One part of this phenomenon is attributed to the isolation of the individual. He argues that in the 21st century society has moved further and further away from a shared life to an individual life. Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafes, Coffee Shops, Bookstores, Bars, Hair Salons, and Other Hangouts at the Heart of a Community* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1999), 212. Peter Block cautions, “Our isolation occurs because western culture, our individualistic narrative, the inward attention of our institutions and our professions, and the messages from our media all fragment us. We are broken into pieces.” Block suggests that because we are more interested in individuality and independence than interdependence, an alternative future will be difficult to create. Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2008), 4.

⁷ Pohl, *Living into Community*, 4.

perceived loss of independence, and seek an easy path on their own terms. However, a true community of shalom creates the space for individuals to become more fully themselves and will be strengthened when each individual adds distinctiveness to the group. Michael Battle maintains, “The problem in human community is not so much that some lack knowledge of how to behave in company with others, but that they put themselves forward in ways meant to exhibit their superiority, rather than their distinctiveness.”⁸ The multifaceted community dance is one that celebrates the individual who adds to the community.

African leader Desmond Tutu combined his Anglican training with his South African roots and lived out a kind of *Ubuntu*⁹ *Theology*.¹⁰ In his book *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Tutu shares that in South Africa, when they want to give someone high praise they say the person has *ubuntu*, “It is to say, ‘My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours.’ We belong in a bundle of life. We say, ‘A person is a person through other persons.’ It is not, ‘I think therefore I am.’ It says rather: ‘I am human because I belong, I participate, I share.’”¹¹ Being truly human requires belonging

⁸ Michael Battle, *Reconciliation: The Ubuntu Theology of Desmond Tutu*, Revised & updated ed (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2009), 43.

⁹ Michael Battle explains, “Ubuntu is an African concept of personhood in which the identity of the self is understood to be formed interdependently through community.” Battle, *Ubuntu*, chapter 1, Kindle.

¹⁰ Battle writes, “For Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Ubuntu recognizes that human beings are called to be persons in community because we are made in the image of the triune God” He explains further, “Two significant factors shaped this view. The first was Tutu’s Anglican heritage, with its eucharistic understanding of community, munity, and the second was the long process by which South Africa renounced apartheid the separation of peoples by race in favor of unity in diversity.” See chapter two of *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me* for more detail.

¹¹ Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 1st Image Book ed (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 31.

and participating; being truly human is not an isolated, passive activity. It takes *connection to and interaction with* others.

In 1927, just a handful years before Tutu was born in South Africa, 21-year-old Dietrich Bonhoeffer was defending his doctoral thesis, *Sanctorum Communio* (The Community of Saints) at Tübingen University in Berlin, Germany.¹² In the third chapter of his thesis he states, “In the following we will show that even the formal concept of person can be conceived only in terms of community.”¹³ As his argument continues he writes, “In summary, human spirit in its entirety is woven into sociality and rests on the basic-relation of I and You. ‘Only in interaction with one another is the spirit of human beings ever revealed; this is the essence of spirit, to be oneself through being in the other.’”¹⁴ Bonhoeffer also emphasizes the necessity of the other, the “basic relation of I and You” in order “to be oneself.”

YHWH declared that it was not good for the human to be alone in chapter two of Genesis,¹⁵ Dr. Lewis and team explained that the body is an “open loop” system that needs another human being to regulate it, and Dr. Wilder explained that the brain is not configured to perceive its own identity, and therefore needs other people to interact with.¹⁶ In the same manner, both Bonhoeffer and Tutu demonstrate that without

¹² John Malkov, “Dietrich Bonhoeffer Bibliography,” accessed October 26, 2020, <http://www.dbonhoeffer.org/Biography.html>.

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Clifford J. Green, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, v. 1 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 63.

¹⁴ Block, *Community*, 73.

¹⁵ See chapter 2

¹⁶ See Chapter 4 Lewis, Amini, and Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 85; Wilder, “The Life Model and Transformation.”

community the individual is not complete. Humanity was created for connectedness, to be more than simply an individual human being. Without community, the individual is not complete.

But the individual is not created to be lost in the community. The individual needs to be differentiated from the other individuals in the community. Assimilation does not make a community of shalom. In 1 Corinthians chapter 12, Paul writes about the body of Christ, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” Paul goes on to explain what he means, “If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ...If all were a single member, where would the body be?”¹⁷ For the community to be healthy and functioning properly each individual needs to bring their unique gifts and personality to the whole.

David Benner cautions,

We should never be tempted to think that growth in Christlikeness reduces our uniqueness. While some Christian visions of the spiritual life imply that as we become more like Christ we look more and more like each other, such a cultic expectation of loss of individuality has nothing in common with genuine Christian spirituality. Paradoxically, as we become more and more like Christ we become more uniquely our own true self.¹⁸

The spiritual formation journey, while it must be taken in community, does not reduce the uniqueness of each individual. Pastor and therapist Peter Holmes states, “We must all

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:12, 17, 19, ESV.

¹⁸ David G. Benner, *The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self-Discovery*, Expanded Edition, The Spiritual Journey (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 17.

honor our uniqueness, while learning the voluntary interdependence of authentic community.”¹⁹

The journey is one that must be taken in community, but the hard, internal work must be done by the individual, not the community. Humanity is inclined to avoid anything that is uncomfortable. Henri Nouwen warns, “To wait for moments or places where no pain exists, no separation is felt and where all human restlessness has turned into inner peace is waiting for a dream-world.”²⁰ David Benner expands on this central idea when he says, “Although the object of one’s fears may seem to be external, the real source of the fear is internal. The danger is within. The enemy is one’s own self—or at least some aspects of the self.”²¹ The dance between the individual and the community enables the individual to come face to face with their inner life, it does not prevent or distract from the individual work. Again, Nouwen states,

No friend or lover, no husband or wife, no community or commune will be able to put to rest our deepest cravings for unity and wholeness. And by burdening others with these divine expectations, of which we ourselves are often only partially aware, we might inhibit the expression of free friendship and love and evoke instead feelings of inadequacy and weakness. Friendship and love cannot develop in the form of an anxious clinging to each other.²²

Coming face to face with the inner loneliness and fear can drive one toward Christ, avoiding that discomfort and pain robs the individual of a truly transformational journey.

¹⁹ Holmes, *Becoming More Human*, 197.

²⁰ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1986), 30.

²¹ David G. Benner, *Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality*, Expanded Edition, The Spiritual Journey (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 42.

²² Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 30.

Just as the brain is made of many individual parts that must function as they were intended, so too does the community.²³ For the community to function each person must contribute her or his uniqueness to the greater whole. And just like the brain needs those individual parts to be integrated together, the community needs each part to be integrated together. Juan F. Martinez says it beautifully: “Individuals have gifts that the body needs. But it is the body that recognizes those gifts and builds up the individual.”²⁴ Community is a multifaceted dance between the individual and the group.

Fear v. Love

In a love-centered community, both individual and group integration is made possible. Scripture is replete with messages about love, from the Gospels to the Epistles, the body of Christ is instructed to love one another. In the Gospel of John, after washing the disciples’ feet, Jesus tells them, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Jesus’s new command was a love-centered community. In the letter to the Ephesians Paul tells the “faithful saints” that he thanks God every time he prays for them because of their love for the saints.²⁵ In his book *Lifesigns*, Henri Nouwen says, “The house of love is the house of Christ, the place where we can think, speak, and act in the way of God—not in the way of

²³ See chapter 4

²⁴ Mark Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 167.

²⁵ John 13: 34-35; NRSV Ephesians 1:15

a fear-filled world...Jesus offers us this house right in the midst of our anxious world.”²⁶

It is here, as the body of Christ comes together in mutual love for God and each other that paradise (the kingdom of God) is found (see chapter 2 and 3).

Unfortunately, “The existing community context is one that markets fear, assigns fault, and worships self-interest. This context supports the belief that the future will be improved with new laws, more oversight, and stronger leadership... The overriding characteristic of the stuck community is the decision to broadcast all the reasons we have to be afraid.”²⁷ When driven by fear, the individual needs to be in control. Dr. Benner observes, “Fear breeds control. People who live in fear feel compelled to remain in control. They attempt to control themselves and they attempt to control their world.” He continues, “Fear also blocks responsiveness to others. The fearful person may appear deeply loving, but fear always interferes with the impulse toward love. Energy invested in maintaining safety and comfort always depletes energy available for love of others.”²⁸ A fear-based community is the opposite of a transformative community. Instead of integration of the mind and the community, it causes disintegration and disunity. Instead of knowing and being known, it is self-centered and destructive. “Fear prevents us from forming an intimate community in which we can grow together, everyone in his or her own way.”²⁹

²⁶ Henri J. M Nouwen, *Lifesigns: Intimacy, Fecundity, and Ecstasy in Christian Perspective*, Image Books ed. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1990), 9–10.

²⁷ Block, *Community*, 37.

²⁸ Benner, *Surrender to Love: Discovering the Heart of Christian Spirituality*, 41–42.

²⁹ Nouwen, *Lifesigns*, 20.

While the shalom community is about both the individual and the group, it must be about love rather than fear. Stepping back for a moment into the world of neuroscience, Dr. Timothy Jennings teaches that the region of the brain called the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) is the heart of the brain. He explains, “It is in this brain region where we experience empathy, compassion and love, and where we choose the right from the wrong.”³⁰ What does this have to do with fear? And why should we care? Dr. Jennings expounds,

In order for our judgment to work best, our consciences must be clear. This can only happen when we live in harmony with the law of love, which requires removing distorted God-concepts and coming back to a true knowledge of him. When we do so, the ACC (heart) grows stronger and calms or resolves the experience of guilt.³¹

When the experience of guilt is calmed, and the ACC is strengthened the brain becomes healthier, more integrated. However, Dr. Jennings cautions, “The more fear-inducing our God-concept is, the more selfish our actions and the more damage occurs. Because the fear circuits of the brain produce powerful emotions and can lead to impulsive decision making, our emotions are not designed to be in charge of our actions.”³² Dr. Newberg confirms that fear-based religious communities cause damage rather than shalom, “Religious activities that focus on fear may damage the anterior cingulate, and when this happens, a person will often lose interest in other people's concerns or act aggressively against them. We suspect that fear-based religions may even create

³⁰ Timothy R. Jennings, *The God-Shaped Brain: How Changing Your View of God Transforms Your Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 38.

³¹ Jennings, 39.

³² Jennings, 40.

symptoms that mirror post-traumatic stress disorder.”³³ A community of fear reduces the individual’s ability for good judgment, it reduces the individual’s ability to see the other individuals in the group clearly, it reduces the ability of the individual to freely participate in the community. Henri Nouwen warns, “Fear can make us upset and angry. It can drive us into depression or despair. It can surround us with darkness and make us feel close to destruction and death.”³⁴

However, Dr. Newberg’s research has shown, “Meditating on any form of love, including God’s love, appears to strengthen the same neurological circuits that allow us to feel compassion toward others.”³⁵ Dr. David Benner asserts, “Creation declares that humans are born of love and for love, created in the image of a God who is love. Love is our source and love is to be our fulfillment.”³⁶ Community that is based on God’s love rather than fear enables the brain to be other-focused and reflect the image of God; community that is based on God’s love establishes God’s kingdom on earth.

Accountability, Participation, and Teachability

Rather than a culture of fear, a shalom community incorporates the discipline of accountability and creates a culture of participation and teachability. In his book on Benedictine Christian formation, David Robinson states, “One of the spiritual essentials for Christian formation, according to Benedict, is to walk in obedience to God through

³³ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 53.

³⁴ Nouwen, *Lifesigns*, 4.

³⁵ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 53.

³⁶ Benner, *Surrender to Love*, 26.

our accountability to others.”³⁷ Peter Block suggests, “The essential aspect of the restoration of community is a context in which each citizen chooses to be accountable rather than entitled.”³⁸ Likewise, John McKnight writes, “Where the consumer society breeds individualism and its effects of entitlement and self-interest, an abundant community is marked by a collective accountability that can be created only in relationship to other people.”³⁹ True accountability places every individual in the community on the same level, it creates a connectedness that leads to relationships rather than barriers that create an “us versus them” culture. Accountability one way the power balance is disrupted. A discipline of accountability among all the members of the community protects against a culture of fear, isolation, and individualism.

Along with accountability, the community must also be open and teachable. Peter Holmes has learned that a *therapeutic faith community* must accept the messy reality of living together in authenticity, “There is a belief among churchgoers that congregational life should be warm and friendly, rather than a more authentic place of discipline and painful ongoing self-reflection.” True community is willing to be honest and open, willing to struggle together, willing to enter into honest self-reflection. Ethics professor James Olthuis writes, “In the experience of suffering-with, the very suffering that isolates

³⁷ David Robinson, *Ancient Paths: Discover Christian Formation the Benedictine Way* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2010), 26.

³⁸ Block, *Community*, 48.

³⁹ John McKnight and Peter Block, *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods*, 1st ed (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2010), 65–66.

and sets apart becomes a way of connecting and bonding.”⁴⁰ It is in the openness to one another and the struggle with one another that connectedness begins to take place.

Not only openness is required, but the willingness to learn is essential. Holmes argues that learning is essential to becoming what he calls a *Theocentric* community, “The most basic way to learn how to live in such a community requires our willingness to positively change in order to learn and learn in order to change.”⁴¹ Rather than a controlling environment, a shalom community creates a culture of change, created by the willingness to learn.

Psychologist Scott Peck established four stages of true community development: pseudocommunity, chaos, emptiness, and community. *Pseudocommunity* happens as individuals first come together and “fake it.” In pseudocommunity the members avoid disagreement and are “extremely pleasant with one another.”⁴² This is the exact opposite of the messy self-reflective community Holmes describes. The second stage, *chaos*, is the “well-intentioned but misguided attempts to heal and convert.” Peck suggests, “Underlying the attempts to heal and convert is not so much the motive of love as the motive to make everyone normal—and the motive to win, as the members fight over whose norm might prevail.”⁴³ This reflects Benner’s warning that fear breeds control and blocks responsiveness to others, while depleting the energy available for loving others.

⁴⁰ James H Olthuis, *The Beautiful Risk: A New Psychology of Loving and Being Loved* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 66.

⁴¹ Holmes, *Becoming More Human*, 196–97.

⁴² Peck, *The Different Drum*, 86–87.

⁴³ Peck, 90–91.

According to Peck there are two ways out of chaos, “One is into organization;” however he states that “organization is never community.”⁴⁴ Rather than organizing, true community will require moving into and through the third stage, *emptiness*. Peck explains, “Until such time as we can empty ourselves of expectations and stop trying to fit others and our relationships with them into a preconceived mold we cannot really listen, hear, or experience.”⁴⁵ Emptiness here reflects Holmes *Theocentric community* that is honest and self-reflective, willing to learn and change. The final stage in Peck’s model is *community*. In this stage there is a kind of peace in which the group finds the ability to be open and vulnerable with one another.⁴⁶ As Olthuis suggested, while the community struggled together, they were connecting and bonding as well.

Participation is an essential element of the shalom community. Participation involves both interdependence and empowerment. Peter Block writes, “Community will be created the moment we decide to act as creators of what we become.” He states, “This requires us to believe that this organization, this neighborhood, this community is mine or ours to create.”⁴⁷ For a community to be transforming, the members of the community need to take ownership and responsibility of the community. John McKnight writes in *Abundant Community*, “The idea of community abundance is about our common interest and who will care for the whole.” He specifies, “We are responsible for each other. This is the meaning of community. We take seriously the idealistic notion that our future is

⁴⁴ Peck, 94.

⁴⁵ Peck, 95.

⁴⁶ Peck, 102–3.

⁴⁷ Block, *Community*, 133–34.

dependent on each of us and if one of us is not free, or valued, or participating in a full life, then these are not possible for any of us.”⁴⁸ The apostle Paul told the Corinthians that their community was like a body, each member an individual part of the whole body; and each part responsible for their own task. Paul exhorted, “But as it is, God has placed each one of the parts in the body just like he wanted. If all were one and the same body part, what would happen to the body? But as it is, there are many parts but one body. So the eye can’t say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you,’ or in turn, the head can’t say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you.’”⁴⁹ Every member of the community must participate, each member must contribute to the whole.

In the field of sociology one component to human development is *empowerment and agency*. This is defined as, “enabling people and groups to act—to drive valuable outcomes.”⁵⁰ In her chapter *Participatory Methods in Community Practice*, Sociologist Dorothy Gamble explains, “Empowerment and agency enable people to explain the dilemmas they face and the options they need for more accessible opportunities.”⁵¹ The participatory method recognizes the need for people to take ownership of their own story. Gamble writes, “Participatory methods, appropriately and effectively applied...help people become actors in their own destiny. Participatory methods are critical for people...to be able to think through their historical and situational conditions.”⁵²

⁴⁸ McKnight and Block, *The Abundant Community*, 66.

⁴⁹ 1 Corinthians 12:18-21 (CEB)

⁵⁰ Weil, Marie, Michael S. Reisch, and Mary L. Ohmer, *The Handbook of Community Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2012), 327.

⁵¹ Weil, Reisch, and Ohmer, 327.

⁵² Weil, Reisch, and Ohmer, 339.

Sociologist Jim Ife builds on this, “Community development must always seek to maximize participation, with the aim being for everyone in the community to be actively involved in community processes and activities...The more people who are active participants, the more the ideals of community ownership and inclusive process will be realized.” Ife explains that by maximizing community participation the community also increases empowerment and consciousness. He does elaborate that participation will not look the same for everyone. “Good community work will provide the broadest possible range of participatory activity, and will legitimize equally all people who are actively involved.”⁵³ Participation empowers the individual and the community; participation provides an avenue for the individual and community to learn more about themselves and creates a culture of belonging as it establishes ownership by each member.

Returning to Ubuntu theology and Desmond Tutu’s statement, “We say, ‘A person is a person through other persons.’ It is not, ‘I think therefore I am.’ It says rather: ‘I am human because I belong. I participate, I share.’”⁵⁴ Ubuntu theology depends on the participation of all the members, Michael Battle explains: “A spirituality of Ubuntu is more about participation in the process of becoming lovable persons.” Participation in this process frees the community from a need to impress or degrade others.⁵⁵ In a similar vein, Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass state, “When we participate over a long period of time in addressing fundamental human needs in the light of and in response to God’s active presence in the life of the world, we grow into a double-sided knowledge of God

⁵³ Jim Ife, *Community Development in an Uncertain World: Vision, Analysis, and Practice* (Cambridge; New York, nY; Port Melbourne, Vic: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 292.

⁵⁴ Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, 31.

⁵⁵ Battle, *Ubuntu*, chapter 2, Kindle.

and ourselves.”⁵⁶ A community of shalom is one in which each member is becoming more human, more Christ-like, a journey that requires each individual be seen and heard by others in the community. Without participation the act of seeing and being seen cannot take place.

The community dance is complex, it is one that takes time to learn and develop. The movements and steps are important and cannot be rushed. The dance cannot be done in isolation, it must be done in community and yet at the same time sees and knows each individual. It is one that cannot be done in a culture of fear, it must be done within the rhythm of love. It is one that creates space for everyone to participate, where everyone is mutually accountable, and willing to learn. It is a dance that requires both relationship and patience (see chapter 3). Within this community, practices are essential; this chapter will now discuss those practices.

Community Practices

Practices and Rituals

Practices are the scaffolding that gives form and shape to a community. In their chapter entitled “A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices” Dykstra and Bass describe Christian practices as, “things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God's active presence for the

⁵⁶ Bass, Dorothy C., and Craig Dykstra, “Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life,” in *A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices*, edited by Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2002), chapter 1, Kindle.

life of the world.”⁵⁷ They suggest that Christian practices address “fundamental human needs and conditions” that result from the character of human existence. These are practices such as “embodiment, temporality, relationship, the use of language, and mortality.”⁵⁸ Christine Pohl argues that within community structure, “A framework that focuses on practices allows us to see issues in congregational and community life from a different angle and helps us to get at the moral and theological commitments that structure our relationships.”⁵⁹ Practices provide a means for creating a shalom community culture by addressing human needs. Proper practices help to nurture a culture of reflection and healthy relationships. Practices form and shape the relationships within the community, practices provide boundaries for the community, and practices, when implemented correctly provide a lens for the community to see and understand itself.

Closely related to practices are rituals. In his book *The Art of Community*, Vogl defines ritual as “any practice that marks a time or event as special or important. The actions are imbued with meaning. They connect the present with things in the past and our hope for the future.”⁶⁰ Rituals provide meaning to the community, while connecting the individuals to each other, as well as the past and future of the community. Neurologist Andrew Newberg explains the effects of ritual in the brain, “Rituals add substance to our beliefs, and the more intense the ritual, the more likely we are to have a religious or spiritual epiphany. Thus, spiritual practice is the key to making God personally

⁵⁷ Bass and Dykstra, chapter 1, Kindle.

⁵⁸ Bass and Dykstra, chapter 1, Kindle.

⁵⁹ Pohl, *Living into Community*, 5.

⁶⁰ Vogl, *The Art of Community*, 49.

meaningful and real.”⁶¹ Rituals not only connect individuals to each other, the past, and the future, but also to God.

McKnight explains that within an abundant community cooperation is essential. He states, “Cooperation is based on the belief that there is enough for each of us...It is concerned about the process we choose to handle an uncertain future. It is a willingness to debate and argue in a way that sustains the relationship, above all.”⁶² Along these lines, Sennett suggests that expressive rituals enable greater cooperation and connection among the community, “Ritual makes expressive cooperation work...ritual enables expressive cooperation in religion, in the workplace, in politics and in community life.”⁶³ A community dinner might include sharing food, the sharing of eucharist might integrate a ritual of passing the elements, a responsive reading or prayer incorporates the whole community in one voice. Sennett suggests, “observing the Eucharist or a Seder together brings theology to life; rituals of civility, as small as ‘please’ and ‘thank you,’ put abstract notions of mutual respect into practice.”⁶⁴ Rituals provide meaning, connectivity, communication, and cooperation.

Carefully choosing the practices and rituals is a critical and essential process. The practices and rituals that a community chooses has the possibility of creating either a healthy life-giving community, or an unhealthy and abusive community. Pohl states, “Certain attitudes and actions shatter community life rather than sustain it, and make life

⁶¹ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 42.

⁶² McKnight and Block, *The Abundant Community*, 89.

⁶³ Richard Sennett, *Together the Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 17.

⁶⁴ Sennett, 5.

together unhappy and sometimes dangerous. When we engage in betrayal, deception, grumbling, envy, or exclusion, we violate connections between us.”⁶⁵

Models of Community Practices & Rituals

The list of practices and rituals that a community can incorporate and engage in are endless. Charles Vogl defines several principles that are important for developing a community of belonging. *The Boundary Principle* is based on the fact that “members want to know who’s in the community and shares their values. Visitors want to know a safe way to explore without committing themselves.” Vogl warns that “This boundary should be more about making the inside space safe for insiders than about keeping outsiders out.”⁶⁶ *The Initiation Principle* creates an activity as a means to welcome and recognize an individual into the community; and allows them to “feel confident and welcome in their belonging.”⁶⁷ *The Inner Circle Principle* establishes a method for growth in the community. “We all want to be valued or valuable...we all aspire to belong to prestigious inner rings...for new ways to participate and contribute.”⁶⁸ The danger of the inner ring is the danger of never being satisfied, always striving for another inner ring. Vogl states, “Avoiding the inner ring trap is why our communities must offer clear paths to personal growth for those who share our values.” Vogl argues that this “prevents us from creating meaningless inner rings that remain unattainable.” He believes, “if we

⁶⁵ Pohl, *Living into Community*, 6.

⁶⁶ Vogl, *The Art of Community*, 33.

⁶⁷ Vogl, 43.

⁶⁸ Vogl, 87.

consciously create inner rings with our communities, and build them based on our core values, and invite anyone with those same values to enter, we create a forum for friendship.”⁶⁹ These three principles combined resemble the practices of *The First Scrutiny* of the early church, (see chapter 3). Vogl states, “an exploration zone is important for visitors. This is how we protect insiders while giving outsiders a chance to participate and learn more about the community.”⁷⁰ For the early church the first scrutiny was the boundary and the exploration zone. It required a member of the community to introduce new members to one part of the community and then allowed them to participate in an initiation process. Once they were brought into the community they were not immediately ushered into the inner circle, they began with catechism, learning about the community and then growing in their spiritual journey. There were clear markers on this journey, practices to participate in, and rituals, such as baptism, that signified their movement from one circle to the next. There was only one inner ring to strive toward. It was this final ring that the disciple was working toward, and it was in this ring that the disciple fully participated with the community in the ritual of communion. Boundaries, initiations, and inner circles allows a community to be both open and welcoming while at the same time providing a closed environment of belonging.⁷¹

In his *therapeutic faith community* mode, Holmes established the principle: *With Christ in Our Midst*. In a *therapeutic faith community* God’s presence is essential. “[God] talks to people (e.g. Ex 15:26), ‘meddling’ in all of our lives. By borrowing Yahweh’s

⁶⁹ Vogl, 96–98.

⁷⁰ Vogl, 36.

⁷¹ See chapter 3 to also see how Wesley achieved this same thing.

words and putting them into practice as an act of worship we become more fully participants within Trinity. Our response, our life of worship, further empowers us.” Holmes argues further that when the faith community comes alongside the individual, walking with the individual through her or his pain and darkness, the whole community experiences the healing. “By this process we both demonstrate the love of Christ...and also enter into Christ together in a way we cannot achieve privately.”⁷² An essential practice/ritual for this principle is *communion*. Reflecting on Paul’s model for a faith community, “Each community was conceived in love, focused more around ‘Communion’ and energized spiritually through the Holy Spirit by the exercising of spiritual gifting and fruit.”

For Peter Block a restorative or alternative community is comprised of citizens⁷³ who focus on five principles. It begins with attending to the way in which the community gathers together.⁷⁴ Block states, “The essential work is to build social fabric, both for its own sake and to enable chosen accountability among citizens...The work is to design ways to bring citizens together so that they experience the ‘quality of aliveness.’” Being attentive to the way we gather leads to a strong associational life. “It is how citizens choose to build connections for their own sake, usually for common purpose. These are the primary constituency for transformation. In associational life, creating connectedness

⁷² Holmes, *Becoming More Human*, 216–17.

⁷³ Block argues that, “Citizens, in their capacity to come together and choose to be accountable, are our best shot at making a difference.” And he defines a citizen as “one who is willing to be accountable for and committed to the well-being of the whole...A citizen is one who produces the future, someone who does not wait, beg, or dream for the future.” Block, *Community*, xi, 63.

⁷⁴ “Every gathering, in its composition and in its structure, has to be an example of the future we want to create. If this is achieved in this gathering, then that future has occurred today and there is nothing to wait for.” Block, 75.

becomes both an end and a means.” It is also about how citizens use their power:

“Citizens who use their power to convene other citizens are what create an alternative future.” The thinking and actions of the citizens is more important than the institutions and leaders. Block explains that better leadership, programs, funding, regulations or oversight are not able to “create a fundamental shift.”⁷⁵ Since it is citizens who drive the alternative future, the small group is where the alternative future will be created.⁷⁶ Block states, “This also means that we must set aside our concern for scale and our concern for speed. Scale, speed, and practicality are always the coded arguments for keeping the existing system in place.”⁷⁷ The final principle is about conversations.⁷⁸ “All transformation is linguistic.” He argues, “The shift in conversation is from one of problems, fear, and retribution to one of possibility, generosity, and restoration.”⁷⁹ The restorative community, according to Block, is one that is driven by the citizens, accomplished through conversations that focus on the right questions, takes place in the small community, and is not focused on scale or speed.

These models demonstrate that boundaries set up with a path toward full participation establish a community for belonging. Communities established with Christ

⁷⁵ Block, 31.

⁷⁶ Block suggests that in the small group every voice is able to be heard, the place where our own individual experience is connected to the larger community and provides a self-correcting mechanism when all is not well. Block, 95.

⁷⁷ Block, 31.

⁷⁸ This conversation is more about asking the right questions, rather than solving a problem. “We work hard on getting the questions right. This begins by realizing that the questions themselves are important, more important than the answers. The primary questions for community transformation are ‘How do we choose to be together?’ and ‘What do we want to create together?’ These are different from the primary questions for individual transformation, which are ‘How do I choose to be in whatever setting I find myself in?’ and ‘What am I called to do in this world?’” Block, 75.

⁷⁹ Block, 30–31.

in their midst create environments that participate with the Trinity and establish mutual participation. And finally, communities that work together, gather together, lead together, and communicate with one another about the possibilities of what they can create together, become communities of shalom. What all of these models have in common is that relationships are essential, patience is required, and practices are indispensable (paradise, practice and patience, see chapters 2 and 3).

Community Leadership

Leadership will be critical in the community of shalom. Scott Peck teaches that true community is a group of all leaders, where “everyone’s gifts are recognized and everyone leads according to them.”⁸⁰ Block suggests, “Community building requires a concept of the leader as one who creates experiences for others—experiences that in themselves are examples of our desired future. The experiences we create need to be designed in such a way that relatedness, accountability, and commitment are every moment available, experienced, and demonstrated.”⁸¹ In her book *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit*, leadership and diversity expert Juana Bordas reaches into the wealth of wisdom and experience from “Latino, Black and American Indian communities” to gain a multicultural leadership perspective. She states, “Leaders are expected to listen, integrate the collective wisdom, and reflect the groups’ behavior and values...As they empower others, a community of leaders evolves.”⁸² By combining these various voices, it is

⁸⁰ Peck, *The Different Drum*, 72, 159.

⁸¹ Block, *Community*, 86.

⁸² Juana Bordas, *Salsa, Soul, and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age*, 2nd ed, A BK Business Book (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2012), 96.

evident that leadership empowers and creates experiences in which everyone is recognized for what they have to bring to the group, while creating accountability methods for everyone (including the leader). Leaders spend their time listening to the group, reflecting the values of the group, and integrating the wisdom of the group.

Conversely, a toxic community leadership style has defining features. Peck states, “A group led by a dictator is not, and never can be, a community. Community and totalitarianism are incompatible.” In their book *A Church Called Tov* authors Laura Barringer and Scot McKnight warn against toxic leadership, “It begins when power and authority are vested in an individual.”⁸³ Power and authority, especially invested in one individual, often give way to a culture of fear. “Perhaps the most common temptation for church leaders is to wield their assumed authority and position as weapons of lethal, wounding power. When a leader manifests the power hatchet, a culture is formed that adjusts to the blade of fear. Power and fear are close companions.”⁸⁴ Professor of sociology Ronald Enroth explains that authoritarian leaders are tyrants who take pleasure in requiring obedience. Enroth proposes, “It is important to recognize that leadership depends on followership, and from a truly Christian perspective, that means cooperation with the leader rather than domination and control by the leader.”⁸⁵ In their paper “Pseudo-Transformational Leadership” professors of Organizational Behavior Amy Christie, Julian Barling, and Nick Turner explain that pseudo-transformational leaders, “dominated by self-interest, create and transmit visions that exclude the best interests of

⁸³ Scot McKnight and Laura Barringer, *A Church Called Tov: Forming a Goodness Culture That Resists Abuses of Power and Promotes Healing* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2020), 34.

⁸⁴ McKnight and Barringer, 31.

⁸⁵ Ronald M. Enroth, *Churches That Abuse* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 196.

followers, and use positional power to achieve their own ends. These leaders are most interested in absolute power and personal gain.”⁸⁶ They warn, “pseudo-transformational leadership will be reflected in leaders who enact self-serving values, actively discourage creative thought, and exploit their followers, yet manifest strong inspirational talent and appeal. Together, these behaviors allow pseudo-transformational leaders to manipulate followers into achieving the leaders’ self-interested goals.”⁸⁷ Three models of leadership reflect the needs of the shalom community, while providing measures to guard against toxic leadership.

Transforming, Adaptive, & Servant Leadership

In his book *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, Peter Northouse defines transformational leadership as, “the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower.”⁸⁸ A transformational leader will be a strong role model for followers who identify with them.⁸⁹ The transformational leader also empowers and nurtures her followers. Christie and associates explain, “Authentic transformational leaders inspire and use their influence to empower others.”⁹⁰ Professors Jung, Chow, and Wu write that

⁸⁶ Amy Christie, Julian Barling, and Nick Turner, “Pseudo-Transformational Leadership: Model Specification and Outcomes1: PSEUDO-TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 41, no. 12 (December 2011): 2945, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2011.00858.x>.

⁸⁷ Christie, Barling, and Turner, 2948.

⁸⁸ Peter Guy Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, Seventh Edition (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2015), 162.

⁸⁹ Northouse, 167.

⁹⁰ Christie, Barling, and Turner, “Pseudo-Transformational Leadership,” 2944.

transformational leaders “seek followers’ participation by highlighting the importance of cooperation.” They explain that through these shared experiences the group is able to learn from each other, they further explain that by delegating authority, leaders empower the group to “execute any necessary action for effective performance.” This empowerment produces an environment of motivation and creativity.⁹¹ Transformational leadership creates connections, empowers each individual, encourages participation, and delegates authority; the leader accomplishes this by role modeling and giving away authority.

The second leadership model is *Adaptive Leadership*. Northouse states that adaptive leadership focuses on “how leaders help others do the work they need to do, in order to adapt to the challenges they face.”⁹² Leadership expert Ronald Heifetz presents two types of leaders. The first type operates with the goal of influencing the community “to follow the leaders vision.” The second leaders’ goal is to influence the community to face its own problems. He states that adaptive leaders “mobilize people to face problems, and communities make progress on problems because leaders challenge and help them do so.”⁹³ Adaptive leaders do not need to know or have the answers to the problem. Rather, they create space for the community to learn and discover new possibilities, often in creative ways, similar to the citizens in Block’s restorative communities. Adaptive leaders ask questions, encourage, and support people on a journey to a new

⁹¹ Dong I Jung, Chee Chow, and Anne Wu, “The Role of Transformational Leadership in Enhancing Organizational Innovation: Hypotheses and Some Preliminary Findings,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 14, no. 4–5 (August 2003): 530, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(03\)00050-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(03)00050-X).

⁹² Northouse, *Leadership*, 258.

⁹³ Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994), 14–15.

understanding.⁹⁴ In the adaptive leadership model the focus is on the community, not the leader. It is the job of the leader to create the space and experiences that will empower members of the community to face the challenges before them. This means the leader needs to be able to see the reality of the situation, gauge the level of distress the community is experiencing and then create the space to regulate stress. The leader helps the community to focus and take responsibility for the issues before them. Finally, the leader must make sure all voices are heard, making sure those with hard questions or quiet voices are not overlooked.⁹⁵ Adaptive leadership is about empowering, creating space, motivating, and keeping the work of the community with the community, not the leader.

Northouse explains that *servant leadership* empathizes with and nurtures followers. “Servant leaders put followers first, empower them, and help them develop their full personal capacities.”⁹⁶ Dr. MaryKate Morse explains, “Servant leaders have a passion to lead for Jesus, like Jesus, and to Jesus and through his Spirit to be a part of God’s transforming presence in their communities. Their care for individuals and the mission rise above personal ego needs for status and achievement.”⁹⁷ In his book *Servant Leadership* New Testament professor Efrain Agosto explains how the ministries of Jesus and Paul modeled good servant leadership. Jesus’s leadership modeled both sacrifice and leadership to his disciples, who were a diverse group of people from all walks of life,

⁹⁴ See Heifetz Part I: Setting the Frame, *Leadership without Easy Answers*.

⁹⁵ Heifetz, 128.

⁹⁶ Northouse, *Leadership*, 225.

⁹⁷ MaryKate Morse, “Servant Leadership,” 2019, 1.

including both the poor and women.⁹⁸ For Paul, servant leadership is about “both human humility and divine power.” Every leader has a role to play, while God is the one who provides the growth. The goal is not who has the power or who does it best, but “who carries out their role according to the common purpose.”⁹⁹

Agosto combines the examples of Jesus and Paul and comes up with three elements for servant leadership. The focus is first on the poor and oppressed,¹⁰⁰ while at the same time allowing for failure. Jesus was more concerned about commitment than failure, “All-out commitment was needed for leadership in this movement...Even if some of them failed to understand, at least they had commitment.”¹⁰¹ Second, leaders cannot work alone. “To take right action in the complex matters that lie before us, dialogue, including dialogue between different races, classes, genders, and faiths must be fostered.”¹⁰² Finally, humility is imperative. The servant leader must not lead from a sense of entitlement or self-importance. The call for humility reminds us “of our weakness and shortcomings and ultimate dependence on God”¹⁰³

Taken altogether, these three models outline a model for leadership for the shalom community. Leadership begins with the leader herself. Leadership that is powered by God, will start with the leader’s own spiritual health. It will require humility and sacrifice. Leadership will share authority by empowering everyone and will get out of the

⁹⁸ Efrain Agosto, *Servant Leadership: Jesus & Paul* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), 96.

⁹⁹ Agosto, 202.

¹⁰⁰ Agosto, 207.

¹⁰¹ Agosto, 199.

¹⁰² Agosto, 207.

¹⁰³ Agosto, 208.

way when needed. The leader must be willing to model the values and desired outcomes of the community, and the leader must be willing to be patient enough for true transformation to take place. Leadership must be willing to create space for all voices to be heard, for all gifts to be discovered and used. Leadership will need to establish accountability structures and safe environments for every individual to fail and find restoration again. Within the shalom community, leadership is a humble relationship with God, self, and others, that empowers and creates space for the community to grow, develop, and face challenges, for both the individual and the community to be transformed.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter several words, themes, or ideas have surfaced. Much like the brain, community works best when every member is living through their unique giftedness while contributing to the whole. A community of shalom is one that is Christ centered, and relationship based (paradise). It creates space for honest communication, is closed yet welcoming, possibility focused and empowering (practice). Shalom communities are focused on creating spaces that invest in people and possibilities, rather than fault finding, or worrying about numbers or size (patience). Leadership in a shalom community is spiritually centered, models behavior, and is willing to be held accountable while establishing methods of accountability for the whole group. In sum, leaders focus on the love of God and neighbor rather than fear and fault finding.

The next chapter will bring together the biblical, historical, biological, and community elements discussed thus far to formulate an answer to this dissertation's

guiding question, “How can the church be a community so that lonely and anxious people can be seen, known, and belong?”

CHAPTER 6:
A COMMUNITY OF SHALOM

Overview

This paper began with the observation: the world is filled with lonely, anxious, and divided people. It also started with a claim from Dr. Thompson, “Our lives will be abundant, joyful, and peaceful only to the degree that we are engaged, known, and understood by one another.”¹ He also argued, “It is only when we are known that we are positioned to become conduits of love. And it is love that transforms our minds, makes forgiveness possible, and weaves a community of disparate people into the tapestry of God’s family.”² This led to the question, “How can the church be a community so that lonely and anxious people can be seen, known, and belong?”

Chapter one noted Max Lerner’s 1957 prediction that unless America was able to find a way to create integral community, it would become more fragmented and unfulfilled. Forty years later Ray Oldenburg declared Lerner’s prediction realized. At the same time Robert Putnam demonstrated the lack of social engagement in America, while Peter Holmes acknowledged that community was not created by simply coming together for church.

It is human nature to divide into *ingroups*, living, working, even worshipping with people who look, think, and act just like us. These *ingroups* create an “us vs. them” culture, which perpetuates anxiety of the *other*. The United States has relocated and

¹ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, iii.

² Thompson, 3.

divided more and more into homogenous neighborhoods, while at the same time experiencing higher levels of anxiety and loneliness. The natural tendency for humans to divide into ingroups does not create a world in which people are seen, known, or understood. Homogeneous neighborhoods do not create the conditions for joy and peace and do not foster communities of shalom. Instead, anxiety increases—using up vital brain resources needed for establishing healthy relationships—and loneliness results, increasing anxiety, and so on.

Not only are neighborhoods homogenized, so are most churches. In fact, the church growth movement took advantage of the natural human propensity to divide into ingroups with the *homogenous unit principle*. While the country becomes more divided, anxious, and lonely, the church declines more and more. Gallup polls and Pew research both show that church attendance has significantly declined since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Sociologists Josh Packard and Ashleigh Hope found that individuals (who felt the church was only concerned about its own survival) are leaving the church and finding alternative options for community involvement and social engagement. And Willowcreek's research discovered that church activities did not lead to spiritual growth.

From God's creative activity in Genesis 1 to God's consummation in Revelation, relationship—both vertical and horizontal, within a heaven and earth dwelling place—has been the vision. From Genesis to Ephesians the mandate has been to expand the heaven and earth dwelling into the rest of God's creation. All of this has been done by the faithful saints of God who are united in Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and all of this is accomplished as the faithful saints love one another, in all their diversity, and overcome the powers of this world.

Instead of focusing on numerical growth, both the church of Rome and later the Methodist movement reacted to the needs of the people, while establishing structures that built a community of faithful saints. Both focused on individual spiritual formation while understanding that the community of believers was the place of transformation. The church of Rome as well as the Methodist movement focused on addressing the physical and spiritual needs of both the individual and the community.

If the church is going to address the needs of anxious, lonely, and divided people, it must take seriously the way God created the brain to work. Chapter four explained that the brain is an intricate and complex system, designed to not only help us survive, but to thrive. When the brain is integrated, it is flexible, creative, joyful, and able to engage in healthy, attuned relationships. When it is not integrated, it is inflexible, and often struggles with anxiety, making it difficult to participate in healthy relationships.

Finally, chapter five explored the elements of community. From the moment YHWH declared that it was not good that the human was alone, humanity has been searching for a place to belong. Chapter five defined community as a multifaceted place and experience, in which people communicate honestly with one another as they share in their mutual joys, sorrows, and welfare. A shalom community is one that is Christ centered, and relationship based, one that invests in and empowers people.

Application

Like Paul's instructions to the Ephesians, and then the church in Rome, and later the Methodist movement, the church needs to be a place of shalom, a place that addresses

the whole person.³ For the culture of the twenty-first century, that will mean taking the biology of the brain and mental health seriously. It will mean challenging the extreme individuality of the American culture. It will require an intentional strategy to create community spaces that address the needs of the anxious, lonely, and divided culture. *The shalom community is a place of belonging, where God's love is shared and experienced, a place where every individual both knows and is known, it is a place of ownership, participation, and accountability.* Each community will look different as it addresses the local culture, but there are certain elements that will be important.

Essential Elements

Throughout this paper the importance of a love-based community has been emphasized. In the Gospel of John Jesus told his disciples, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). In Ephesians, Paul praised the faithful saints for their “love toward all the saints” (Ephesians 1:15). Their relationship with Christ shaped the way the disciples and the faithful saints lived their lives, and it was evident in their love toward all the saints. A love-centered community makes integration possible. Henri Nouwen stated, “The house of love is the house of Christ, the place where we can think, speak, and act in the way of God—not in the way of a fear-filled world...Jesus offers us this house right in

³ See chapter 2 discussion on Ephesians for definition of Shalom

the midst of our anxious world.”⁴ It is here, as the body of Christ comes together in mutual love for God and each other, that heaven and earth dwell together.

With this foundation set, the following are eight elements of community that have been present throughout this paper.

1) *The community is Christ-Centered.* Chapter two demonstrated that when YHWH El’ohim (יהוה אֱלֹהִים) planted the garden, built the tabernacle, and sent Christ, it was always God’s dwelling place where humanity was welcomed in. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul states that Christ is the head while the people are the body of the church. Then he described the household of God, with Christ as the cornerstone, where the faithful saints are able to dwell through the Holy Spirit. It is always God’s dwelling place, open to those who are faithful.

In chapter three, both the Church in Rome and the Methodist movement knew that the priority was always love of God. Irenaeus taught that the Christian life must be caught up in Christ’s story; he instructed the church to focus their lives on the paradise found in the Body of Christ.⁵ At the same time the *Didache* taught that the Christian life must be caught up in the practice of the story of Christ.⁶ Later, Wesley preached that that true Christian was the one whose love for God engrossed “the whole heart, as takes up all the affections, as fills the entire capacity of the soul, and employs the utmost extent of all its faculties.”⁷ From the moment El’ohim (אֱלֹהִים) uttered the words “Let there be...” until

⁴ Nouwen, *Lifesigns*, 9–10.

⁵ See chapter 3 *Paradise*

⁶ See chapter 3 *Practice*

⁷ See chapter 3 *The World of the Methodist John Wesley*, Albert Cook Outler, and Richard P. Heitzenrater, *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 65.

John saw the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven,⁸ the story has been of God united with God's people within God's dwelling place. The New Testament placed Christ as the heart of that dwelling place.

2) *The community is love based, not fear based.* Chapter two reflected on Jesus's command that the disciples love one another⁹ and Paul's praise of the faithful saints in Ephesus for their love for one another. Throughout chapter three, Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, *The Didache*, Tertullian, and John Wesley the focus of the church was always about loving God and neighbor, it was always about the vertical and horizontal relationship.

Chapter four explained that the human body is biologically wired for love. The system of one person helps to regulate the system of another person by altering "hormone levels, cardiovascular function, sleep rhythms, immune function, and more...together they create a stable, properly balanced pair of organisms."¹⁰ However, the regulation needs to be based in love, not fear. Chapter five explained that a fear-based community is the opposite of a shalom community. Instead of integration of the mind and the community, it causes disintegration and disunity. Instead of knowing and being known, it is self-centered and destructive. "Fear prevents us from forming an intimate community in which we can grow together, everyone in his or her own way."¹¹

⁸ Genesis 1 and Revelation 21

⁹ See chapter 2 *The New Testament Dwelling* specifically the discussion on the Gospel of John

¹⁰ See chapter 5 *The Biology of Love*, Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon, *A General Theory of Love*, 85.

¹¹ Nouwen, *Lifesigns*, 20.

3) *The community has clear boundaries, initiation rites, and a path for growth.*

Chapter three showed that both the church in Rome and the Methodist movement relied on this element. This was seen in the *First Scrutiny*, *The Apostolic Tradition*, and *The Disciplina Arcani* (discipline of the secret) of the early church.¹² In the Methodist movement this was practiced in the class meeting, the bands, and their quarterly check in with Wesley himself, where he issued their membership card.¹³

Chapter five looked at three of Charles Vogel's principles for community building: the boundary principle, the initiation principle, and the inner circle principle. The boundary principle provides a means for members to know they belong, and for visitors to explore without needing to commit themselves.¹⁴ The initiation principle creates an action that is understood as the official welcome into the community.¹⁵ The inner circle principle establishes a method for growth within the community.¹⁶ At the same time, to avoid a fear-based community that seeks to control rather than grow, these elements must be porous. They should never be about keeping people in or out, but always about providing the means for belonging and growing.

4) *The community has established practices and rituals.* Chapter four explained the Hebbian principle,¹⁷ "neurons that fire together, wire together."¹⁸ The more these same

¹² See chapter 3 *Patience*

¹³ See chapter 3 *The Organization*

¹⁴ Vogl, *The Art of Community*, 33.

¹⁵ Vogl, 43.

¹⁶ Vogl, 87.

¹⁷ See chapter 4 *Memory*

¹⁸ See original Hebb explanation in the section titled Mode of perceptual integration: the cell-assembly D. O Hebb, *The Organization of Behavior: A Neuropsychological Theory*, 2012, 69–70.

neurons fire together the stronger the neuro pathway becomes. Chapter four also explained that from the moment of birth the newborn needs to form a secure attachment bond to the caregiver. If this bond is not established, it will affect every relationship the individual has for the rest of her or his life.¹⁹ The absence of a secure attachment bond can be overcome by establishing new neuro pathways and firing different neurons. When developing these new pathways, what a person pays attention to matters. Practices and rituals that enable mindfulness and meditation increase the ability to pay attention to those things that bring transformation.²⁰ Smith explained, “We learn to love not primarily by acquiring information about what we should love but rather through practices that form the habits of how we love”²¹

Chapter five argued that practices are the scaffolding that gives form and shape to a community. Dykstra and Bass described Christian practices as, “things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.”²² Along with practices, a community has rituals. Rituals provide meaning to the community, as well as connecting the past to the present.²³ Chapter five quoted Dr. Newberg, “Rituals add substance to our beliefs, and the more intense the ritual, the more likely we are to have a religious or spiritual

¹⁹ See chapter 4 *Attachment*

²⁰ See chapter 4 *Awareness/Attention*

²¹ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 21.

²² Bass and Dykstra, *Practicing Theology*, Chapter 1, Kindle.

²³ Vogl, *The Art of Community*, 49.

epiphany. Thus, spiritual practice is the key to making God personally meaningful and real.”²⁴

5) *The community is teachable, commits to accountability, and encourages participation.* Each individual needs to accept that there is always more to know and be willing to change as the community learns together. Chapter five explained that a transformative community incorporates the discipline of accountability and creates a culture of participation and teachability. Honest accountability places every individual in the community on the same level, it creates connectedness and avoids barriers that create an “us versus them” culture. Participation allows the individual and the community to learn more about themselves while also creating a culture of belonging. It is in participation that connectedness happens. A shalom community is a teachable community. It is a culture of change, created by the willingness to learn. Chapter five quoted Scott Peck, “Until such time as we can empty ourselves of expectations and stop trying to fit others and our relationships with them into a preconceived mold we cannot really listen, hear, or experience.”²⁵

6) *The community is one of communication and cooperation.* Each individual actively communicates and cooperates with the whole community. The community works for what is possible, what is generous, and what is restorative. All transformation is linguistic. In chapter five Block argued that “The shift in conversation is from one of problems, fear, and retribution to one of possibility, generosity, and restoration.”²⁶ The

²⁴ Newberg and Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain*, 42.

²⁵ Peck, *The Different Drum*, 94–95.

²⁶ Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*, 30–31.

restorative community, according to Block, is one that is driven by the citizens, accomplished through the conversations that take place in a small group, focused on the right questions, and willing to be patient and move as slow as needed. Along with communication is the necessity to cooperate: “Cooperation is based on the belief that there is enough for each of us...It is concerned about the process we choose to handle an uncertain future. It is a willingness to debate and argue in a way that sustains the relationship, above all.”²⁷

7) *The community is relationship focused, not concerned about size or pace.* In chapter one²⁸ Lesslie Newbigin responded to the church growth movement: “We do not find Paul concerning himself with the size of the churches or with questions about their growth. His primary concern is with their faithfulness, with the integrity of their witness.”²⁹ Roberts and Marshall argued, “Focusing on numbers doesn’t lead us to a discipleship that results in growing personal holiness.”³⁰ And Kreider explained the early church was not focused on evangelism, “By the end of the second century, most of them had instituted...the ‘discipline of the secret,’ which barred outsiders from entering ‘private’ Christian worship services and ordered believers not to talk to outsiders about what went on behind closed doors...They knew that worship services were to glorify God and edify the faithful, not to evangelize outsiders.”³¹ When the focus is on numbers, it is not on relationships, it is not on shalom. Chapter two looked at Jesus’s ascension in the

²⁷ McKnight and Block, *The Abundant Community*, 89.

²⁸ Chapter 1 *Beyond the Church Growth Movement*

²⁹ Newbigin, *The Open Secret*, 125.

³⁰ Roberts and Marshall, *Reclaiming God’s Original Intent for the Church*, 40.

³¹ Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church*, 11.

first chapter of Acts. The disciples ask if this was the time when the kingdom of Israel would be restored. Jennings argued that they were asking a nationalistic question, “When will we rule our land, and become self-determining, and if need be, impose our will on others?”³² Jesus then redirects their thinking, “It is not for you to know...what the Father has set by his own authority.”³³ Basically, Jesus is telling them that God sets the agenda, not them. Focusing on numbers and pace is imposing the human agenda on God’s household, rather than submitting to God’s agenda. In chapter five Block cautioned, “This...means that we must set aside our concern for scale and our concern for speed. Scale, speed, and practicality are always the coded arguments for keeping the existing system in place.”³⁴

8) *The community is a place of shalom (joy/peace/wholeness)*. This paper began with a quote from Dr. Curt Thompson, “Our lives will be abundant, joyful, and peaceful only to the degree that we are engaged, known, and understood by one another.”³⁵ This paper has been exploring how the church might build a community so that lonely and anxious people can be seen, known, and belong.” In chapter two, the concept of Shalom was introduced. Snodgrass explained Paul’s use of the word *peace* in Ephesians 2:14.³⁶ “Peace is not merely the cessation of hostility; it is a comprehensive term for salvation and life with God. The background to this use is the Old Testament concept of shalom, which covers wholeness, physical well-being, prosperity, security, good relations, and

³² Jennings, *Acts*, First edition, *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, 19.

³³ See chapter 2 *God’s New Testament Dwelling*

³⁴ Block, *Community*, 31.

³⁵ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, iii.

³⁶ See chapter 2 *The New Temple*

integrity.”³⁷ Shalom incorporates abundance, joy, peace, and more. It is not just about the individual; it is about the community. Chapter three described the church of Rome and the Methodist movement as communities that cared for the whole person and community, not just the spiritual need. Chapter four explained the role that brain biology plays in the well-being of the whole person. The ability to know and be known requires attention to the emotional experience of each individual. Chapter five explored the elements of a transforming community. All these pieces are needed for the community to be a place of shalom.

The elements of a shalom community: 1) Christ-centered; 2) loved based, rather than fear based; 3) established clear boundaries, initiation rites, and path for growth; 4) established practices and rituals; 5) maintains a culture of teachability, participation, accountability; 6) values communication and cooperation; 7) relationship focused, not concerned about size or pace; 8) a place of shalom (joy/peace/wholeness). Chapter three showed how the church navigated these challenges through *paradise, practice, and patience*, while focused on vertical and horizontal relationships. These eight elements will require the church to be a place of *paradise, practice, and patience*.

Considering all the above, the chapter will propose a model on how to cultivate a community of shalom. Before proposing a final model, however, a brief discussion about the application of leadership and spiritual formation within this framework will be needed.

³⁷ Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 130.

Leadership and Spiritual Formation

Within this shalom community, leadership and spiritual formation will have a clear definition. The *Didache*³⁸ offered a choice between a path of life or one of death. On the path towards life, “You will love the God who made you; second: you will love your neighbor as yourself.”³⁹ On this path your words are backed up by action, and your plan will not be motivated by evil.⁴⁰ Leadership and spiritual formation must make this same choice.

Neurobiology has shown that complicated systems of the brain are flexible and adaptive only when integrated; and it is only when an individual is in healthy and satisfying relationships that he or she is able to know oneself. It has also demonstrated that implicit, unprocessed memories affect an individual’s emotions and behavior, resulting in a diminished ability to engage in those necessary relationships.⁴¹

The multifaceted community dance requires the individual and the community to work together. Neither one is complete without the other. The individual must do their own internal work, their own spiritual journey, so that they can contribute to the community. But the individual needs community to help successfully do their internal

³⁸ See chapter 3

³⁹ Milavec, *The Didache*, 34.

⁴⁰ Milavec, 36.

⁴¹ See chapter 4

work.⁴² Juan Martinez explained, “Individuals have gifts that the body needs. But it is the body that recognizes those gifts and builds up the individual.”⁴³

Spiritual formation will require choosing the path to life over the path to death. It will depend upon learning to love God as ultimate. It will require, just as the disciples, surrendering the personal agenda and embracing God’s. It will involve doing the hard internal work of facing the unprocessed memories and discovering who God created you to be. And it will do all this within the context of a shalom community. It is joining God, through the Holy Spirit, united with Christ, and in participation with the faithful saints to live out God’s shalom by loving God and neighbor while reflecting God’s image into the world.

Leadership must be powered by God; leaders need to embody and model shalom. Leadership will share authority, making sure every voice is heard and every member is empowered to participate and contribute their uniqueness to the community. Leaders need to ensure participation, patience, accountability, and the love-based community structure.

Leadership within the shalom community is a joining with God, through the Holy Spirit, in unity with Christ to model, empower, and enable others to live and participate in the heaven and earth dwelling where transformation enables shalom.

⁴² See chapter 5

⁴³ Mark Branson and Juan F. Martinez, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership*, 167.

A Model

Just like the brain and Paul's model of the body of Christ, leaders who seek to create a shalom community need to understand that it is made of many parts, and functions best when all those parts are doing their part, and all parts are integrated and working together. Paradise, practice, and patience are woven throughout this model. In every step the mingling of heaven and earth must be present, in every step shalom is to be lived-out through the community practices. And every step requires patience for a true shalom community to be developed. Size and pace will always give way to relationships and wholeness. The following model begins with the leadership; however, it is less than one step followed by another, and more of an integrated on-going cycle. The six steps below are all necessary, but they are not inclusive.

Step One: Model Christ Centered Leadership

A community of shalom begins with Christ-centered leaders, who are focused on love rather than fear (elements 1 and 2). Leaders must embody and model shalom, it is the leaders who will establish the heaven and earth garden-temple. Element one, *Christ-centeredness* is the first step for the leaders. Knowing God requires engaging in practices that embody loving God. Every shalom community will discover their own style of praise and worship, but worship is a necessary practice for every community of shalom. Each shalom community will develop their own rituals, but rituals will be necessary for every community of shalom. Discovering and developing those practices will be a means for the new shalom community to develop a sense of ownership and belonging (element 4). It will be the leaders who embody and model this:

Leaders who desire to create a community of shalom must work out for themselves what it means to love God and neighbor as self. Leaders will need to ask themselves how they are living out shalom in their own lives. These leaders will need to work with mentors, spiritual directors, and/or counselors to discover their own places of anxiety and loneliness; they must work to understand their own methods of attaching, attuning, and focusing attention. These leaders must themselves be willing to be self-reflective, to learn, and to change (elements 5 & 8).

Leaders who desire to create a community of shalom are committed to making it a place of experience and possibility that empowers every member of the community to participate and share their unique gifting. It will require the leader give away authority, share leadership with everyone in the community. It will require establishing a system of accountability that is willing to allow people to fail, while walking with them through the failure with grace and love (elements 2, 7, & 8).

Step Two: Foster Experiences of Togetherness

Fostering a space and experience of togetherness is critical to this process (element 7). Since the shalom community is based on horizontal and vertical relationships (paradise), developing experiential spaces will be essential to welcoming, building, and maintaining new relationships. The following are two possible examples.

Gathering around the table is the first way to create experience and togetherness, as most people find this to be natural and relaxing. For the first meal together, the main dish and a drink should be provided by the leader. Every other member is asked to bring something to contribute to the meal, something they want to share with the group. This meal is not intended to be a “well-coordinated menu.” Part of the experience is seeing the

wide variety of food that is on the table, it is acceptable to have too many desserts and not enough vegetables. Every member is also asked to bring an item or a picture of an item that is important to them. They should come prepared to talk about the item and the dish they brought and what it means to them (element 5, 6, & 7). It should also be made known that it is completely acceptable to bring something from the deli section of their favorite grocery store. While the community eats together, each person takes their turn to share. A devotion and time of prayer follows the meal (element 1).

A group project is a second way to foster experience and togetherness. The shalom community needs to find an organization or ministry to support together. Someone in the group may already be participating in something that the rest of the group would like to adopt. This organization should reflect the gifting and passions of the community. Leaders will need to make sure there is a way for every member of the community to participate. If your shalom community has several sports enthusiasts, a ministry such as Fellowship of Christian Athletes might be good opportunity. If everyone is not athletic, the leader needs to help the community find other ways to participate. This might be something like hosting a fund-raising event, where the shalom community organizes and serves the food (element 5, 6, & 7).

As the community develops and individuals get to know one another, as the group discovers their own personality and values, as individuals take more ownership, new ideas experiences of togetherness will develop. The Leadership needs to guide, encourage, and enable these developing spaces and experiences.

Step Three: Teach a Theology of Shalom

The fifth element states that the community is teachable. Thus, leaders will need to teach the theology, history, and concepts of the shalom community, as well as the eight elements required for this community. This needs to cover biblical material as well as theology, history, psychology, sociology, and community development. Leaders will need to give members of the community space to struggle with new ideas and concepts that may be uncomfortable for them (elements 5 & 7).

As the community comes together, a season of biblical teaching will be essential for establishing and embracing the biblical idea of this shalom community. This bible study can be done as a sermon series followed by small group discussions. A sermon series offers the shalom community leader the opportunity to establish the biblical and theological framework. The community should then meet for small group discussion groups (groups of 4 to 8 makes it easier for every voice to be heard) to discuss the implications and possibilities of the topic. How might this teaching shape their community? These small group discussions should then come back together for discussion in the larger community setting (element 5, 6, & 7). Such topics might be:

- The Dwelling Place of God. An exploration of God's heaven and earth dwelling from Genesis to Revelation.
- Shalom. An exploration of Shalom throughout scripture.
- The New Temple. A study of the book of Acts.
- A New Commandment. A study of how Jesus models love in the gospel of John
- One Body. A study of Ephesians

For the shalom community to address issues of loneliness, anxiety, and division, an understanding of how the brain works, as well as different models of community development, will be important as well. Topics might be:

- Understanding loneliness and anxiety
- Memory and Emotions, what are they
- Healing memories and emotions
- Models of Community development
- Ubuntu, I am because You are
- Fear vs. Love

As the shalom community grows, biblical teaching and concept teaching will develop along with them. This is an opportunity for members of the community to develop in their knowledge and share their expertise to the rest of the group. Bringing in outside experts to teach a specific topic may be necessary (and another opportunity for a shared experience).

Step Four: Create a Community Covenant

A shalom community will be a covenantal community with established practices, rituals, boundaries, initiation rites, paths to growth, and a system of accountability (elements 3-6). As the shalom community begins the members will learn to communicate and cooperate as they work together to create their community covenant. A series of weekend retreats or seminars would be good options. These events could include:

- Retreat Option. The retreat option offers an extended time together, with intensified community building opportunities.

- Friday Evening:
 - Dinner: provide a relaxed setting for conversations and togetherness (element 7).
 - Evening Devotions: Who's Agenda? Based on Acts 1:8: "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" Then using Jennings statement, "The disciples ask the nationalist question: When will we rule our land, and become self-determining, and if need be, impose our will on others?" And Jesus's response to their question, "It is not for you to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority" (element 1).
 - Dismiss for evening, encouraging everyone to reflect on how they might want to impose their will on others (elements 1 & 8).
- Saturday:
 - Breakfast (8:00-8:45)
 - Small group prayer time (9:00-9:40)
 - ◇ Focused on the need to surrender individual agendas, and a willingness to work together and seek God's direction (elements 1-8).
 - Cooperative Activity (10:00-12:00) (elements 3-7)
 - ◇ Work around tables in groups of 4 or 5, each table should have a large sheet of paper to write on.
 - ◇ Choose one item that the group needs to work on. For example: What are our boundaries and paths to growth?

- ◇ Each table spends time discussing their ideas, writing them on the paper. Every 15 minutes the group moves to the next table, leaving their paper behind. At the next table read the ideas written down, discuss and build up on those ideas. This is done a total of 4 times.
- ◇ Large group discussion: what are some common themes or ideas that came out of this activity? Begin to create a big picture framework.
- ◇ The Leader needs to ensure every voice is heard in this process, and every person is respected.
- Lunch (12:00-12:45)
- Quiet time (1:00-3:00)
- Afternoon Session (3:00-5:00)
 - ◇ Now that there is a general, big picture framework, what are the challenges this might bring? What are the advantages? What needs to be put into place.
 - ◇ Continue the same format from the morning for the first hour, moving from table to table.
 - ◇ Follow up with the large group discussion, continuing to build and refine the framework.
- Dinner (5:00-5:45)
- Evening Worship/Reflection (7:00-8:00)
 - ◇ Use this time for meditation and reflection after a hard day of work.
 - ◇ See appendix B for a possible reflection exercise
- Dismiss for evening

- Encourage people to continue to gather with evening snacks, and small group activities (element 7)
- Sunday
 - Breakfast (7:30-8:15)
 - Bible Study and Communion: 9:00-10:00
 - ◇ Ephesians 1:15 & 16: Faith and Love
 - ◇ Communion
 - Final Session (10:30-12:30)
 - ◇ What are the parts of the framework that everyone is comfortable with?
 - ◇ Where are people not comfortable with?
 - ◇ What needs more work?
 - ◇ As you leave the retreat what is the next action item?
 - Lunch (12:30-1:15)
 - Departure
- Seminar Option. The seminar option has the same goal as the retreat but takes place over a longer period, and close to home.
 - Breakfast (8:00-8:45)
 - Devotions (9:00-10:00)
 - ◇ Use the Friday Night Retreat Devotions
 - Reflection time (10:00-10:30)
 - ◇ Encouraging everyone to find a space alone and reflect on how they might want to impose their will on others.

- Break time (10:30-11:00)
- Small group prayer time (11:00-11:45)
 - ◇ Focused on the need to surrender individual agendas, and a willingness to work together and seek God's direction.
- Lunch (12:00-12:45)
- Cooperative Activity (1:00-3:00)
 - ◇ Use retreat cooperative activity
- Worship/Reflection (3:15-4:00)
 - ◇ See appendix B for a possible reflection exercise
- Session 2 (4:15-6:00)
 - ◇ Use retreat session 2
 - ◇ Wrap up with a summary of the framework at this point, and establish the starting point for the next meeting.
- Dinner: 6:00-6:45
- Dismiss
- The following Sunday:
 - ◇ Bible Study and Communion
 - Ephesians 1:15 & 16: Faith and Love
 - Communion

With the seminar option, choose a regular schedule to meet for the continued discussion, until the framework has been established and agreed upon. If a shorter day works better, meet more often for half days, and focus on one session instead of two.

Build upon the devotions each time. For both the retreat and seminary it would be useful to provide a notebook with the schedule and space for journaling and notes.

These retreats and seminars can also be used to bring in experts for teaching community development, working on the emotional health of the community, how to walk alongside individuals with deep wounds, or developing inner healing prayer teams. The general structure of the retreat or seminar can be used to build on topics that the shalom community finds useful.

Step Five: Establish a Culture of Wholeness

A shalom community will be a place of loving healing and wholeness (element 2 and 8). Addressing the needs of an anxious, lonely, and divided people, entails coming face to face with pain. This will require training and networking. Facing unprocessed memories can bring immense healing. For some, healing prayer may be all that is needed, for others, professional therapy may be required as well. It will require a trained prayer team,⁴⁴ as well as a network of therapists for referrals.⁴⁵

John Wesley's class meeting is a good example of a practice that helps to address the needs of anxious, lonely, and divided people. The class meeting is a group of four to eight people who gather to be seen and known. For a leader who is seeking to create a shalom community, developing a modern class meeting will be essential (each community can adopt an appropriate name for these groups). The community will need to

⁴⁴ Dr. Marcus Warner has developed R.E.A.L. Prayer through his Deeper Walk ministry, <https://deeperwalkinternational.org>. Dr. Ed Smith & Dr. Joshua Smith have developed Transformational Prayer Ministries, <https://www.transformationprayer.org/about-the-founder-of-tpm/>.

⁴⁵ A scholarship fund to help pay for the therapist is a good idea too.

choose how to establish these groups. Some options: 1.) Schedule, when people are available; 2.) Location, those who live in the same area (this was how Wesley set up his class meetings); the important thing is that everyone is in a group. Each community will need to determine if the groups will meet weekly or bi-monthly. Groups will need to be facilitated by a leader who ensures everyone is seen, heard, and participating (elements 1-8).

Each meeting will begin with a time of silent reflection, prayerfully remembering the previous week, paying attention to their relationship with God, self, and others. Each member shares what they are thankful for, how they have seen God at work, and areas of growth since the last meeting, and something to focus on for the next meeting. After each member shares, other members respond back, echoing back what they heard the individual saying (I heard you say that..., individual and then affirm or correct).⁴⁶ Someone in the group should be selected to keep a record of each participant's area of growth, as well as any specific prayer requests. This record should be kept for the use of this group only, and its confidentiality must be secured. Each meeting is closed with a time of prayer for each individual. Other items, such as singing or reading of scripture, can be included if the groups choose to add it.

Step Six: Practice Assessment

For leaders who seek to establish a shalom community, regular assessment will be key. The eight essential elements are the guide for this assessment. How is the shalom community living out and living into these elements? How is leadership living out and

⁴⁶ This exercise insures that the individual “feels felt.” See chapter 4.

living into these elements? Where is the community doing well, and what does the community need to address?

Assessment should be done on a yearly basis. It should be done as a time of celebration and reflection. It is a time of individual as well as community reflection. It is a time to give thanks, share stories, and honestly acknowledge areas of growth for the coming year. Questions to be asked: What are the stories from the past year that demonstrate how we are doing on this element? How are we incorporating these elements into the life of our community? For each of the elements where can we grow? What are some possibilities for us to consider? This is a time of worship and prayer. This is a time to share communion and commit the coming year to God's agenda and the Holy Spirit's guidance.

Limitations

The first chapter of this paper presented research on the present state of the evangelical church in the United States. Six churches were presented, each church faced their own challenges. Some were trying to survive, some were struggling with the growth expectations of their denomination, some faced internal division. The shalom community presented in this model will not address all the needs of the church.

The shalom community is not a means to increase membership numbers, the shalom community is not worried about numbers. Because the shalom community is not about numbers, resources can be limited. Where and how you meet will look different than what people may be used to. Most likely there will not be a budget to pay a staff, the leader of the shalom community needs to be prepared to be bi-vocational. This is an opportunity for the community to trust God as they learn new ways being community.

Finally, creating a shalom community is a relationship focused, and therefore will develop at a slow pace. In our world of bigger and faster is better, this can be challenging. The shalom community a long-term journey (that requires patience), the community will need to keep their focus on the eight elements to measure their success.

For those who are called to a shalom community, their journey will be challenging. The shalom community requires a high level of commitment, and a willingness to walk with people through their joys as well as their pain and sorrows. The boundaries and initiation elements will need to be designed so that individuals can explore and understand these challenges. The community needs to be willing to honor and bless those who choose not to participate. Because of this, existing churches who feel called to establish a shalom community should consider this community as church plant launched out of their current ministry.⁴⁷ Finally, as churches and denominations choose to embrace a shalom community model, they need to do so understanding that spiritual wholeness is the goal, and numerical growth will not a means of assessment.

Conclusion

This paper began with the claim that the nation is filled with lonely, anxious, and divided people. It also quoted Dr. Thompson's claim that "Our lives will be abundant, joyful, and peaceful only to the degree that we are engaged, known, and understood by

⁴⁷ Both the established church and the new shalom community should remain in relationship and partnership so that both ministries can be blessed.

one another,”⁴⁸ and that “it is love that transforms our minds, makes forgiveness possible, and weaves a community of disparate people into the tapestry of God’s family.”⁴⁹

Scripture showed that God has called the faithful saints into a partnership, one that is empowered by the Holy Spirit, and in the unity of Christ, to expand God’s household into the world as their love for God and one another overcame the powers of this world. It is centered on love for God and then the love for others. History showed how the early church and the Methodist movement used their time, energy and resources on this vertical and horizontal relationship paradigm, doing so through paradise, practice, and patience. Neuroscience demonstrated the open circuit biology of humanity, which requires loving relationships with others in order to be a fully integrated itself. And the elements of community determined that a shalom community is one that is Christ-centered, and relationship based, a place for honest communication, cooperation, and participation.

How can the church weave a disparate group of people into a dwelling place of God? “How can the church be a community so that lonely and anxious people can be seen, known, and belong?” It must first surrender its own agenda, and embrace God. It must be empowered by the Holy Spirit, understanding that shalom is based on God’s power, not its own. It must be united with Christ, understanding that Christ is the head and the cornerstone. The shalom community loves God first, and then focuses on loving one another as Christ loves them. The shalom community must be focused on practices that bring healing, rather than harm. The shalom community will join God, in the power

⁴⁸ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, iii.

⁴⁹ Thompson, 3.

of the Holy Spirit, and in the unity of Christ to love God and one another, and do this through the lens of paradise, practice, and patience.

APPENDIX A:
FOCUSED ATTENTION EXERCISE

Philippians 4:4–9 (CEB)

⁴ Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad! ⁵ Let your gentleness show in your treatment of all people. The Lord is near. ⁶ Don't be anxious about anything; rather, bring up all of your requests to God in your prayers and petitions, along with giving thanks.

⁷ Then the peace of God that exceeds all understanding will keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus.

⁸ From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true, all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise. ⁹ Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us. The God of peace will be with you.

1. Light a candle or turn on a special light while you do this exercise. Take time to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit as you do so, and declare the time and space to be holy ground (do this out loud if possible)
2. Read this scripture out loud
3. Write this scripture on a piece of paper
4. Take time to be aware of who God is (ie: 1 John 4:10) and you are in God (ie: A beloved Child of God who is fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of God.)
 - a. ⁴ Be glad in the Lord always! Again I say, be glad!
5. What are you anxious about? Write it down

- a. ⁶ Don't be anxious about anything; rather, *bring up all of your requests to God* in your prayers and petitions
 - b. After writing down your anxieties take time to meet with Jesus and confess these anxieties to Jesus.
 - c. What does Jesus want you to know about these anxieties?
6. What are you thankful for? Write it down
- a. along with giving thanks
 - b. Now take your thanksgiving to Jesus, tell him about them. Let Jesus respond to your thanksgiving
7. Ask Jesus to show you what is true, write it down
- a. From now on, brothers and sisters, if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is true
 - b. Now speak those truths out loud, if you need to look in the mirror as you speak them out loud
8. What is praiseworthy? What is holy? What is righteous? Write it down
- a. if anything is excellent and if anything is admirable, focus your thoughts on these things: all that is holy, all that is just, all that is pure, all that is lovely, and all that is worthy of praise.
 - b. Take time to praise God with music, coloring, dancing, or whatever form of worship you are led to engage in.
9. Practice this regularly
- a. ⁹ Practice these things: whatever you learned, received, heard, or saw in us.

APPENDIX B:
ATTACHEMENT GUIDED PRAYER EXERCISE

Psalm 23 (CEB)

Note to leader: this is not a rushed exercise, take time, move slowly through each step.
Prepare yourself to be sensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Leader begins by lighting a candle and praying, acknowledging the presence of the Holy Spirit, and declaring the authority of Christ.

Sit in a comfortable position with both feet flat on the floor.

Breathing exercise:

Breath in for four seconds, paying attention to the air as it enters your body,

Hold the air for four seconds, being aware that life comes from God,

Slowly release the air for 4 seconds, thanking God for your life.

Repeat 3X

Leader instructs participants to close their eyes, and invites them on a journey.

Leader:

Image a grassy meadow, feel the warmth of sun as it shines on you, hear the music of the birds, smell the flowers. Breathe deeply of the fresh air. Look around, see all that surrounds you, settle in to this space.

Now, invite Jesus to join you. See him walking towards you, welcome him.

Part I

Leader slowly reads:

Hear these words from David:

¹ The LORD is my shepherd.

I lack nothing.

Do you feel you are lacking anything right now? Share that with Jesus and allow Jesus to respond to you.

(Silence, do not rush)

Leader continues:

² He lets me rest in grassy meadows;
As you are in the grassy meadow, with Jesus your shepherd, take time to rest.
Breathe deeply and find security in the comfort of the shepherd.
(Silence, do not rush)

Leader continues:

Off in the distance is a gently flowing river,
Allow Jesus to lead you to these restful waters.
Find peace in the presence of your shepherd as you walk along the banks of the river
(Silence, do not rush)

Leader continues:

As you walk with Jesus along the river, in the middle of the grassy meadow hear the words of David:

¹ The LORD is my shepherd.
³ he keeps me alive.
It is your shepherd Jesus, who keeps you alive.
Be still and know that God is the very source of your life, how does that make you feel right now?
(Silence, do not rush)

Leader continues:

Your shepherd Jesus, who keeps you alive guides you on the proper paths, for the sake of his own name.
As you are walking with Jesus in the grassy meadow, follow him, what path does he want to take you down?
(Silence, do not rush)

Leader reads slowly:

Hear the words of David:

¹ The LORD is my shepherd.

I lack nothing.

² He lets me rest in grassy meadows;

he leads me to restful waters;

³ he keeps me alive.

He guides me in proper paths

for the sake of his good name.

Take time to breathe deeply, and find security with your shepherd.

(Silence, do not rush)

Part II

Leader slowly reads:

As you continue to follow Jesus down the path Jesus has chosen, you enter into a dark valley.

Off in the distance you can see the things in your life that cause you anxiety. What are they? Tell Jesus what they are.

(Silence, do not rush)

Leader continues:

As you are walking through the dark valley with your shepherd Jesus,

And as you see your anxieties off in the distance,

You begin to see that Jesus has placed himself between you and those anxieties.

He is shielding you from them.

Allow yourself to walk with Jesus through this dark valley as he shields you from all your anxieties.

How are you feeling?

(Silence, do not rush)

Leader reads slowly:

⁴ Even when I walk
 through the darkest valley,
 I fear no danger
 because you are with me.

Your rod and your staff—
 they protect me.

Be aware that Jesus is your secure anchor. What do you need let Jesus have right now?

(Silence, do not rush)

Part III

Leader reads slowly:

As Jesus leads you out of the valley you begin to climb up a hill. At the top of the hill is house, a big oak tree shades the yard at the side of the house, under the tree is a picnic table. There is a lush garden behind the house. As you get closer, you realize the table is filled with food for a meal. Jesus invites you sit with him and eat.

You sit down to eat. As you and Jesus eat you enjoy a talking and laughing together. You are filled up, you are satisfied.

Take time to be aware that Jesus is the one who fills you up, as you sit at the table with Jesus, find your satisfaction in him.

(Silence, do not rush)

Leader continues:

As you finish your meal Jesus tells you that you are welcome to come into the house, he wants you to consider it your home too.

You get up from the table and follow Jesus into the house.

Take time and walk around the house. Allow yourself to feel welcome and wanted in this home.

Find a place in the home to sit down, and as you sit take time to be aware of God's love for you.

(Silence, do not rush)

Leader reads slowly:

⁵ You set a table for me
right in front of my enemies.

You bathe my head in oil;
my cup is so full it spills over!

⁶ Yes, goodness and faithful love
will pursue me all the days of my life,
and I will live in the LORD's house
as long as I live.

(Silence, do not rush)

Leader continues:

Jesus says in the gospel of John: "As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love." (*John 15:9, CEB*)

Jesus's invitation is to remain in his love. This journey you have walked with Jesus today is available to you whenever you need it. You can walk in the grassy meadow, along the gentle river, as you walk through dark valley's, you can enter into the valley with Jesus. God's house of love is your home, where you are welcome, wanted, and loved every day.

Closing Prayer:

You have been with us in this space as our shepherd, we thank you Lord Jesus.

We ask Holy Spirit that you walk with us from this place today, remind us to remain in Jesus's love, and remind us that we can come to this space any time we desire.

Note to Leader: After the exercise invite participants to share if they desire. For some they will not be ready to share yet, for others, sharing right away will be needed.

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